

Matthias Görtz

Social Software as a Source of Information in the Workplace

**Modeling Information Seeking
Behavior of Young Professionals
in Management Consulting**

vwh

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Abstract

The rising popularity of the *social web* and the associated change of static websites and their content towards open platforms of social sharing, collaboration, and user-generated data confront knowledge-intensive business service providers with the question what role *social software* plays as a source of professional information in the workplace. Due to the high affinity and familiarity of young internet users with such services, it needs to be analyzed whether and, if yes, how employers need to adapt their electronic information environments to the expectations and behaviors of job entrants.

In the course of this doctoral dissertation of information science this problem is addressed in a specific context of use and scientific research environment. The information seeking behavior of young professionals in management consulting is analyzed by assessing the fit of existing analytical and process models of information seeking in regards to the research interest of this thesis and their validity for the context of use. This is achieved through qualitative observation and semi-structured interviews. The identified shortcomings and criticism of existing research results in the development of a task-specific model of information seeking that enables the design of a context-specific online survey of the information source usage of the examined population (n = 115).

The results of this multi-layered methodical approach show that in spite of the identified potential of external wikis and social intranet sites to serve as sources of *social* information, particularly for supporting young professionals in management consulting in gathering an overview of existing sources and evaluating the retrieved information and its quality, the high frequency of use of social web services for private purposes is not transferred to the usage for professional purposes. In the course of a leadership workshop measures for leveraging the realization of the identified potential are derived and aligned to the process of task-based information seeking behavior of young professionals. This leads to the reflection of context-specific challenges and conflicting interests of including social software as a source of information from a management perspective.

Keywords: [information seeking behavior], [social software], [social web], [management consulting], [electronic information environment]

Zusammenfassung

Die steigende Popularität des *Social Web* und der damit verbundene Wandel von statischen Webseiten und -Inhalten hin zu offenen Plattformen sozialen Austauschs, kollaborativer Prozesse und nutzergenerierter Daten stellt insbesondere Organisationen wissensintensiver Dienstleister vor die Frage, welche Rolle *Social Software*-Anwendungen als Quelle berufsbezogener Information am Arbeitsplatz spielen. Aufgrund der hohen Affinität und Vertrautheit junger Internetnutzer zu derartigen Diensten gilt es zu analysieren, ob, und wenn ja, wie Arbeitgeber ihre elektronische Informationsumgebung an Erwartungshaltungen und Arbeitsverhalten von Berufseinsteigern anpassen sollten.

Im Rahmen der vorliegenden informationswissenschaftlichen Dissertation wird dieser Fragestellung in einem spezifischen Anwendungskontext und wissenschaftlichen Forschungsumfeld nachgegangen. So wird das Informationssuchverhalten von jungen Berufseinsteigern in der Unternehmensberatung untersucht. Dabei werden bestehende Modelle der Information-Seeking-Forschung anhand von qualitativen Beobachtungen und semi-strukturierten Interviews kritisch analysiert und auf ihre Gültigkeit für den Untersuchungskontext und das Forschungsinteresse geprüft. Das anschließend eigens entwickelte Modell aufgabenspezifischen Informationssuchverhaltens ermöglicht die Gestaltung eines kontextbasierten Online-Fragebogens zur Erhebung der Nutzung von Informationsquellen der untersuchten Zielgruppe (n = 115).

Die daraus resultierenden Ergebnisse zeigen, dass trotz des Potenzials externer Wikis und interner Social-Software-Anwendungen, Nutzer am Arbeitsplatz als Quelle *sozialer* Information insbesondere für die Identifikation relevanter Quellen sowie der Evaluation gefundener Information und ihrer Qualität zu unterstützen, das intensive private Nutzungsverhalten des Social Web sich kaum in der berufsbezogenen Nutzung widerspiegelt. In einem Experten-Workshop werden Maßnahmen zur Realisierung des identifizierten Potenzials entwickelt und entlang des Prozesses aufgabenspezifischen Suchverhaltens junger Berufseinsteiger strukturiert. Dabei werden kontextspezifische Herausforderungen und Interessenskonflikte aus Perspektive der Personalführung reflektiert.

Schlagwörter: [Informationssuchverhalten], [Soziale Software], [Social Web], [Unternehmensberatung], [Elektronische Informationsumgebung]

Acknowledgements

“Context is not simply the state of a predefined environment with a fixed set of interaction resources. It’s part of a process of interacting with an ever-changing environment composed of reconfigurable, migratory, distributed, and multiscale resources.” (Coutaz et al. 2005)

As I do not grow tired of saying “context is key”, I would like to acknowledge that this does not only apply to the understanding of social software as a source of information in the workplace. It is even more valid for the process of seeking information and, ultimately, writing a doctoral dissertation.

I am deeply grateful to all of those that make my professional and private context a wonderful interactive mix of inspiration, guidance, encouragement, and critical feedback. The following pages would never have been written without the unconditional trust, tireless support, and constructive feedback from a variety of institutions, colleagues, friends, and family.

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Frankfurt, October 2011

Matthias Görtz

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Appendices *) **WWW**

Appendix A: Detailed results of fit-gap analysis

Appendix B: Course of semi-structured interviews

Appendix C: Selected detailed survey results

*) Der Anhang ist online abrufbar unter <http://www.vwh-verlag.de/vwh/?p=693>.