

# The Successful Elements on Knowledge Sharing Constructed Social Media among Academic Staff <sup>†</sup>

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<sup>†</sup> Presented at the International Academic Symposium of Social Science 2022, Kota Bharu, Malaysia, 3 July 2022.

**Abstract:** This paper aims to explore influencing organizational elements that inspire social media based on knowledge sharing among academic staff in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Nowadays, alongside the emergence of Information Communication and Technology (ICT), knowledge sharing could be considered essential in educational institutions, regarding their effectiveness and longer-term survival. Nonetheless, to certify the success of knowledge sharing within Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), there is a need to understand the role of knowledge-sharing activities in the life of these communities. Social media have emerged as essential forums for locating, connecting, collaborating, and sharing ideas among individuals. However, only limited research has addressed the role of social media in facilitating knowledge sharing between academic staff. This research adopted a qualitative approach to understanding the subject matter in depth. Data were gathered from thirty-two academic staff members from two public and two private universities. The findings resulted in the identification of seven key themes, namely: organizational structure, technology infrastructure, organizational strategy, organizational culture, management support, people and skills, which all need to be considered as influential elements for social media.

**Keywords:** knowledge sharing; social media; academic staff



**Citation:** Aziz, N.E.A.; Mokhtar, S.A.; Arfin, N.A.M.; Jamin, J.; Aziz, W.A.H.W.; Abdullah, N. The Successful Elements on Knowledge Sharing Constructed Social Media among Academic Staff. *Proceedings* **2022**, *82*, 66. <https://doi.org/10.3390/proceedings2022082066>

Academic Editor: Mohamad Rahimi Mohamad Rosman

Published: 20 September 2022

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## 1. Introduction

HEIs, by definition, are knowledge-concentrated environments, and their primary purpose is to generate and disseminate knowledge through teaching and learning. Due to the fact that knowledge is such a noteworthy asset, it is considered to be a valuable resource for organizations and individuals. Thus, knowledge could be considered a resource required by the management. Knowledge sharing is essential, as much precise work is carried out among teams comprising people who are not physically located in the same area and interact online [1].

Today, in many knowledge organizations, most work is largely unseen because it is difficult for us to obtain information about others and connections. HEIs are among those essential to supplying future generations with knowledge. HEIs are confronting several challenges and social and economic pressures which require developing strategies to respond to the current era's realities effectively. The uncertainty in knowledge work can hinder knowledge sharing, and thus may bring many adverse effects on the organization [2].

Current trends in HEIs encompass the expectation that academic staff members would be willing to move from knowledge hoarding toward knowledge sharing [3]. According to the authors, Ref. [4] stated that knowledge could be a basic asset for HEIs. The authors

mentioned that knowledge sharing had become a part of many organizations, especially in HEIs where knowledge is created, obtained, and distributed. Furthermore, such sharing of knowledge between academic staff members necessarily includes the formation of interpersonal relations, as well as enhancing the education of future generations.

HEIs can apply social media to communicate and share knowledge or ideas among academic staff. One article [5] pointed out that social media could deliver a forum for learning and act as a virtual center for HEIs to encourage knowledge sharing and contribute towards research and teaching methods and a myriad of skills among academics for succeeding in educational competitiveness. Social media are considered critical aspects within the university to facilitate knowledge sharing and the performance of significant tasks to support daily communication [6]. However, knowledge-sharing difficulties while using social media in HEIs are inevitable [7].

In the Malaysian context, HEIs must adopt knowledge-sharing approaches using social media to improve knowledge management and performance and ensure long-term survival in a competitive environment. As suggested by [6–8], knowledge sharing could enhance organizational performance as a requirement for corporate competitiveness. Hence, the adoption of knowledge sharing could improve the performance of organizational competitiveness. The knowledge created by academics, embedded in their minds, is the institutional capital. Competitive advantage can be obtained if command of this knowledge can be shared with those who need it to derive benefits. Thus, Ref. [9] argues that social media and sharing of institutional knowledge by the staff will bring meaningful improvements to the institutions, with potential benefits to the broader HEIs, and hence the performance of educational institutions as a whole will be enhanced.

Yet, knowledge sharing employing using social media is still underdeveloped in HEIs in Malaysia. Most studies exploring knowledge sharing and social media are done abroad. Thus, it is important to study which strategies could be adopted to implement knowledge sharing in Malaysian HEIs. Numerous studies have explored these issues, but only in the broader context of knowledge sharing between employees of organizations. However, there is a paucity of comprehensive research on knowledge sharing between academic staff in HEIs. In this regard, Ref. [10] revealed that research to understand knowledge sharing in academic teams within HEIs is limited compared with other sectors.

Thus, this study focuses on social media and knowledge sharing, as well as investigating the influence of organizational elements that contribute to using social media for knowledge sharing. Apart from that, this research identified the knowledge and methods they shared within the knowledge-sharing between individuals, such as in an academic team or within broader institutions.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Knowledge Sharing

In generating new knowledge, knowledge sharing, whereby individuals share their knowledge, now plays a vital role within institutions [11]. Nevertheless, the shared understanding should be of such quality as to add value to the organization [11]. Knowledge sharing between individuals can be viewed as a form of social interaction in which individuals participate. However, if knowledge sharing effectively improves the quality of operations, informed decision-making, problem-solving, and the development of highly skilled employees must be effectively managed [8]. Thus, in recent years, knowledge has emerged as an essential dimension of strategic management, innovation, and information systems in most organizations [12].

### 2.2. Organizational Elements Could Significantly Influence Knowledge Sharing

Organizations could be viewed as systems of core, elaborating, independent and inconsistent elements and interconnections among all or part of these elements. The elements representing resources, activities, processes, networking technology and policies are essential for the viability of the organization [2]. Organizational elements could be

defined as areas in which results, if they are satisfactory, will ensure successful competitive performance for the organization [12].

Previous research has led to the identification of several organizational elements considered to exert significant influences on knowledge sharing. Among these elements, there is a consensus among the authors that seven are especially important in terms of their influence on organizational culture in the context of knowledge sharing by using social media, namely: organizational culture, organizational structure, management support, technology infrastructure, skills, people and organizational strategy. Each of these is examined in the following sections. There is a general acceptance in the literature that knowledge sharing is essential to organizations.

### 2.3. Social Media in HEIs

Social media represent a second wave in web developments by offering tools and applications such as weblogs, wikis, Ajax, Really Simple Syndication (RSS) and tagging. However, some authors prefer to view media platforms as a dimension of online social interaction which also permits the creation and exchange of information. Other researchers approach social media from a technological perspective which can provide services such as wikis, blogs or weblogs really simple syndication (RSS), Ajax, instant messaging and podcasts. In the context of the current research, social media can be considered as authoring tools that are easy to use for people who do not have an information technology background but who can avail of its many facilities for sharing knowledge by means of creating weblogs, social networking applications and services such as Facebook and Myspace.

In addition, [5] draws attention to university websites which are mines of information and knowledge with lecturers' notes and PowerPoint presentations as well as students' contributions. These are accessible through permission from the college library, but they often have a section accessible to the wider public also. However, knowledge which has accumulated on those sites have to be managed as valuable assets, and institutions remain dubious about those sites opening up freely to the general public. Nevertheless, Rowley does envisage a widening of access, but more in the direction of explicit rather than tacit knowledge. In-house, however, such sharing may become more common, especially within departments, but again, will probably not embrace tacit knowledge. The advantage of technological approaches lies in its facility for systematizing and synchronizing information shared by academics.

## 3. Research Approach

This study used a qualitative approach to identify the organizational elements of knowledge sharing based on social media. Qualitative research methods have been used to understand the subject matter in depth. It is aligned epistemologically with an interpretive research approach. Interpretivist thinking considers understanding the "meaning" of social phenomena for its participants. Interpretivism also acknowledges human agency and reflexivity. The case study has been chosen which intends to identify and influence organizational elements of social media based on knowledge sharing. The results of this paper are based on interpreting the results of semi-structured interviews with academic staff in selected universities from Malaysian HEIs within the public and private sectors.

## 4. Findings

As is illustrated in Table 1 below, a total of 32 participants were willing to participate in the research study and, subsequently, 32 semi-structured interviews were conducted. The findings explain how knowledge sharing using social media can be applied, as conveyed in the case studies' data. In addition, the results also illustrated the influences of and how the influential organizational elements contribute to social media based on knowledge sharing in Malaysian HEIs.

**Table 1.** Summary of Participants and their positions selected from Case Study HEIs.

University	Number Management Team	Number of Senior Staff	Number of Junior Staff	Number of Participants
University A	2	3	4	9
University B	2	2	4	8
University C	2	3	3	8
University D	1	3	3	7
Sub Total	7	11	14	Final Total 32

Overall, seven elements were identified from the literature review data collected, specifically: organizational strategy, organizational structure, organizational infrastructure, organizational, organizational culture, management support, people, and skills. The codes are used to identify citations taken from interview transcripts. All interviews were conducted face to face. There were thirty-two participants (academic staff) involved in the interviews, and the interviewees were allocated letters according to their position in the university and ID number e.g., MT1, MT2, SS1, SS2, JS1, JS2) to maintain anonymity.

According to the interviews conducted with most of the participants, it was found that to share their knowledge with another person, a relationship must first be established between them. A participant took it one step further and pointed out that not only is the amount of knowledge sharing affected by the type of knowledge or the relationship but was also dependent upon the strength and quality of the relationship.

One of the participants’ experiences advised that the communication approaches and knowledge sharing methods he used were based on the type of relationship he had with a person. In some cases, he might pick up the phone, he might send an email message, or he might get up out of his chair and physically approach the person. In some cases, he even travelled by airplane to either maintain an important relationship, repair a relationship or form a new relationship.

The participants agreed on the importance of skills and abilities that are built from the practices and experiences in the use of social media for knowledge sharing over time. In addition, social media could be a source that might lead to increased confidence. It could be used as an effective method to develop and maintain good communication for sharing knowledge. When asked about their views on why social media platforms are not popularly used by academics in MHEIs, the academic staff suggested that the use of social media platforms might increase their workload since they would have to re-design their activities to fit the use of social media, extend consultation hours beyond normal working time, cope with their own unfamiliarity with the social media tools and learn how to incorporate the social media platforms into their work.

They also saw the social media tool as an informal tool and a distraction. And, of course, they were concerned about the issue of privacy and security when social media platforms are used for academic purposes. For instance, one senior academic staff says: ‘And then I just think, ‘You know what? Let somebody else do it.’ And I wouldn’t have thought that in my academic careers because I still thought I could make a difference. It’s time, I can’t carry on struggling using this social media. I can’t be bothered’ (senior academic staff in management position).

**5. Conclusions and Implications of the Study**

There is increased responsiveness and identification of social media as an approach method for knowledge sharing in organizations. However, limited research has been conducted on social media applications for organizational knowledge sharing, especially in HEIs. Presently, Malaysian academics need encouragement and support to use social media that could benefit their work. Therefore, it is needed to encourage them with the influence elements to use social media. The research for this paper was conducted with

academic staff, because of time constraints, but in the future, it might be worth considering conducting similar research with non-academic staff. As well, it could also be interesting to investigate the perception of social media based on knowledge sharing between academic and non-academic staff in private and public universities.

This study investigated the influence of organizational elements that contribute to social media-based knowledge sharing by Malaysian-based HEIs. It implies a need for HEIs to recognize that social media can be an effective medium for such knowledge sharing by academic staff, consequently leading to HEIs' identification of organizational elements that influence the use of social media. In seeking to determine the drivers and barriers to sustainable use, this research should interest practitioners and researchers undertaking similar projects.

**Author Contributions:** Thank you to all committed authors N.E.A.A., S.A.M., N.A.M.A., J.J., W.A.H.W.A. and N.A. who willingly dedicated their precious time in completing this paper. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** Not applicable.

**Acknowledgments:** This research was partially supported by Universiti Teknologi MARA Kelantan Branch, Malaysia.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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