A Mixed Methods Research Schema for Identifying the Contextual Success Factors of Social Network Sites

Morteza Nabi-Meybodi, Sirous Alidousti
Iranian Research Institute for Information Science and Technology (IranDoc), Tehran, Iran
Nabi@students.irandoc.ac.ir
Alidousti@irandoc.ac.ir

Abstract: Social network sites (SNSs) are especial kinds of virtual communities that can provide a space, of specialized and professional type, for researchers and academics. Due to the widespread use of these sites for different purposes, each country has developed local social network sites, considering the context and user of these SNSs. Anjoman is one of these sites, which has been created in Iran with the purpose of synergizing scientific interaction and communication among researchers across the country. Due to the contextual nature of the implementation of information technology applications, it is essential to understand the factors that would affect the success of social network sites in some real-life contexts. Adopting an exploratory case study and survey, this study aims to explain a mixed methods research schema to explore factors affecting the creation and success of Anjoman as the major SNS of researchers and academics in Iran. This article reports on the design and process of this study as a work in-progress. This study can be of value to the researchers who are willing to contextually conceptualize social network sites, in general, and professional and academic social network sites, in particular, and to identify contextual factors affecting their success.

1. Introduction

Today, the Web is shifting deeply towards a kind of Web that is more social. It provides individuals with a rich context within which they can share knowledge (Fu et al. 2008; Yan et al. 2008). In fact, in this new web, the possibility of creating a virtual community has been provided for people. This community is dynamic and easy to use. It can be enriched with information resources contributed by every individual person (Yan et al. 2008). Social network site (SNS) is considered as a particular type of such communities and in professional and specialized type, it can be the host of various researchers and a space for them to collaborate with each other. There are numerous SNSs around the world that connect millions of individuals with one another. Anjoman is one of these social network sites essentially created by the Iranian Research Institute for Information Science and Technology (IranDoc) to provide a virtual platform for scientific and academic interaction and communication of Iranian researchers who, in particular, use the IranDoc theses and articles database (http://anjoman.irandoc.ac.ir/). Since previous studies indicate that the use of information technology is accompanied by some risks (Clegg et al. 1997; Dehning, Richardson 2002; Luna-Reyes et al. 2005; Santos, Sussman 2000), the identification of key factors affecting the success of the Anjoman can also contribute to its success. Thus, in this paper, the subject of finding key factors affecting the success of professional - specialized social network sites in Iranian context has been taken into consideration and Anjoman site has been selected as the case for this research. However, to identify these contextual factors, we need an appropriate research design. Anjoman is providing a social network service for researchers and academics in the context of Iran. Designing a good research process can be helpful for exploring contextual factors affecting the success of Anjoman. So, the main purpose of this article is to report on the design and process of doing this kind of study as a work in-progress.

On this basis, first the problem is stated and its significance is expressed. Then, the literature on success factors of SNSs is reviewed. Afterwards, research questions and objectives are defined and, then, the research approach is explained. Finally, research process is presented.

2. Problem statement

Investment in the field of information technology and related fields has developed increasingly. However, the facts indicate that the success in the use of information technology has not been very satisfactory (Santos, Sussman 2000; Willcocks, Lester 1999). In this regard, the question which was asked previously as: Is there a return on investment in information technology? became a new question: Why and when might there be a return on investment in information technology? Such approach reveals the significance of attention to context in the success of using information technology (Dehning, Richardson 2002; Gu, Gera 2004; Sharpe, Arsenault 2008).