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How do Affordances Spread and how does this Impact the IS Usage Behavior

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Information Systems (IS) research has moved away from a dichotomous understanding of the use and non-use of a system to a more nuanced analysis of differences in the actualization of affordances. Affordances refer “[...] to the [action] possibilities arising from that relation for actions or behaviors [of a user] that will lead to a particular immediate concrete outcome” (Bygstad et al., 2016, p. 87). These affordances are provided by technology (i.e., they exist), can be perceived by the user, and are ultimately actualized (Bernhard et al., 2013). The translation, “link, and distinction, between perception (being aware of the existence of an action possibility) and actualization (turning possibility into action) of affordances is still unclear in the IS literature” (Bernhard et al., 2013, p. 5). Due to the increasing adoption of digital innovation and the needed features offered by IS, the need to understand the relationship between the user and the particular IS rises. The affordance theory builds the basis to gain in-depth insights regarding the design of effective IS by helping to understand the IS usage behavior. This view asserts that affordances can actively be designed into an IT artifact (Mettler et al., 2017). IS research often aims at identifying affordances; a deeper understanding of how technology affordances that are shared within one group in an organization (e.g., a department) spread to others or between particular individuals is yet still missing (Leonardi, 2013). By identifying mechanisms on how existing affordances are perceived and actualized and there, mainly, how they are spread and shared in an organizational context, a deeper understanding of design patterns of IS could be generated. In this regard, we call for research that examines the interdependences in the process of spreading and sharing in the context of the actualization of affordances between different groups of actors (Leidner et al., 2018) to gain insights into how an affordance-based view could inform the adoption, appropriation, and adaptation of emerging technologies to support organizational outcomes and goals.

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