

# Social Power and Willingness to Share Knowledge

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## ABSTRACT

Willingness to share knowledge is subjective to an individual. It relies on an individual's decision to share or not with others. One of the factors that influence individual willingness to share knowledge is authority ranking. There are four types of social power comprising legitimate, coercive, referent and expertise power. Among of these four types of social power, this study aimed to investigate the significant relationship of social power and willingness to share knowledge. A survey was conducted among 150 knowledge workers in ICT industries which are mainly located in Cyberjaya, Malaysia. Partial Least Square analysis was conducted to analyze measurement and structural model. The results of the study indicate that none of the social power dimensions influence willingness to share knowledge as in the Malaysia context.

**Keywords:** Knowledge Sharing Behavior, Willingness to Share Knowledge, Social Factors

## Introduction

Power is an individual's capacity to move others, to influence, to persuade, to encourage and to engage in a specific behavior (French & Rav'en, 1959; Yulk, 2002). The role of power is also considered to change or control others behavior, attitudes, opinions, objectives, needs, and values (Rahim, Antonioni, & Psenicka, 2001). In other words, power can control people and circumstances. Essentially, there are six bases of power; informational, reward, coercion, legitimate, expertise, and referent (French & Raven, 1959). Among this mix of power, power is divided into two categories of formal and informal. A formal power is defined as formal structures whether hierarchical, legitimate or based on formal authority (French & Raven, 1959). In an organizational context, formal power is held by an individual who has a position in an organization. A formal power can refer to legitimate, rewards, coercive and information power or personal power (Yulk, 1991). A personal power is based on individual personality, quality or characteristics such as expert, referent, persuasive and charisma. Robbins and Judge (2009) advocated that personal power comes from the unique characteristics, experiences, knowledge as a person has the level of expertise, respect, and admiration by others.

One of the roles of power is to control and change others' behavior particularly in sharing knowledge. A power may regulate others decision either they are willing or been forced to share knowledge. Boer, Berends and Baalen (2011) studied social power and willingness to share knowledge. The study supported that who at higher rank have better access to knowledge will share knowledge with those in the lower rank and they are expected to acknowledge or return the act in the form of commitment who at a lower rank. In contrast, the finding revealed that people who are at lower rank are willing to share knowledge with their superior, and expect a kind of care or recognition in return from the supervisor. In these two

different contexts; either formal or informal power can influence individual's willingness to share knowledge.

## Methodology

A sample of 150 knowledge workers participated in this study. They are experts in Information and Technology (Info Tech) industries at MSC companies located in Cyberjaya, Malaysia. A survey was conducted to on knowledge workers and was reported that there was 100 percent response rate. Social power was measured using a Likert scale with five items adopted from Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989) and Raven, Schwarzwald, and Koslowski (1998). Measurement for willingness to share knowledge was adopted from Hooff and Hendrix (2004). Partial Least Square (PLS) data analysis was used to identify the significant relationship between social power and willingness to share knowledge. Respondents' profile in Table 1 stated information of knowledge workers pertaining to gender, age, working experience and education background. Among the respondents, 52.7 percent knowledge workers were female, 47.3 percent were male. Respondent was mostly aged ranging from 26-30 (37.3%), 28.7 percent were between 20-25 and 9 percent were above 45 years old. For working experience, 64 percent of respondents had 5 -9 years, 3 percent had between 10-12 years old and 4 percent had more than 15 years of experience. Added that, most of the respondent's 55.3 percent were a degree holder, 31.3 percent were the master holder and 3.3 percent were higher degree and professional certificates holders.

Table 1: Demographic Factors

Demographic Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	79	52.7
Males	71	47.3
Aged		
20-25	43	28.7
26-30	56	37.3
31-35	24	16
36-40	19	12.7
41-45	4	2.7
45-50	3	2
51 - 55	1	7
Working Experience		
5-9 years	96	64
10-14 years	48	32
More than 15 years	6	4
Education		
Diploma	15	10
Degree	83	55.3
Master Degree	47	31.3
Higher Degree	3	2
Professional	2	1.3

## Finding and Discussion

### *Common Method Variance (CMV)*

Before further analysis of measurement and structural model, a common method variance had been conducted was done purposely to minimize the response bias as the survey was collected from single source. Harman single factor was used to measure the CMV (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) and the threshold value of variance should be less than 50 percent (Field, 2016). The result of this study shows that common method bias did not occur as the single factor explained 41.67 % of the variance.

### *Convergent Validity*

Convergent validity, the analysis involves examining factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability. According to Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins, Kuppelwieser (2014), the loadings must higher than 0.7 and this indicates that the items have high internal consistency reliability to represent the constructs. For the loadings lower than the threshold values, the items are recommended for deletion until the average variance extracted to meet the minimum values of 0.50. Second, the values of average variance extracted (AVE) estimated by the ratio of construct variance to the total variance among indicators should be above the threshold value of .50 (Barclay, Thompson & Higgins, 1995). As in Table 2, the result indicates that all the loadings were all higher than 0.7, the composite reliabilities were all higher than 0.7 and AVE were also higher than 0.5 as suggested in the literature.

For the assessment of discriminant validity, a traditional Fornell and Larcker's criterion of assessment was used to calculate the cross-loadings between constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The assumption underlying discriminant validity is, if the single loading of the indicator is greater for their own latent variable than for the other latent variables in the model, the result can be as interpreted the model is well differentiated with respect to the other constructs. The result revealed that the values on the diagonals were greater than the corresponding row and column values indicating the measures have discriminant validity.

Table 2: Convergent Validity

Constructs	Items	Factors Loading	(CR)	(AVE)
Legitimate Power (LP)	LP1	0.845	0.925	0.756
	LP2	0.924		
	LP3	0.917		
	LP4	0.785		
Coercive Power (CP)	COP5	0.811	0.891	0.672
	COP6	0.816		
	COP7	0.82		
	COP8	0.832		
Referent Power (RP)	RP9	0.886	0.956	0.844
	RP10	0.936		
	RP11	0.93		
	RP12	0.922		
Expert Power (EP)	EP13	0.925	0.94	0.798
	EP14	0.923		
	EP15	0.849		
	EP16	0.874		

Table 3: Discriminant Validity

Constructs	1	2	3	4
1.CP	0.828			
2.EP	0.111	0.893		
3.LP	-0.176	0.445	0.862	
4.RP	-0.063	0.612	0.535	0.918
5.WTS	0.144	0.333	0.076	0.286

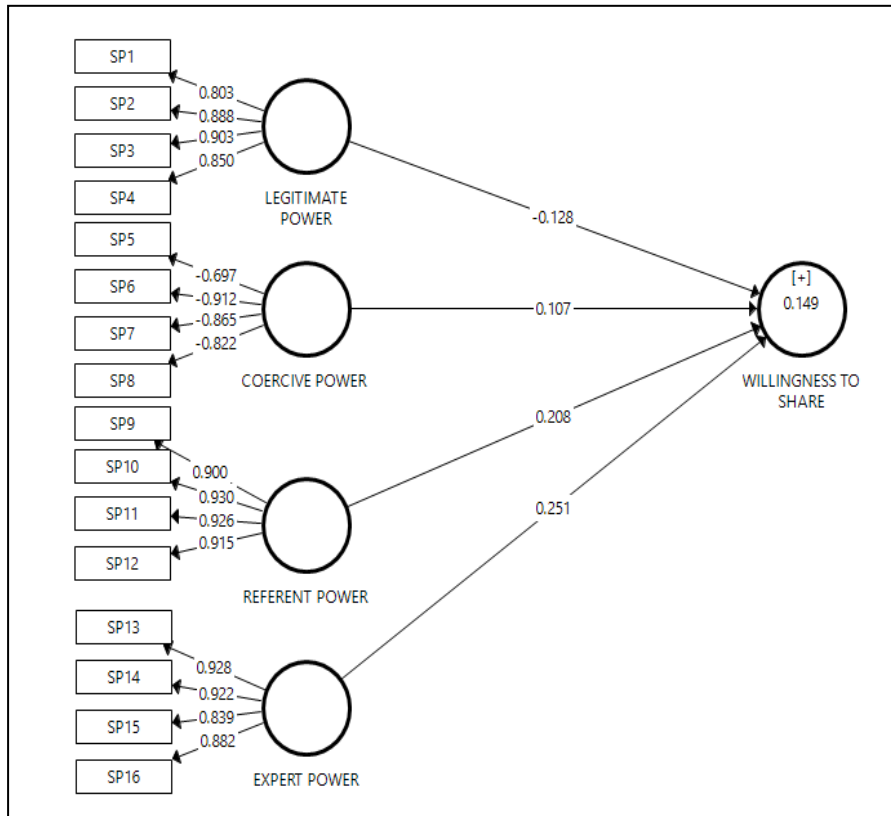


Fig.1: Measurement Model of Social Power and Willingness to Share Knowledge

### Structural Model

The significance of the relationship requires a bootstrapping technique, which involved a process of repeated by analyzing a total of 300 samples for each dataset. To confirm the significance of the relationship, the significant values should be less than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ) with the t-value exceeds 1.96, and then the hypothesis of the relationship can be accepted. The  $R^2$  values of 0.149 suggested that 14.9 percent of the variance in willingness to share knowledge was explained by legitimate power, coercive power, referent power and expert power. Moreover, there were positive relationship between coercive power ( $\beta = 0.251$ ,  $std = 0.193$ ), expert power ( $\beta = -0.072$ ,  $std = 0.091$ ) and referent power ( $\beta = 0.208$ ,  $std = 0.186$ ) with willingness to share knowledge except for legitimate power ( $\beta = -0.128$ ,  $std = 0.182$ ) as there was a negative relationship. Among the four IV's finding above, the result indicates that none

of the types of power discussed was statistically that significant to influence willingness to share knowledge as the p values were greater than 0.05.

To further confirmed the result, the values of confidence interval bias corrected were round of 0 and this result confirmed that there was no significant relationship of coercive power (LL= -0.402, UL=0.247), expert power (LL= -0.473, UL=0.307), legitimate power (LL=-0.455, UL=0.449), referent power (LL= -0.465, UL=0.305) with willingness to share knowledge. Overall, the finding confirmed that social power which consists of coercive, legitimate, referent and expert power did not statistically significantly influence with a willingness to share knowledge.

Table 3: Structural Model

Relationship	$\beta$	SE	T- value	F <sup>2</sup>
COP →WTSK	0.107	0.186	1.306	0.012
EXP →WTSK	0.251	0.193	1.306	0.043
LEGP→WTSK	-0.128	0.182	0.705	0.013
REFP →WTSK	0.208	0.186	1.114	0.027

\*\*p<0.05

COP Coercive Power, EXP Expert Power, LEGP Legitimate Power, REFP Referent Power, WTSK Willingness to Share Knowledge

Table 4: Confidence Interval Bias

Relationship	LL	UL	Decisions
COP →WTSK	-0.402	0.247	Not Support
EXP →WTSK	-0.473	0.307	Not Support
LEGP→WTSK	-0.455	0.449	Not Support
REFP →WTSK	-0.465	0.305	Not Support

## Conclusions

The current study aims to investigate the significant relationship between social power and willingness to share knowledge. The overall finding can be concluded that social power did not statistically significantly influence willingness to share knowledge. This finding can be explained in such away that individuals with a formal power have the opportunity to abuse their positions and mistreat their employees. They are not going to share with them (Tepper, 2000). The finding also was supported by Riege (2005), people who hold formal power have less to share their knowledge with others.

There is a probability that this is going to happen to individuals with a high position as they are the dominant keepers of explicit and tacit knowledge. They only want to share the

important things needed by the employees. For further discussion, Riege (2005) also supported that formal power causes employer to decide not to share knowledge because of a strong hierarchy, high position and high status in organization. Besides, differences level of experience, lack of interaction between people in the hierarchy contributed to unwillingness to share knowledge. In contrast, Menon, Thomson and Choi (2006) supported that those people in formal power fear of status fade or exemption. Whilst, according Lin (2007), personal power refers to an individual who has high personal power and can regulate the relationship between people. An expert power which is part of personal power has been found to positively motivate people to share their expertise and knowledge with others (Boer, Baalen & Kumar, 2004). However, in this study, personal power remains not significant to influence willingness to share knowledge. This might happen due to the feeling of high competition among the members. They feel anxiety to the insecure position if they share more or they know more in the organization. This finding has been supported by Lin, Wu and Lu, (2012). A similar finding by Boer et al. (2004) mentioned that expert power does not influence people to share knowledge while formal power was associated with knowledge sharing. This finding contrast to Lin et al (2012) with regard to willingness to share knowledge.

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