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Research on the Effect of Employee Use Pattern on Employee's Job Performance

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Abstract: In the current Internet era, the demand for efficiency and seamless communication in a rapidly developing economy has led to the increasing adoption of enterprise social platforms. This study investigates the relationship between corporate social platform usage patterns and employee performance through a multi-case analysis of seven Chinese enterprises using the WeQia platform. Drawing on Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory, the research identifies four core technical characteristics of Enterprise Social Media (ESM), Timeliness, Flexibility, Accessibility, and Sharing, and proposes a framework linking these characteristics to two distinct usage patterns: task-demand and relationship-demand. The findings indicate that task-demand usage significantly enhances task performance, while relationship-demand usage more strongly influences innovation performance. Furthermore, the choice of usage pattern is influenced by the interplay between organizational formalization and task characteristics. This study provides a practical framework for enterprises to align platform features with organizational needs.

Keywords: Enterprise social media; Technical characteristics; Usage patterns; Task performance; Innovation performance; U&G theory

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1. Introduction

Enterprise social networking platforms integrate mature social network functionalities into organizational structures, enabling employees to engage in daily office activities, self-task management, and collaborative work. These tools promote efficient, transparent communication and play a vital role in stimulating employee initiative and shaping corporate culture [1,2].

The global enterprise social platform market has witnessed rapid evolution, with platforms such as Slack, Microsoft Teams, and DingTalk deeply integrating into organizational workflows [3]. In the Chinese context, indigenous platforms like DingTalk and WeCom have become ubiquitous digital workplaces, profoundly reshaping intra-organizational communication and knowledge collaboration [4,5].

For corporate managers and IS researchers, understanding how platform characteristics and usage patterns interact to influence employee performance remains a central concern [6,7]. Research has increasingly moved from examining general adoption to exploring differentiated usage patterns and their impacts on productivity and innovation [8,9]. Therefore, the goal of this study is to help organizations identify influential platform characteristics that guide employees toward effective usage patterns, ultimately achieving positive performance outcomes.

Current literature presents varied perspectives on ESM usage patterns. Much existing research treats employees as isolated actors, failing to provide a holistic understanding of how core ESM platform characteristics match with business operations. This study addresses the following research questions:

(1) What are the core technical features of corporate social platforms, and how can they be identified?
(2) What differences exist in the choice of internal usage patterns among different companies?
(3) How do ESM features influence usage pattern selection and subsequently affect employee performance?
(4) What factors should organizations consider when choosing a usage pattern?

This paper addresses these questions by extracting core ESM technical characteristics and refining usage patterns through a multi-case study. It analyzes the relationships between ESM characteristics, usage patterns, and employee performance, and examines the firm-level factors that influence usage mode selection.

2. Literature review

2.1. Uses and gratifications theory

A central tenet of Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory is that media use is selective and driven by individuals' rational assessment of their needs and expectations of specific media [10]. Classic U&G research identifies three broad categories of needs: social needs, hedonic needs, and cognitive needs [11,12]. In the contemporary digital workplace, U&G theory has been extended to explain employees' selective use of enterprise social platform features, with studies identifying gratifications such as productivity enhancement, information seeking, and relationship building [13,14].

2.2. ESM technical characteristics

Sun and Mouakket examined the influence of nine technical features on users' continuance intention, underscoring the critical role of technical characteristics in sustained IS use [15]. Subsequent research has highlighted system quality, information quality, and service quality as core determinants of user satisfaction [16,17]. In the era of mobile and cloud-based platforms, adaptability and seamless integration with enterprise systems have emerged as increasingly important features [18]. In the Chinese market, studies indicate that simplicity and mobile-first design are particularly valued by small and medium-sized enterprises [19,20].

2.3. Task-oriented and relationship-oriented use of corporate social platforms

Task-oriented ESN use focuses on work task completion, whereas relationship-oriented ESN use emphasizes the establishment and maintenance of personal relationships [21,22]. Liu and Fu distinguished these two patterns, proposing that they differ in motivation, behavior, information types, and social relationships [23]. This dichotomy has been refined in recent literature, with scholars recognizing a more nuanced spectrum including ambidextrous use that combines task and social orientations [24,25]. Within the Chinese enterprise context, the affective dimension of relationship-building rooted in guanxi adds further complexity [26] (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Task-oriented and relationship-oriented ESN usage classification

Difference	Task-oriented ESN use	Relationship-oriented ESN use
Motivation	Completion of work tasks	Establishment and maintenance of personal relationships
Behavior	Planning, classification and monitoring	Listening, encouragement and support
Information	Professional and job information	Individual and general information
Social relationships	Instrumental relationship	Emotional relationship

2.4. Enterprise social media use and employee performance

Meta-analyses confirm that enterprise social media use has a generally positive but modest effect on job performance, moderated by usage type, task characteristics, and organizational culture [27,28]. Work-oriented use is more strongly associated with task efficiency, while social-oriented use is more conducive to innovation [29]. The concept of "enterprise social media overload" describes negative consequences such as technostress that can paradoxically undermine performance [30]. In the Chinese context, studies on DingTalk and WeCom have highlighted enhanced management control and improved coordination, while also raising concerns about work-life balance [31,32].

2.4.1. Team performance

Team performance refers to the efficiency and effectiveness of task execution [33]. Recent research emphasizes the mediating role of team-level constructs such as transactive memory systems in the relationship between ESM use and team performance [34,35].

2.4.2. Task performance and innovation performance

Janssen and Van Yperen distinguish task performance from innovative performance [36]. In the enterprise social software context, task performance refers to the degree to which platform use enhances work task completion, while innovative performance refers to promoting and implementing new ideas [18]. Recent studies find that relationship-oriented use fosters innovation through knowledge sharing, while task-oriented use may sometimes stifle creativity due to its emphasis on efficiency [37,38]. Ambidextrous use is emerging as a critical capability for achieving both exploitative and exploratory innovation outcomes [39].

3. Research methods

A multi-case study design is more persuasive and offers greater generalizability than a single-case study, as it follows a replication logic [40]. This study employs multi-case analysis, with interviews conducted with WeQia's internal management and user enterprises including Lingling7, Pin Ming, and Jing Hong. A summary of case companies is provided in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Classification of key information in seven case companies

Enterprise	Industry	Relationship with WeQia	Application functions
WeQia	Internet company	Developer	Mobile office, project collaboration, mobile CRM, enterprise mobile IM
Ping Ming	Technology information	User	Mobile office, mobile CRM, enterprise mobile IM

Zhong Tuo	Communication services	User	Mobile office, enterprise mobile IM
Yang Ri	Car decoration	User	Mobile office
Jing Hong	Decorative design	User	Project collaboration, mobile CRM, enterprise mobile IM
Jun Road	Automotive service	User	Project collaboration, mobile office
Lingling7	Financial services	User	Mobile office, enterprise mobile IM

3.1. Date collection

Data collection combined primary interviews with secondary sources such as company literature and websites. During interviews, respondents were first introduced to the research purpose, and questions followed an interview outline. Interviewees introduced their company's development process, products, and operational mode. Interviews ranged from 34 to 119 minutes, producing a total of 146,530 text transcripts from 13 interviewees across 9 interview sessions.

3.2. Data analysis

Data analysis employed an open coding approach based on exploratory research methods [40]. Interview content was coded using content coding analysis [41]. First-level coding was applied to the interviews. Then, concepts relating to usage patterns and employee performance were differentiated, forming second-level codes. Finally, ESM technical characteristics were abstracted from interview materials to form third-level codes. A total of 411 valid entries were obtained: 221 related to ESM platform characteristics, 34 to usage patterns, and 70 to usage-pattern-performance relationships.

3.3. Ethics statement

This study involved interviews with enterprise managers and employees. All participants were informed of the research purpose and voluntarily participated. No personally identifiable information is disclosed in this paper.

4. Results

4.1. Core technical characteristics of enterprise social platforms

From 411 entries across the seven companies, four salient ESM characteristics were identified: Timeliness, Sharing, Accessibility, and Flexibility.

Timeliness was frequently emphasized by managers who repeatedly mentioned "improving efficiency." Timeliness is enhanced through concise approval processes, efficient process links via mobile terminals, and fast communication channels for managers to promptly address employee feedback.

Sharing facilitates a knowledge network, where approximately eighty percent of sharing occurs in the "colleagues' circle" for internal matters, and twenty percent in the "work circle" for external affairs, according to WeQia's technical director. Moreover, sharing provides long-term storage for important files and corporate culture, aiding new employee onboarding.

Accessibility refers to the ease with which employees can access information and functions. Interviewees cited the platform's similarity to WeChat, noting minimal learning costs, which ensures high accessibility.

Flexibility manifests in satisfying diverse user needs and enabling various ways to meet task requirements [42] (**Table 3**).

Table 3. Examples of feature recognition of enterprise social platforms

Feature	Number of entries	Proportion	Typical entry
Timeliness	67	67/221	"Our tasks and documents can be viewed at any time after they were uploaded to WeQia, and new employees can easily learn about the culture and the way they work."
Share ability	43	43/221	"I share things on the platform that everyone sees and will participate in discussions. People are more active than before."
Accessibility	53	53/221	"The learning cost of WeQia is very low, its page is very similar to WeChat, which reduces visual conversion and is easy to use."
Flexibility	58	58/221	"It can help enterprises to solve hidden problems that you don't find now, and WeQia can help you solve them."

4.2. Usage patterns of enterprise social platforms

Integrating U&G theory with case study findings, two primary usage patterns were identified as follows.

The Relationship-demand pattern builds upon social and hedonic needs, requiring a harmonious atmosphere for knowledge sharing. Interviews suggested that employees gain satisfaction from helping others on the platform, contributing to a positive atmosphere.

The Task-demand pattern views the platform as a means to enhance work efficiency through process monitoring, project coordination, and mobile office functions. As Lingling7's CEO stated, the platform allows managers to easily monitor the business progress of each department (**Table 4**).

Table 4. Examples of usage patterns of enterprise social platforms

Pattern	Number of entries	Proportion	Typical entry
Relationship requirements	14	14/34	"Soft things show in open communication, through active atmosphere and making the team together, communicating more effectively."
Task requirements	20	20/34	"The behavior of staff got effective management, such as when I am out to positioning, visit a customer and record it, including the employee's work report."

4.3. Usage patterns and employee performance

This study examines the impact of ESM usage patterns on two aspects of employee performance: task performance and innovation performance [18] (**Table 5**).

Table 5. Use patterns and employee performance relationships

Relationship	Number of entries	Proportion	Typical entry
Relationship-task	23	23/70	"It is more convenient for me to improve the efficiency of my work. The communication efficiency of the whole company is also improved."
Relationship-innovation	12	12/70	"Emotional support is more effective, and it is timely to support front-line workers. They are motivated to improve their work efficiency."
Task completion-task	19	19/70	"Through this communication all the time, we may be able to solve more problems and promote the organization's cohesion."
Task completion-innovation	16	16/70	"The first point is that participation is higher, and the second point is that I get information more conveniently and more focused."

4.4. Identification of the core technical characteristics of enterprise social platform

From 411 entries across the seven companies, four salient ESM characteristics were identified: Timeliness,

Sharing, Accessibility, and Flexibility.

Timeliness was frequently emphasized by managers, particularly CEOs, who repeatedly mentioned "improving efficiency." The study found timeliness is enhanced in three ways: (1) concise approval processes, (2) efficient process links via mobile terminals for task scheduling and reporting, and (3) fast communication links for managers to understand and promptly address employee feedback.

Sharing was identified as the second characteristic. The platform facilitates a knowledge network that encourages information and knowledge exchange. WeQia's technical director noted that about eighty percent of sharing occurs in the "colleagues' circle" for internal matters, and twenty percent in the "work circle" for external affairs. Sharing provides long-term memory storage for important files and corporate culture, aids in new employee onboarding, and manifests in the sharing of information, knowledge, topics, and culture.

Accessibility refers to the ease with which employees can access information and functions. Interviewees cited the platform's similarity to WeChat, noting minimal learning time and training costs, which ensures high accessibility.

Flexibility manifests in two ways: the platform satisfying diverse user needs, a factor Wixom and Todd (2005) found significantly impacts user satisfaction, and the flexibility in how employees use the platform to meet various task requirements. A detailed summary is provided in **Table 6**.

Table 6. Examples of feature recognition of enterprise social platforms

Feature recognition	Number of entries	Proportion	A typical entry
Timeliness	67	67/221	"Our tasks and documents can be viewed at any time after they were uploaded to WeQia, and new employees can easily learn about the culture, the business and the way they work."
Share ability	43	43/221	"I share things on the platform that everyone sees and will participate in discussions and reviews. People are more active than before."
Accessibility	53	53/221	"The learning cost of WeQia is very low, its page is very similar to WeChat, which reduces the visual conversion and easy to use."
Flexibility	58	58/221	"It can help enterprises to solve some hidden problems, there are some problems you don't find now and WeQia can help you to solve the problem, it will save a lot of trouble for us".

5. Research model and propositions

Following the extraction and identification of the above variables, a theoretical model is constructed. Enterprises should focus on how the information transfer and communication process facilitated by the social platform enhances efficiency and achieves business goals. These are embodied in the four identified technical features: Timeliness, Flexibility, Accessibility, and Sharing, as shown in **Figure 1**.

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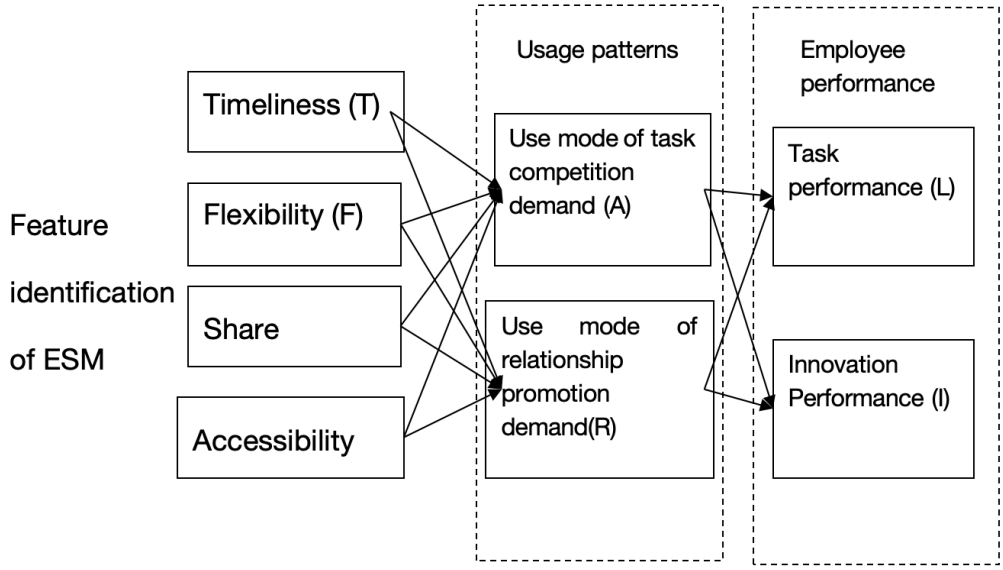

Figure 1. Research model.

5.1. Technical characteristics and usage mode choice

The analysis reveals distinct associations between technical features and usage patterns. Sharing and Flexibility align more with the relationship-demand usage mode, while Accessibility and Timeliness align more with task-oriented characteristics (**Table 7**).

Table 7. EMS features and use mode relations to recognize the typical clause and sub clause

Technical characteristics	Usage pattern	Influence	Typical company
Timeliness (T)	Use mode of task competition demand (A)	Significant positive impact	Jing Hong Pin Ming
	Use mode of relationship promotion demand(R)	Some effects	Zhong Tuo
Flexibility (F)	Use mode of task competition demand (A)	Some effects	Jun Road
	Use mode of relationship promotion demand(R)	Significant positive impact	Ling Ling 7 Pin Ming
Accessibility(G)	Use mode of task competition demand (A)	Significant positive impact	Zhong Tuo Jun Road
	Use mode of relationship promotion demand(R)	Some effects	Jing Hong
Share ability(S)	Use mode of task competition demand (A)	Some effects	Pin Ming
	Use mode of relationship promotion demand(R)	Have a significant positive impact	Zhong TUO Ling Ling 7 Jing Hong

5.2. Usage modes and employee performance

The analysis indicates a trade-off between task performance and innovation performance. Zhong Tuo and Pin Ming, primarily using task-completion patterns, showed high task performance but limited innovation improvements. Conversely, 007fenqi and Jundao, emphasizing creativity, showed stronger innovation performance (**Table 8**).

Table 8. Impact of EMS usage patterns on employee performance

Usage pattern	Work performance	Influence	Typical company
Use mode of task competition demand (A)	Task performance(L)	Significant positive impact	Pin Ming, Jun Road
	Innovation performance(I)	Some effects	Zhong Tuo, Jing Hong
Use mode of relationship promotion demand (A)	Task performance(L)	Some effects	Jun Road, Lingling7
	Innovation performance(I)	Significant positive impact	Pin Ming, Jun Road, Lingling7

Based on the above analysis, the following propositions are advanced:

(1) Proposition 1: Timeliness and Accessibility are more closely matched with the task-demand usage mode, while Flexibility and Sharing are more closely matched with the relationship-demand usage mode;

(2) Proposition 2: The task-demand usage mode has a significant impact on task performance, while the relationship-demand usage mode has a significant impact on innovation performance.

5.3. The basis for the choice of enterprise usage pattern

When choosing a social platform, enterprises consider the match between platform features and their internal organizational and business characteristics.

5.3.1. The internal characteristics of the organization

Flatter organizations, with reduced management levels, reflect a lower degree of communication formalization, requiring relationship-oriented ESM usage to foster initiative. Additionally, more hierarchical organizations with fixed task logic benefit from task-oriented ESM for clarity (**Table 9**).

Table 9. The differences of organizational characteristics

Organization type	Business characteristics	Internal characteristic	Desired function
Pyramid	High demand for skills	High formal level, fixed task logic	Relational assistance to break rigid boundaries
Flattening	High demand for information	Low formal level, flexible task ability	Task assistance for project execution

5.3.2. Task characteristics

Enterprises with high information needs prioritize timely and shared communication, aligning with Sharing and Flexibility features. Enterprises with high technical needs prioritize process accuracy, aligning with Accessibility and Timeliness features.

5.3.3. Choice of use mode

The choice of ESM usage mode is contingent upon the interplay between organizational communication formalization and primary task characteristics. The synthesis is as follows:

(1) High formalization with technical tasks → Task-demand mode

(2) High formalization with information tasks → Combined mode (task + relationship)

(3) Low formalization with technical tasks → Combined mode

(4) Low formalization with information tasks → Relationship-demand mode

For proposition 3, when formalization is high, a task-demand mode is chosen if tasks are technical; a

combined mode is selected if tasks are information-oriented.

For proposition 4, when formalization is low, a combined mode is selected if task characteristics are technical; a relationship-demand mode is used if task characteristics are information-oriented.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Theoretical contribution

This study refines the core technical characteristics of enterprise social platforms from an information transmission perspective, identifying Timeliness, Flexibility, Accessibility, and Sharing. It extends prior research by demonstrating these features' direct impact on usage pattern selection and employee performance [15,16]. Drawing on U&G theory, it provides a refined classification of ESM usage into task-demand and relationship-demand patterns, empirically linking them to distinct performance outcomes. The findings show that ESM effectiveness depends on the congruence between features, usage patterns, and organizational context.

6.2. Practical implication

First, ESM vendors should enhance technical flexibility, such as customizing approval workflows to avoid information bottlenecks. Second, enterprises must understand that performance improvement derives from strategically choosing a usage pattern aligned with business characteristics and organizational culture. Third, a top-down promotion strategy, where management leads by example, is crucial for successful platform assimilation.

6.3. Limitations and future research

The data for this study were collected in 2015, representing a specific early stage of enterprise social platform development. Nonetheless, the core technical characteristics identified, Timeliness, Flexibility, Accessibility, and Sharing, remain foundational to current platforms such as DingTalk and Microsoft Teams. The insights offer a timeless lens for understanding how platform features interact with usage patterns to influence employee performance, serving as a valuable baseline for comparative studies in the current era of digital transformation.

Future research should employ quantitative methods to test the propositions advanced in this paper with larger samples. Comparative studies examining how the evolution of technical features has reshaped usage patterns in platforms like DingTalk and WeCom are warranted. The emergence of AI-powered features introduces new dynamics requiring investigation. Finally, longitudinal tracking and cross-cultural comparative studies would be highly valuable.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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