

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i5.1675>

How Much Does Employees' Trust Really Matter in Using Human Resources Social Technology System (HRSTS)?

Mohamed Mohiya¹

Abstract

The Human Resources Social Technology System (HRSTS) represents a workplace-based social technology initiative implemented by organizations to provide employees with a platform to express their concerns and experiences. Despite its intended purpose, employee trust has emerged as a critical challenge influencing the utilization of HRSTS. This study aims to assess the extent to which trust affects employees' engagement with HRSTS and, more importantly, to identify the underlying factors that contribute to trust or distrust in this system. To guide the investigation, the study employs the Social Exchange Theory (SET) as a theoretical framework. SET is particularly relevant in this context as it conceptualizes the employee–HRSTS relationship as a reciprocal exchange process, emphasizing mutual responsiveness and bidirectional interactions. A qualitative research design was adopted, utilizing semi-structured interviews as the primary method for data collection. A total of 37 interviews were conducted with employees who have used. Findings reveal that employee trust significantly influences the adoption and effective use of HRSTS. However, a predominant lack of trust was observed among users within the studied organization. Key factors contributing to this distrust include the presence of content filtration mechanisms implemented by the employer, insufficient feedback and responsiveness to employee input, a perceived absence of concrete outcomes resulting from HRSTS usage, and a lack of accessible informational resources and operational guidelines. This research offers both theoretical and empirical contributions, representing one of the few studies to explore the determinants of trust in the context of HRSTS. It advances understanding of how trust can be fostered, regained, and maintained to ensure HRSTS functions as an effective and credible social technology within organizational settings.

Keywords: Employee Trust, Human Resources Social Technology System, Social Exchange Theory, User-Generated Content.

Introduction

The Human Resources Social Technology System (HRSTS) constitutes one of the social technology initiatives implemented by organizations to facilitate employee communication and engagement within the workplace. Despite its intended function, prior research (e.g., Cummings, 2017; Chin et al., 2015) has highlighted employers' ongoing difficulties in cultivating employee trust in HRSTS, thereby hindering its adoption and effective utilization.

A significant body of literature has underscored the necessity of employee engagement with HRSTS (e.g., Chin et al., 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Van Osch & Coursaris, 2013; Turban et al., 2011; Sangwan et al., 2009). Trust, or lack thereof, has been shown to be a critical factor influencing such engagement (Paroutis & Al Saleh, 2009; Koch et al., 2012). However, a notable limitation in the existing research is the absence of a detailed exploration into the mechanisms by which trust is formed in HRSTS and the root causes of distrust. For instance, Paroutis and Al Saleh (2009) emphasize trust as a primary determinant of employee participation, while Koch et

¹ King Khalid University, Email: mmohiya@kku.edu.sa



al. (2012) argue that organizational trust plays a central role in the system's success, which is further shaped by managerial oversight and control.

Some organizations claim that HRSTS fosters transparency by enabling public visibility of employee input (Silverman et al., 2013), while others exert control over the platform's design and operations. Despite these contrasting approaches, there remains a lack of empirical evidence that identifies the specific trust-related challenges employees face with HRSTS. This gap necessitates investigation from the employee perspective, with an emphasis on how trust is constructed and what factors contribute to trust or distrust.

Trust in HRSTS is shaped by social interactions, which form the foundation of relational trust (Davenport & Hall, 2001). HRSTS potentially enables trust development by facilitating such interactions, which may result in cognition-based trust (Liu et al., 2014). Nevertheless, employee distrust may stem from employer-imposed restrictions—such as limiting User-Generated Content (UGC)—which can delay or suppress employee contributions, thereby undermining trust. Employees may interpret these constraints as indicative of employer distrust.

Despite growing scholarly and practitioner interest in HRSTS (Wehner et al., 2017), extant research has predominantly focused on managerial or technological dimensions (e.g., Alshawabkeh et al., 2018; Treem et al., 2015; Majchrzak et al., 2013). While some studies acknowledge the employee role in HRSTS success (Leonardi et al., 2013; Sangwan et al., 2009), they often neglect to explore the specific concerns and experiences of employees. Organizational studies tend to prioritize job performance and process efficiency (e.g., Majchrzak et al., 2013), thereby marginalizing the core purpose of HRSTS as a medium for employee voice. Similarly, technological perspectives typically focus on system functionality and refer to users generically, overlooking the unique needs and expectations of employees within the workplace context (Chin et al., 2015; Hester, 2011).

Theoretically, many HRSTS investigations lack robust conceptual frameworks and often present a one-sided view, concentrating exclusively on either managerial or technological aspects. In response, the present study employs Social Exchange Theory (SET) to bridge this gap. SET provides a bidirectional lens to examine the relational dynamics between employees and employers within HRSTS, conceptualizing trust as a product of reciprocal social exchange (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

SET is particularly suited to this inquiry, as it regards HRSTS as an interactive process involving mutual exchange between stakeholders. Contrary to managerialist perspectives that emphasize organizational interests, SET positions employees as active participants whose engagement is shaped by reciprocal expectations. The theory supports understanding how trust is cultivated and sustained between employees and employers within the HRSTS environment (Gonzalez et al., 2013; Van Osch & Coursaris, 2013).

This study adopts a theory-informed approach, grounded in Social Exchange Theory (SET), which was selected in advance to guide the development of the research questions and inform the data collection process. In response to the previously identified gaps in the literature, the research is structured around the following core questions:

1. What are the underlying causes influencing employees' trust in their use of the Human Resources Social Technology System (HRSTS)?
2. In what ways does HRSTS influence employees' trust in the system?

3. How does employees' trust in HRSTS change or evolve over time, and through what mechanisms?

To address these questions, the study employs a qualitative research design, specifically utilizing semi-structured interviews. This method enables both an in-depth exploration of pre-identified trust-related factors and the emergence of unanticipated themes related to employee trust. The theoretical framework of SET supports the interpretation of these emergent insights by providing a lens to examine and explain the dynamics of trust within HRSTS.

Further methodological details, including participant demographics and data collection procedures, are presented in the subsequent methodology section. The findings of this research yield actionable insights for HR professionals, organizational managers, and decision-makers seeking to enhance HRSTS functionality and foster greater employee trust. This aligns with the overarching objective of the study, which was shaped by a comprehensive analysis of the collected qualitative data.

Human Resources Social Technology System (HRSTS)

Human Resource Social Technology Systems (HRSTS) have evolved from the conceptual and functional foundations of Social Media (SM). Therefore, comprehending the architecture and operational principles of SM is essential for developing a more nuanced understanding of HRSTS. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), SM comprises internet-based applications rooted in Web 2.0 principles, facilitating the creation and exchange of User-Generated Content (UGC). These platforms provide real-time, interactive spaces where users engage freely and publicly without needing prior approval (Kolbitsch & Maurer, 2006), thus fostering spontaneous and accessible social interaction.

Although terms like HRSTS and Web 2.0 are occasionally used interchangeably, HRSTS emerged as a specific application of Web 2.0 in organizational contexts. It was conceptualized as a platform network spanning all connected devices (O'Reilly, 2007), representing a shift from the unidirectional communication of Web 1.0 to a participatory and open environment (Musser et al., 2006). As a second-generation web technology, HRSTS emphasizes user engagement and the collaborative creation of content (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016; Khoshafian, 2008).

Given its user-driven nature, the effective utilization of HRSTS heavily depends on individuals' willingness to engage and contribute through UGC. User participation is critical to the success of such systems (Sangwan et al., 2009; Koch et al., 2012). However, despite its foundation on openness, employers may undermine this principle by moderating or filtering content before publication, thereby restricting the autonomy typically associated with UGC platforms. This highlights a notable gap in the literature regarding how organizational design choices—particularly the regulation of UGC—affect employee engagement with HRSTS.

The platform features of HRSTS, including real-time interactivity and synchronous communication tools, are instrumental in facilitating reciprocal exchanges. These tools promote dynamic discussions and allow users to respond immediately and visibly, enhancing collaborative discourse (Kolbitsch & Maurer, 2006). When implemented effectively, these functionalities encourage openness, foster transparency, and empower users by amplifying shared perspectives and popular sentiment (Khoshafian, 2008).

As a result, some organizations consider HRSTS a viable internal communication tool for enabling employees to voice their concerns and ideas. Nonetheless, questions remain regarding

the extent to which employees feel secure using employer-controlled platforms with the same openness as public SM networks. Additionally, replicating the informal, user-centered dynamics of public SM within organizational settings is inherently challenging. Employers may exercise control over content moderation and platform design in ways that conflict with employees' expectations, potentially undermining the social interaction HRSTS seeks to enable.

Employees' Trust in HRSTS

Trust between employees and employers is a foundational element in the effective use of Human Resource Social Technology Systems (HRSTS). It has been argued that HRSTS can serve as a mechanism for fostering trust, as it enables interactive engagement through User-Generated Content (UGC), thereby enhancing social interaction among employees and contributing to the development of mutual trust (Salas-Fumás & Sanchez-Asin, 2013). While such platforms have the potential to facilitate interpersonal connections and relationship-building (Liu et al., 2014), establishing this type of trust-based environment presupposes a baseline level of trust already exists (Paroutis & Al Saleh, 2009). Nevertheless, HRSTS may still function as a tool for cultivating or rebuilding trust within the organization. According to Hall and Graham (2004), HRSTS promotes a sense of community, belonging, and relational closeness. However, trust tends not to emerge rapidly in virtual contexts (Cascio, 2000), and this challenge may be influenced by the structural design and managerial control over HRSTS.

Distrust can also result from how HRSTS is implemented and governed. For instance, when employers impose restrictive controls on UGC—such as requiring content to pass through filtration systems before publication—this undermines the core participatory feature of HRSTS. Such restrictions not only compromise the authenticity of the platform but may also erode employee trust, thereby limiting social interaction and engagement. Conversely, when employers provide timely, constructive, and meaningful feedback, it enhances employees' confidence in the system. Thus, the degree of trust in HRSTS is closely tied to the nature of employees' experiences and how management responds to their contributions.

Trust evolves through social interaction (Davenport & Hall, 2001), and HRSTS plays a facilitative role by enabling exchanges that foster relationship development and cognition-based trust (Liu et al., 2014). When employees engage with the platform—by acknowledging and positively responding to peers' contributions—they demonstrate appreciation for valuable content, thereby reinforcing mutual trust and encouraging future participation (Wellman et al., 2001). This reciprocal interaction and feedback cycle gradually build trust over time, consistent with traditional conceptualizations of trust as a dynamic and temporal construct (Mayer et al., 1995). Furthermore, HRSTS not only promotes interaction but also supports the creation of online communities in which employees collaboratively share, deliberate, and engage with topics of shared interest (Bernal, 2009).

The effectiveness of HRSTS is contingent on active employee engagement, which in turn relies on a foundation of trust (DiMicco et al., 2009). Trust is thus a critical factor influencing user participation (Paroutis & Al Saleh, 2009). However, the antecedents of employee trust in HRSTS remain underexplored. Organizational efforts to foster a culture of openness and trust are essential to supporting meaningful engagement with HRSTS (Wehner et al., 2017). While virtual trust-building is inherently complex, it is not unachievable. Two key strategies are identified for cultivating trust in HRSTS: First, organizations must refrain from diminishing the democratic nature of the platform. Although managerial concerns over potential misuse of open systems are legitimate—given the possibility of inappropriate public postings (Silverman et al., 2013)—

overregulation through content monitoring and filtration mechanisms undermines the fundamental value of UGC and discourages authentic participation.

Second, trust is reinforced when employers acknowledge and respond to employee contributions. Paroutis and Al Saleh (2009) emphasize that users engaged in knowledge sharing via HRSTS desire feedback from management, which significantly influences their perceptions of trust. Consequently, employer responsiveness plays a pivotal role in either strengthening or weakening employee trust in HRSTS.

Theoretical Foundation

A substantial body of literature grounded in Social Exchange Theory (SET) underscores the central role of trust in shaping interpersonal and organizational relationships (e.g., Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976; Molm et al., 2000; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Saks, 2006). Trust is considered a critical component of effective workplace relationships, particularly between employees and employers. According to SET, these relationships develop over time into trust-based, reciprocal, and mutually committed exchanges (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Emerson, 1976; Saks, 2006). Reciprocity, as a fundamental mechanism within social exchange, enhances the quality of work relationships and fosters trust among employees (Molm et al., 2000).

Blau (1964, p. 94) articulated that social exchange inherently involves “trusting others.” In this context, if employee trust is compromised due to managerial interference in HRSTS (Human Resource Social Technology Systems), this may lead to reduced trust and disengagement from the platform. SET posits that trust emerges gradually as both parties—employees and employers—adhere to the implicit rules of exchange (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Saks, 2006). Therefore, time and accumulated experience with HRSTS are likely influential in shaping the development of trust. Nonetheless, there remains a significant paucity of empirical research specifically addressing how trust evolves within the HRSTS environment from the perspective of employees. SET suggests that the temporal dimension is critical to the formation and evolution of trust.

Although limited, some studies have examined the role of trust in HRSTS usage. For instance, Paroutis and Al Saleh (2009) identified trust as a key determinant of employee participation in HRSTS platforms. Similarly, Koch et al. (2012) highlighted the importance of employer trust in ensuring the effective use of HRSTS in organizational settings. However, tensions may arise depending on how employers manage and exert control over the platform. Concerns have been raised by some employers about the relative lack of managerial oversight in HRSTS, especially when employees are able to post publicly (Silverman et al., 2013).

A review of the literature on trust within the HRSTS context reveals several notable research gaps. The current study seeks to investigate and critically assess the determinants influencing employees' trust in HRSTS. Employee engagement with HRSTS is crucial not only for the system's functional success but also for enabling employees to voice their concerns and perspectives. While prior research has emphasized the value of engaging employees through HRSTS (e.g., Cummings, 2017; Chin et al., 2015; Leonardi et al., 2013; Turban et al., 2011; Sangwan et al., 2009), these studies have generally overlooked employees' perceptions of HRSTS and the contextual dynamics—particularly trust-related factors—that may influence their engagement.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to address the developed research questions, grounded in the assumption that all knowledge is theory-laden and methodologically theory-driven (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Morgan, 1983). Qualitative inquiry supports the exploration and deepening of theoretical understanding (Parse, 1987). Accordingly, this research utilizes Social Exchange Theory (SET) as a theoretical lens to explore how employees respond to HRSTS, focusing on concepts such as reciprocity and the necessary resources or factors influencing engagement.

A qualitative approach, particularly semi-structured interviews, enables participants to express their experiences in their own words, thereby offering richer insights than standardized quantitative measures (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Unlike quantitative research, which seeks causal explanation, qualitative inquiry emphasizes the meaning-making process and the subjective construction of experiences, making it suitable for this study.

Data were collected from a Saudi organization using semi-structured interviews, guided by an interview framework (Berg & Lune, 2004). Two sets of interview guides were developed: one targeting the HRSTS team (including the team leader, HR manager, and head of HR), and another for HRSTS users (employees).

A purposive sampling technique was applied to select participants with direct experience using HRSTS (Etikan et al., 2016; Robinson, 2014). This non-random method ensured access to information-rich participants who could meaningfully reflect on trust in HRSTS. After institutional approval, employee contact details were obtained via the HRSTS platform and interview invitations were sent by the team leader.

In total, 37 interviews were conducted with employees who have used HRSTS. Interviews durations averaged 40 minutes. Data saturation began at interview 34, and the final interview coincided with the expiration of access permission. All interviews were conducted in English, recorded with prior consent, and transcribed by the researcher to ensure accuracy.

The analysis followed the thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), involving familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme development, and refinement. Codes were derived both from the conceptual model (e.g., feedback, attention, HRSTS functionality) and emergent patterns. This systematic process facilitated the identification of meaningful themes that align with the research objectives and contributed to understanding employees' trust dynamics within HRSTS (Wicks, 2017; Saldaña, 2015; Pope et al., 2000).

Finding Analysis

Trust Dynamics and Employee Engagement with HRSTS

The analysis reveals that trust—rooted in employees' experiential interaction with the Human Resource Suggestion and Tracking System (HRSTS)—is a key determinant of their engagement with the platform. The majority of employees emphasized that trust, cultivated over time through organizational behavior, significantly influences their willingness to utilize HRSTS. Trust is perceived as a responsibility that initially lies with the employer, as the organization is the originator and administrator of HRSTS. Once the employer demonstrates trustworthy behavior, employees are more likely to reciprocate by engaging constructively, as one respondent asserted. The data indicate that trust has a cognitive dimension—built on belief systems informed by

experience and temporal factors. Nevertheless, a considerable number of employees reported distrust towards HRSTS, which adversely impacted their usage of the system:

“Well, lack of trust will impact their use of the HRSTS, absolutely.” (HRSTS Team Leader, Interview #1)

Anonymity and Perceived Safety in HRSTS

Trust in HRSTS appears to develop progressively and is heavily influenced by perceived safety and reciprocity. Employee responses suggest that a lack of expected organizational support has resulted in distrust, as evidenced by a widespread demand for anonymous HRSTS accounts. This request underscores their apprehension and fear of potential repercussions:

“I agree that there has to be a good communication language between management and their employees and a good amount of trust.” (Interview #35)

“But so you have, you cannot just build trust or make it overnight, you have to experience it in both directions.” (HRSTS User, Interview #13)

Negative cumulative experiences—over four years in some cases—have contributed to the system’s poor reputation. Some participants even associated HRSTS with job loss, although no definitive evidence confirms this claim. Nonetheless, such perceptions diminish trust and influence the behavior of both users and prospective users:

“Heard commenting here usually result in losing job or blacken out chances of reemployment.” (HRSTS User, Interview #31)

“Nobody is putting things down because of whether there is lack of trust or concern or they think they will get into trouble.” (HRSTS User, Interview #13)

Policy, Protection, and Procedural Clarity

Employees frequently highlighted the absence of formal policies and clear procedural guidelines as a major cause of distrust. The visibility of personal information in HRSTS, without protective frameworks, exacerbates employees’ reluctance to participate:

“Process to protect employees after posting their comments needs to be clear.” (HRSTS User, Interview #34)

“If there is policy and guidelines that somehow a way to eliminate employees’ fear of being reprimanded for posting comments or opinions that represent reasonable criticism, frustration or complaints.” (HRSTS User, Interview #3929)

The lack of anonymity is seen as a fundamental flaw. Employees believe anonymity would alleviate fear and enable honest feedback. Despite acknowledging these concerns, no substantial changes have been made:

“Maybe if they are sure that they can post truly anonymously without being tracked this might be possible...” (HRSTS User, Interview #30)

“Give the option for employee who would like to use the first letter of his/her name... this will ease things...” (HRSTS User, Interview #37)

Even members of the HRSTS Team and HR advisors concur with the demand for anonymity, recognizing that distrust in the system is deeply embedded:

“The big problem is the overarching trust issue ... I have to say that's something we can't solve overnight and it is bigger than HRSTS.” (HRSTS Team Leader, Interview #1)

“Yes absolutely, I don't think anybody, employees want to comment, but they do not want their identity to be revealed...” (HR Advisor, Interview #16)
 “One of the new IT functionalities that we're looking into is making the user's information anonymous.” (HRSTS Team Member, Interview #6)

Filtering Process and Employee Perception

The employer's use of a filtration process—where content is reviewed or moderated—has further eroded trust. Employees interpret this as a sign of the employer's distrust in them. This perceived imbalance undermines the principle of reciprocity that underpins trust in social exchange theory (SET). Thus, employees respond by demanding anonymity as a form of protective reciprocity.

Feedback, Attention, and Cognitive Belief

Another critical factor in trust deterioration is the perceived lack of managerial attention and meaningful feedback. Employees expressed that their contributions were disregarded, reinforcing their belief that the HRSTS is ineffective and symbolic rather than actionable:

“I mean if I had better things to do with my time than throw comments into black holes.” (HRSTS User, Interview #24)
 “So this review is not there so it creates that black hole experience for users.” (HRSTS User, Interview #9)

This absence of response contributes to cognitive disengagement, as employees come to believe their input is futile. Over time, this results in behavioral withdrawal from HRSTS.

Tangible Outcomes and Organizational Response

Employees also emphasized the lack of observable outcomes from their contributions as a key source of frustration and distrust. Despite repeated input through HRSTS, employees reported no actionable changes, thereby questioning the value of the system:

“I feel like it is only talking, nothing more will come... It is only a chat page.” (HRSTS User, Interview #33)
 “Once that kind of confidence is restored in employees, I am sure genuine participation and worthy suggestions will come forward...” (HRSTS User, Interview #37)

Theoretical Insights from Social Exchange Theory

The analysis supports a social exchange framework in which the employee–employer relationship within HRSTS is inherently reciprocal. However, trust must be initiated and sustained by the employer through clear policies, anonymity assurances, consistent feedback, and visible outcomes. The HRSTS Team acknowledged these issues but noted a lack of authority to implement systemic changes:

“Distrust shows there is credibility concern... If the value of HRSTS is seen by employees, then engagement numbers with the system will increase.” (HRSTS Team Member, Interview #6)
 “It is a lack of interest probably amongst people that come from distrust... people do not see maybe a lot of value in doing it.” (HR Advisor, Interview #15)

Overall, the findings suggest that employees' distrust in HRSTS is deeply rooted in their experiences with how the system is managed. The lack of anonymity, policy clarity, attention, feedback, and tangible organizational outcomes has caused employees to view HRSTS as a

threatening rather than empowering tool. Trust in HRSTS, which theoretically evolves through repeated interactions over time, has been eroded by these organizational shortcomings. The emotional and cognitive consequences of this distrust manifest behaviorally through disengagement. For trust to be rebuilt, the organization must adopt a proactive role in addressing these concerns, particularly by redesigning HRSTS to protect and empower its users.

Discussion

The research questions of this study center on the factors that influence employee trust in HRSTS and, consequently, their engagement with the system. The analysis of the data highlights that trust in HRSTS significantly affects employee engagement with the system for several reasons. Unlike prior studies on HRSTS (e.g., Ma et al., 2021; Nilasari, 2020; Offong & Costello, 2017; Koch et al., 2012; Paroutis & Al Saleh, 2009; Liu et al., 2014), which primarily examined the impact of HRSTS on relationships, the present research focuses on identifying why employees trust HRSTS itself. The findings indicate that distrust in HRSTS stems from factors such as its limited functionality (particularly the filtration process), lack of feedback or attention, and insufficient tangible outcomes. The analysis also emphasizes that the employer's actions in designing and managing HRSTS are the primary causes of these issues. Employees' negative perceptions and experiences with HRSTS, which involve a lack of trust, were found to significantly influence their behavioral engagement with the system.

The findings suggest that distrust in HRSTS develops progressively over time based on users' experiences. Employees' responses increasingly reflect their growing distrust, linked to the employer's control over HRSTS and the failure to provide expected resources. This pattern aligns with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976), which posits that social interactions are built on reciprocity and trust evolves through these interactions. In the context of HRSTS, trust or distrust develops based on employees' positive or negative experiences with the system. This study further contributes to understanding that trust in HRSTS emerges gradually through cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, necessitating trust for meaningful engagement with HRSTS.

The employer's filtration process was identified as a key factor in the erosion of employee trust in HRSTS. Employees perceived this process as a breach of trust, leading them to request anonymity in their HRSTS accounts. According to social exchange theory, trust develops through reciprocal relationships, and the lack of trust in HRSTS is a reflection of the employer's distrust towards employees. Feedback and attention from the employer also emerged as critical elements influencing employee trust. When employees felt that their contributions were ignored, their trust in HRSTS diminished, which led to disengagement with the system. This finding corroborates the work of Paroutis and Al Saleh (2009), who found that feedback from employers plays a vital role in the trust-building process in HRSTS.

Another key factor contributing to employee distrust in HRSTS was the absence of tangible outcomes from employees' contributions. The study revealed that a lack of practical results from HRSTS over time contributed to disengagement. The limited provision of tangible outcomes, beyond HRSTS as a technological tool, negatively affected both trust in and use of the system. This finding underscores the importance of delivering meaningful outcomes through HRSTS to foster trust and engagement.

Additionally, the study highlighted the role of informative materials and clear guidelines in fostering employee trust in HRSTS. At the company under investigation, the lack of such

resources led to confusion and uncertainty among employees, further eroding their trust in the system. Employees were hesitant to engage with HRSTS due to a lack of understanding about its purpose and their role within it. When the employer fails to provide these resources, employees' cognitive awareness and emotional security are undermined, limiting their willingness to trust and use HRSTS. The results of this study align with Niall Cook's (2008) findings, which identified the need for informative materials as a key factor in HRSTS engagement.

In conclusion, consistent with existing literature, the present study confirms that employee trust in HRSTS significantly influences engagement. However, it also identifies specific contextual factors that affect trust in HRSTS. The findings suggest that the employer's behavior in the design and management of HRSTS is central to these factors. The identified causes of distrust—limited functionality, lack of feedback and attention, absence of tangible outcomes, and unclear guidelines—contribute not only to distrust but also to disengagement from the system. The study's findings, viewed through the lens of social exchange theory, suggest that employee trust in HRSTS is reciprocal and dependent on mutual trust between employees and employers. This theoretical framework explains how trust develops in HRSTS and highlights the importance of providing expected resources to foster trust and engagement.

Conclusion

The employer has limited the HRSTS's core functionality (UGC) by putting in place a filtration process which delays or rejects employees' submitted comments. As a result, it was found that this negatively impacted employees' social interactions and also causes distrust issues in HRSTS. In addition, unlike with the technological studies, other non-technological accompanying resources were taken into consideration during the translation of HRSTS. The analysis found that employees expect, during the phase of HRSTS translation, clarity of guidelines and informative materials about HRSTS and its objectives, and the employees' role in HRSTS. This is due to a lack of readiness on the part of the organisation, as it was evident that there were limited written materials about HRSTS, detailed goals, objectives, and clear guidelines. Most of these issues reflect the employer's lack of readiness and understanding of HRSTS's nature. As a result, due to employees' exclusion during the design phase and very limited involvement in managing HRSTS, HRSTS does not achieve its intended aim as it becomes a managerial application serving the organisation's interests, not employees', as employers claim.

Blau (1964: 94) argues that social exchange involves "*trusting others*". In SET, the relationship between two parties evolves over time into trusting, loyal and mutual commitments (Emerson, 1976; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Saks, 2006). Saks (2006) suggests that engaged employees are likely to be in more trusting relationships with their employer. Based on the experiences of using HRSTS, trust issues become another key factor that impacts engagement with HRSTS. The research questions address this issue with HRSTS and, most importantly, what causes employees' trust in HRSTS and how. The present research found that trust has a significant impact on engagement with HRSTS. However, in the company, it was found that HRSTS is distrusted by the vast majority of employees. Most importantly, the interpretations of findings confirm that "experiences" in using HRSTS are fundamental in affecting trust or distrust in HRSTS. In the company's HRSTS, the causes of employees' distrust were developed based on the experiences of using HRSTS throughout time. The accumulation of bad experiences of using HRSTS by employees resulted in distrust issue in using HRSTS.

At its core, pure research aims to contribute to both theoretical and empirical knowledge, although it may or may not have direct practical implications. Throughout the study, it becomes evident that the researcher has made both theoretical and applied contributions. The findings underscore that employees' trust in HRSTS plays a critical role in their engagement with the system. Specifically, trust in HRSTS is developed gradually over time, based on employees' experiences. The study further highlights that the employer's mismanagement in the design and administration of HRSTS is a fundamental cause of employees' distrust. Several factors contribute to this distrust, including the system's limited functionality (notably the filtration process), insufficient attention and feedback within HRSTS, lack of tangible outcomes, and the absence of clear informational resources and guidelines.

To foster trust in HRSTS among employees, the company should ensure that tangible outcomes align with the demands made through the system. Moreover, the organization should provide timely and meaningful feedback, address employee inquiries, and refrain from interfering with user-generated content (UGC) within HRSTS. Clear, informative materials and explicit guidelines should also be provided to help employees navigate the system effectively. In conclusion, these recommendations, derived from empirical data, aim to enhance employee trust and engagement with HRSTS.

A key limitation of the current study lies in the external factors that may influence employees' trust in HRSTS, such as cultural considerations. Consequently, the results may be specific to the Saudi context and may not be generalizable to other cultural settings. Future research could explore how employees' cultural backgrounds influence trust in HRSTS, as cultural factors—both organizational and societal—could significantly shape engagement with the system. There is substantial potential for further investigation into the impact of cultural variables on HRSTS usage. Additionally, as this study primarily focused on the employee-employer dynamics in HRSTS, future research should address potential employee-employee interactions that may also influence HRSTS usage. Since HRSTS relies heavily on employee interactions, understanding these dynamics is crucial for advancing knowledge in this area.

Funding Statement

The author extends his appreciation to the Deanship of Research and Graduate Studies at King Khalid University for funding this work through Large (Group Project under grant number RGP.2/590/45) .

References

- Alshawabkeh, A., Razmak, J., Qasim, A., & Kharbat, F. F. (2018). Enhancing internal communication in organizations using enterprise social networking. *International Journal of Economics and Business Research*, 15, 72-86.
- Bizzi, L. (2020). Should HR managers allow employees to use social media at work? Behavioral and motivational outcomes of employee blogging. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 31(10), 1285-1312.
- Berraies, S., Lajili, R., & Chtioui, R. (2020). Social capital, employees' well-being and knowledge sharing: Does enterprise social networks use matter? Case of Tunisian knowledge-intensive firms. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, 21(6), 1153-1183.
- Chen, X., & Wei, S. (2020). The impact of social media use for communication and social exchange relationships on employee performance. *Journal of Knowledge Management*.

- Chin, C. P.-Y., Evans, N., Choo, K.-K. R., & Tan, F. B. (2015). What influences employees to use enterprise social networks? A socio-technical perspective. *PACIS*, 54.
- Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., Bywaters, D., & Walker, K. (2020). Purposive sampling: Complex or simple? Research case examples. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 25(8), 652-661.
- Cropanzano, R., & Greenberg, J. (1997). Progress in organizational justice: Tunneling through the maze. *International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 12, 317-372.
- Cropanzano, R., & Mitchell, M. S. (2005). Social exchange theory: An interdisciplinary review. *Journal of Management*, 31, 874-900.
- Di Tommaso, G., Gatti, M., Iannotta, M., Mehra, A., Stilo, G., & Velardi, P. (2020). Gender, rank, and social networks on an enterprise social media platform. *Social Networks*, 62, 58-67.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1-4.
- Kauschinger, M., Letner, A., Schreieck, M., Urbach, N., Boehm, M., & Krcmar, H. (2022). Individual enterprise social network adoption: The influence of perceived network externalities and perceived social capital advantage.
- Kwayu, S., Abubakre, M., & Lal, B. (2021). The influence of informal social media practices on knowledge sharing and work processes within organizations. *International Journal of Information Management*, 58, 102280.
- Lee, Y. (2020). Motivations of employees' communicative behaviors on social media: Individual, interpersonal, and organizational factors. *Internet Research*.
- Labban, A., & Bizzi, L. (2022). Are social media good or bad for employees? It depends on when they use them. *Behaviour and Information Technology*, 41(4), 678-693.
- Ma, L., Zhang, X., Wang, G., & Zhang, G. (2021). How to build employees' relationship capital through different enterprise social media platform use: The moderating role of innovation culture. *Internet Research*, 31(5), 1823-1848.
- Majchrzak, A., Faraj, S., Kane, G. C., & Azad, B. (2013). The contradictory influence of social media affordances on online communal knowledge sharing. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 19, 38-55.
- Men, L. R., O'Neil, J., & Ewing, M. (2020). Examining the effects of internal social media usage on employee engagement. *Public Relations Review*, 37(2), 101880.
- Molm, L. D., Takahashi, N., & Peterson, G. (2000). Risk and trust in social exchange: An experimental test of a classical proposition. *American Journal of Sociology*, 105, 1396-1427.
- Mohiya, M. (2019). Enterprise social networking (ESN) in the workplace: An investigation of factors affecting employees' engagement with ESN in a Saudi oil company (Doctoral dissertation, University of Glasgow).
- Mohiya, M. (2022). Unleashing employees' tacit knowledge toward performance-driven culture in a Saudi Arabian organization. *Journal of Knowledge Management*.
- Nilasari, B. M. (2020). The impact of social media on employee work performance with trust as a mediation variable. *Jurnal Manajemen*, 24(2), 298-312.
- Offong, G. O., & Costello, J. (2017). Enterprise social media impact on human resource practices. In *Evidence-based HRM: A global forum for empirical scholarship*. Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Oksa, Reetta, Kaakinen, Savela, Ellonen, & Oksanen. (2021). Professional social media usage: Work engagement perspective. *New Media and Society*, 23(8), 2303-2326.

- Paroutis, S., & Al Saleh, A. (2009). Determinants of knowledge sharing using Web 2.0 technologies. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 13, 52-63.
- Pereira, V., & Mohiya, M. (2021). Share or hide? Investigating positive and negative employee intentions and organizational support in the context of knowledge sharing and hiding. *Journal of Business Research*, 129, 368-381.
- Pitafi, A. H., Rasheed, M. I., Kanwal, S., & Ren, M. (2020). Employee agility and enterprise social media: The role of IT proficiency and work expertise. *Technology in Society*, 63, 101333.
- Robinson, O. C. (2014). Sampling in interview-based qualitative research: A theoretical and practical guide. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 11(1), 25-41.
- Salas-Fumás, V., & Sanchez-Asin, J. J. (2013). Information and trust in hierarchies. *Decision Support Systems*, 55, 988-999.
- Saldaña, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.
- Treem, J., & Leonardi, P. (2012). Social media use in organizations: Exploring the affordances of visibility, editability, persistence, and association. *Communication Yearbook*, 36, 143-189.
- Treem, J. W., Dailey, S. L., Pierce, C. S., & Leonardi, P. M. (2015). Bringing technological frames to work: How previous experience with social media shapes the technology's meaning in an organization. *Journal of Communication*, 65, 396-422.
- Turban, E., Bolloju, N., & Liang, T.-P. (2011). Enterprise social networking: Opportunities, adoption, and risk mitigation. *Journal of Organizational Computing and Electronic Commerce*, 21, 202-220.
- Van Osch, W., & Coursaris, C. K. (2013). Organizational social media: A comprehensive framework and research agenda. In *System Sciences (HICSS)*, 2013 37th Hawaii International Conference on (pp. 700-707). IEEE.
- Van Zoonen, W., Treem, J. W., & Ter Hoeven, C. L. (2022). A tool and a tyrant: Social media and well-being in organizational contexts. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 101300.
- Wang, Y. (2022). Exploring the effect of organization–employee relationships on employee communication behaviors on social media: The moderating role of position level. *Psychology of Popular Media*.
- Wang, Y. (2022). When relationships meet situations: Exploring the antecedents of employee communication behaviors on social media. *Social Science Computer Review*, 40(1), 77-94.
- Wehner, B., Ritter, C., & Leist, S. (2017). Enterprise social networks: A literature review and research agenda. *Computer Networks*, 114, 125-142.
- Wellman, B., Haase, A. Q., Witte, J., & Hampton, K. (2001). Does the Internet increase, decrease, or supplement social capital? Social networks, participation, and community commitment. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 45, 436-455.
- Wicks, D. (2017). The coding manual for qualitative researchers. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 12, 169-170.
- Yousaf, S., Rasheed, M. I., Kaur, P., Islam, N., & Dhir, A. (2022). The dark side of phubbing in the workplace: Investigating the role of intrinsic motivation and the use of enterprise social media (ESM) in a cross-cultural setting. *Journal of Business Research*, 143, 81-93.