

## The Effect of Motives on Enterprise Social Network Usage

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### ABSTRACT

Enterprise Social Networks (ESNs) have brought revolutionary changes to business organizations as they offer enormous potential to enhance collaboration, interaction, innovation, and efficiency. However, despite these benefits, many organizations have failed to encourage their employees to actively engage with ESNs, making their investment decisions questionable. Therefore, this study focused on examining the motivations to use ESNs. A comprehensive literature review was conducted to identify the gratifications motivating the employees to use ESNs. Accordingly, information sharing, self-documentation, entertainment, and social interaction were identified as the gratifications driving the employees to use ESNs at work. Data were collected from 146 employees in the software industry who use ESNs at work through an online survey-based structured questionnaire, and data analysis was performed using partial least square based structural equation modeling using SmartPLS. The results revealed that amongst the four gratifications examined in this study, information sharing, self-documentation, and social interaction have positive and significant effects on ESN use. The findings of the study have both theoretical and practical implications. Because the studies examining the gratifications driving ESN use are scarce, the present study helps to fill the existing knowledge gap in this context. This is especially significant in the Sri Lankan context.

*Keywords:* Enterprise social networks, Gratifications, Uses and gratification theory, Motives, Sri Lanka

### INTRODUCTION

With the competitiveness in the environment, organizations are increasingly investing in creating a corporate culture that enhances communication, employee engagement, employee performance, and knowledge sharing among employees. To assist organizations in achieving these objectives, a new class of information technology, commonly known as Enterprise Social Networks (ESNs), has gained prominence in contemporary organizations. The widespread adoption of social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter among the individuals prompted organizations to use similar systems within the organizations. Accordingly, organizations created Enterprise Social Networks, using social networking platforms within the corporate realm to improve communication among employees. ESNs are being widely utilized by organizations as a digital platform to facilitate internal communications, social interactions, and knowledge sharing within an enterprise. The main motive of deploying ESNs is to provide employees with new ways of communication, collaboration, and creation and to use knowledge to enhance employee engagement and performance within the organization (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017).

Adoption of the ESNs can bring a variety of benefits and opportunities to the organization. Enterprise performance and success are increasingly dependent on the efficiency and quality of internal social interaction platforms. However, despite the high level of proliferation, many organizations have failed to successfully implement ESNs within the organization and to encourage the adoption of ESNs among the workforce (Alarifi *et al.*, 2016). Recent studies have predicted that 80% of ESN initiatives may fail to leverage and materialize the intended benefits due to underutilization and lack of adoption (Mann *et al.*, 2012 cited in Chin *et al.*, 2015). According to Liu and Bakici (2019), the majority of the ESNs implementation projects fail during the first six months of the implementation. They identified a possible reason for failure as only a few employees actively use ESNs by accessing and sharing content. They also stated that the business value of ESNs cannot be realized without active employee engagement. In order to increase employees' active usage of ESNs, it is essential to identify different motives driving employees to use ESNs. Even though the effect of motivation has been examined in relation to the other communication media, limited studies have been conducted in identifying the motivations to use ESNs. Further, when examining the limited literature available relevant to ESN use, it is apparent that the findings are not consistent. Therefore, there is a real practical and knowledge gap that needs to be further explored.

The varied findings in the previous research may have emerged due to the cultural differences between different contexts. Also, factors like attitude and individual differences among different workgroups may also lead to different findings. Therefore, it is difficult to generalize findings made in other contexts to the Sri Lankan context. Thus, it is apparent that there is a clear research gap in relation to the use of ESNs in the context of Sri Lanka. Therefore, in order to fill the identified research gap, the study focused on identifying different motives and their influence on ESN usage in the Sri Lankan context. The researcher wanted to achieve two objectives from this study. The first objective was to identify the different motives affecting the usage of ESNs. The second objective was to assess the effect of those factors on ESN usage.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

### Enterprise Social Networks

Enterprise Social Networks can be defined as “ Web-based platforms that allow workers to (1) communicate messages with specific coworkers or broadcast messages to everyone in the organization; (2) explicitly indicate or implicitly reveal particular coworkers as communication partners; (3) post, edit, and sort text and files linked to themselves or others; and (4) view the messages, connections, text, and files communicated, posted, edited and sorted by anyone else in the organization at any time of their choosing” (Leonardi *et al.*, 2013, p. 2). Ellison *et al.* (2015) defined ESNs as a set of technologies that include the basic features of social networks but are implemented within an organization, are permitted by management, and have the capacity to limit membership to specific individuals of a selected organization. ESN is identified as a subset of Enterprise 2.0, which refers to the use of social software such as social networking sites, blogs, wikis, microblogging, and social bookmarking services within enterprises (Mäntymäki & Riemer, 2016). An increasing number of organizations are adopting social network-based applications such as IBM connection, Yammer, Jive, or proprietary solutions that integrate social media technologies such as wikis, blogs, and social networking services into a single platform facilitating internal communication (Kuegler *et al.*, 2015).

### Uses and Gratification Theory

Uses and Gratification theory was originally developed in 1940 and used to examine the satisfaction of radio listeners (Liang *et al.*, 2020). This theory has also been applied in the context of different types of print media such as newspapers, magazines, and television (Dunne *et al.*, 2010). As cited by them, users are capable of understanding their own needs and, as a result, selecting the appropriate media. This theory investigates the gratifications or benefits that draw audiences to various media platforms and the types of content that meet their social and psychological needs (O’Donohoe, 1994 cited in Dunne *et al.*, 2010). The goal of the uses and gratifications theory is to better understand why individuals choose certain types of media as well as to investigate the diverse motives of individuals when interacting with media (Hossain, 2019). The emergence of new digital technologies has re-energized the use of the Uses and Gratification theory for the new media. Therefore, this theory has been widely adopted with new communication media such as social networks sites, mobile social network sites, online games, and virtual communities (Hossain, 2019). When considering the ESNs, employees may enjoy the process of utilizing ESNs, the quality of content and information offered via ESNs, or the social engagement enabled with others in the organization (Liu & Bakici, 2019). Such gratifications received from the use of ESNs may encourage people to actively use ESNs. Therefore, in identifying what motivates employees to use ESNs, this theory can be best applied (Liu *et al.*, 2010; Smock *et al.*, 2011; Alhabash *et al.*, 2014; Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Gan & Li, 2018; Hossain, 2019).

### Gratifications and Enterprise Social Network Usage

One of the objectives of this study is to determine the different gratifications that drive individuals to use ESNs. Since there were different studies conducted in order to identify the different gratifications or motives that directed people to use different media, the researcher adopted a systematic approach to identify the most suitable gratifications for ESN usage, which can then be used to develop a justifiable conceptual framework. Accordingly, the researcher referred to thirteen research articles that have examined the relationship between gratifications and ESN usage and identified fourteen gratifications that can motivate media usage. Out of the fourteen gratifications identified, the four most used gratifications were selected for this study.

### Hypotheses Development

#### *Information sharing and ESN usage*

Information sharing can be defined as the extent to which the contents were exchanged, distributed, and received by the user on media (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011). In this study, information sharing is regarded as posting the contents and commenting on the contents using enterprise social networks. As cited by Laitinen and Sivunen (2021), in organizations, information sharing via ESNs is critical since it permits members to stay informed about organizational issues as well as share and preserve knowledge in an accessible platform. According to Liu and Bakici (2019), information sharing has a significant influence on ESN usage. Therefore, based on the existing literature, it can be identified that there is a positive effect of information sharing on ESN usage. Hence, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H1: There is a positive effect of information sharing motive on ESN usage.

#### *Self- documentation and ESN usage*

Social media, especially blogs, can be used for the purpose of self-documentation as it can be used to document the own life, activities, and events of the users (Nardi *et al.*, 2004). Similarly, ESNs allow the employees to document their daily activities, such as what projects they are working on, what the progress is so far, and so on. As cited by Liu and Bakici (2019), the persistent affordance associated with ESNs allows employees to document their activities similar to a blog. According to the studies conducted by Liu *et al.* (2016) and Liu *et al.* (2010), it can be identified that self-documentation creates a significant influence on ESN usage. Hence, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H2: There is a positive effect of self-documentation motive on ESN usage.

### **Entertainment and ESN usage**

According to Whiting and Williams (2013), entertainment refers to the use of media to deliver enjoyment. A study done by Liu and Bakici (2019) mentioned that the employees are encouraged to participate in such internal corporate communities facilitated via ESNs in order to have fun and enjoyment. According to Leftheriotis and Giannakos (2014); Liu and Bakici (2019), entertainment has a positive influence on the usage of ESN. Hence, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H3: There is a positive effect of entertainment motive on ESN usage.

### **Social interaction and ESN usage**

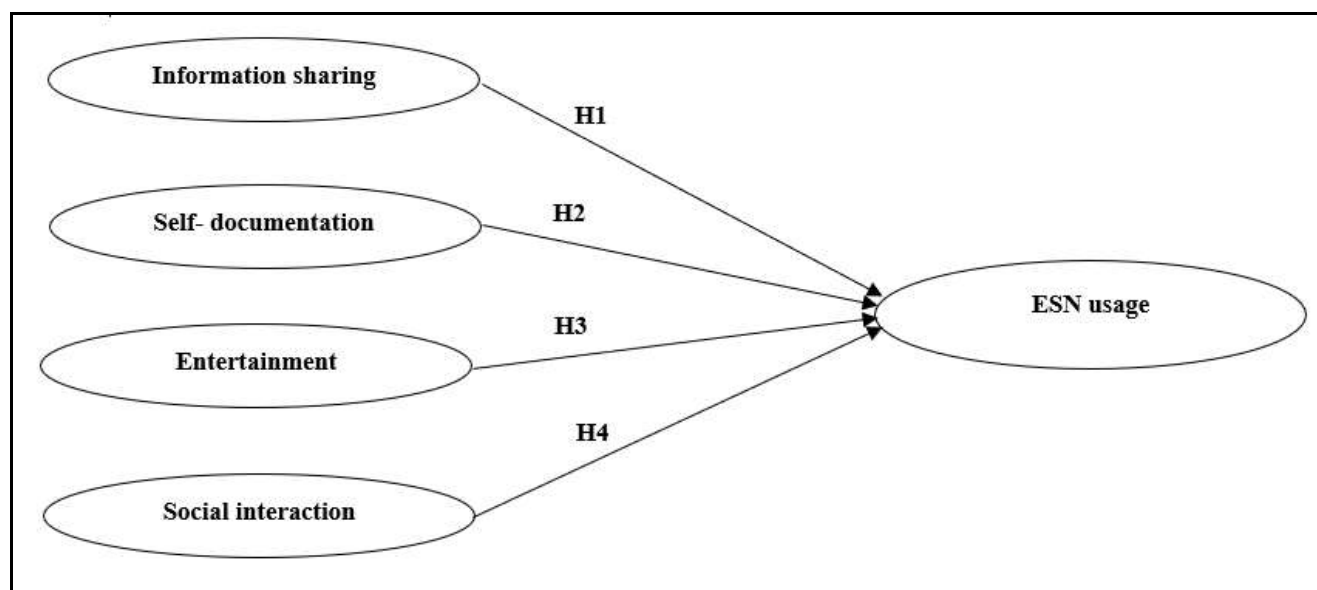
Social interaction can be defined as the use of media to communicate and interact with others (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Social media develop new opportunities for social interactions via chat, instant messaging, posting, rating, and commenting, etc. (Liu & Bakici, 2019). According to Leonardi et al. (2013), ESNs contribute to the development of social capital within the organization as it allows employees to know what others are doing and also to easily establish new connections with other employees. Prior studies have empirically validated the important role played by social interactions in influencing the use of enterprise social media (Whiting & Williams, 2013; Liu & Bakici, 2019). Hence, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H4: There is a positive effect of social interaction motive on ESN usage.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Conceptual Model**

For the purpose of this study, the researcher decided to select the most cited four gratifications as gratifications that motivate employees to use ESNs. The selected gratifications have been used by more than 45% of the previous researchers; hence it justifies the importance of these variables. These gratifications include information sharing, self-documentation, entertainment, and social interaction. Based on that, the conceptual model depicting the relationships between these gratifications and ESN usage was developed (Refer to Figure 1).



Source: This study.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model.

### **Sample**

This study adopted both purposive sampling and snowball sampling as the sampling technique. In order to be a part of the study sample, the respondents needed to satisfy two criteria; respondents needed to use ESNs at work, and they should work in the software industry. On that basis, the researcher can justify the use of purposive sampling as a sampling technique for the study. On the other hand, as the researcher does not have information on the companies using ESNs, the researcher used known contacts to identify the organizations using ESNs first. Then an email invitation was sent to the contact person asking him or her to distribute the questionnaire among other colleagues in the respective organization. This process was repeated until the required number of responses were gathered. Consequently, the study employed a snowball sampling technique as well. Here, the sample was selected from the software industry due to several reasons. One is that employee collaboration and interaction are of paramount importance in the software industry. Further, it was deemed that the widespread use of ESNs in the software industry would lead to more realistic results from the present study.

### **Instrument Development**

The questionnaire method was employed in order to collect data from the target sample. The questionnaire consisted of 3 sections. The first section covered the demographic questions, which included gender, age of respondent, functional area, job level, type of ESN used, and employees' experience with the ESNs. The second section of the study focused on the four gratifications that induce the employees to use ESNs, and the third section consisted of the items to measure ESN usage. The items to measure the constructs were adopted from the previous literature, and each item was measured based on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Once the structured questionnaire was developed, it was pretested first using two academics and a few experts from the industry. Next, a pilot study was done using 20 respondents from the industry. Both the pretesting and pilot testing resulted in modifying and deleting several items from the original format of the questionnaire to improve the clarity of the questionnaire items and also to make them more suitable for the Sri Lankan context.

### **Data Collection**

In order to collect the data, a questionnaire was prepared as an electronic questionnaire using google forms. The online questionnaire invitation was distributed among the selected employees from the software industry who have experience with ESNs. The data collection process was continued for two months, and a hundred and sixty-eight (168) responses were received. Out of all the responses, there were twenty-two (22) respondents who did not have experience with ESNs. Since the sample had to consist of employees in the software companies who use ESNs at work, those responses were dropped from further analysis. This left the researcher with a total of one hundred and forty-six (146) responses.

### **Method of Data Analysis**

For the purpose of data analysis, the researcher utilized two statistical software, namely, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and SmartPLS. SPSS was used for the purpose of data cleaning, demographic analysis, descriptive statistical analysis, and multivariate assumptions testing. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used for comprehensive data analysis.

## **DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

As a part of multivariate analysis, the normality and multicollinearity assumptions were tested. The normality was tested using Skewness and Kurtosis (Hair *et al.*, 2014). The results of the analysis indicated that the skewness value of all items was ranged between -3 to +3, while the kurtosis values of all items ranged between -10 to +10, thereby indicating the normal distribution (Kline, 2016). Multicollinearity of the variables was tested using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). The results of the study indicated that the VIF values of all the variables are below 5. Hence there is no issue in relation to multicollinearity (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016).

### **Respondents' Profile**

The respondent's demographic characteristics indicated that 57% of the respondents were males while 43% were females. The majority of the respondents (72%) were from the age category of 26-35 years. Also, a higher percentage of the respondents were from the middle-level management (39.7%) and the operational level employees (38.4%). Further to this, the majority of the respondents were from the information technology (79.5%) division. It was also observed that 35.4% of the respondents were using Workplace by Facebook, 28.7% respondents were using Yammer, and 25% of respondents were using Slack. Further, it was indicated that the majority of respondents (58.1%) had 3-5 years of experience with ESNs, and 42.5% of respondents had 1-3 years of experience with ESNs.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability can be identified as the degree to which the observed variable measures the true value (Hair *et al.*, 2019). According to Hair *et al.* (2019), composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha are considered as measures of internal consistency. The acceptable level of composite reliability is 0.7 or above (Hair *et al.*, 2011), while the generally accepted lower limit for Cronbach's alpha is 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 2019). However, the Cronbach alpha values greater than 0.95 is not good as it may indicate the redundancy of questionnaire items (Hulin *et al.*, 2001; Ursachi *et al.*, 2015). According to Table 1, the Composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values of all four constructs were above 0.70. Therefore, the internal consistency reliability of the constructs was established.

According to Hair *et al.* (2019), validity can be defined as the extent to which the indicators of a construct jointly measure what they are supposed to measure. This was ensured using content validity and construct validity. In this study, constructs were developed using the existing literature, and also the independent and dependent variables were operationalized referring to the previous literature. Therefore, the content validity is satisfied.

Construct validity can be measured using convergent validity and discriminant validity measures. According to Hair *et al.* (2014), convergent validity can be measured using Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The general rule for an acceptable AVE is 0.5 or higher (Hair *et al.*, 2019). According to Table 1, the AVE values of all the constructs are greater than 0.5. Thus the convergent validity is established. Discriminant validity was tested using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. In order to ensure the discriminant validity, the square root of the AVE value of each construct should be higher than its highest correlation with

any other construct. As depicted in Table 2, the square root values of the AVE of each construct are higher than the correlation with other constructs. Therefore, the discriminant validity is established.

Table 1: Summary of reliability and convergent validity results.

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Entertainment (E)	0.939	0.953	0.804
ESN usage (EU)	0.928	0.946	0.779
Information sharing (IS)	0.950	0.964	0.870
Self-documentation (SD)	0.915	0.946	0.854
Social interaction (SI)	0.949	0.959	0.796

Source: Survey data

Table 2: Discriminant validity results.

	E	EU	IS	SD	SI
Entertainment (E)	<b>0.897</b>				
ESN usage (EU)	0.436	<b>0.882</b>			
Information sharing (IS)	0.535	0.579	<b>0.933</b>		
Self-documentation (SD)	0.488	0.540	0.583	<b>0.924</b>	
Social interaction (SI)	0.650	0.627	0.631	0.530	<b>0.892</b>

Source: Survey data

### Testing of Hypotheses

The main objective of this study was to identify what gratifications affect ESN usage. Following the PLS-SEM, the path coefficients and the significance of the relationships were assessed using the bootstrapping results. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of hypotheses testing.

Hypothesis	Path	Path coefficient	T Statistic	P Value	Decision
H <sub>1</sub>	IS → EU	0.223	2.102	0.036	Supported
H <sub>2</sub>	SD → EU	0.221	2.858	0.004	Supported
H <sub>3</sub>	E → EU	-0.054	0.700	0.484	Not Supported
H <sub>4</sub>	SI → EU	0.402	3.497	0.000	Supported

Source: Survey data

As depicted in Table 3, the path coefficients for information sharing, self-documentation, and social interaction are positive and significant at a 95% confidence level ( $p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that Information Sharing, Self-documentation, and Social Interaction have positive and significant effects on ESN usage. Therefore, hypotheses H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>, and H<sub>4</sub> are accepted. However, it is apparent that Entertainment has no significant effect on ESN usage ( $p > 0.05$ ). Thus, H<sub>3</sub> was rejected.

Once the significance of relationships between variables was tested, the Coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) was used to measure the proportion of the variance in the endogenous variables that is explained by the predictor constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2019, p.760). The analysis reported an R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.479 and an adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.460, which indicates that 46% of the variance in ESN usage is explained by Information sharing, Self-documentation, Entertainment, and Social interaction. This indicates that there is an explanatory power closer to a moderate level in the conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1 above (Hair *et al.*, 2011).

## DISCUSSION

The analysis of the study was undertaken to achieve the research objectives set at the beginning of the study. In order to achieve the first objective, the researcher carried out an extensive literature review which was based on the Uses and Gratifications theory. This resulted in the identification of four gratifications, namely, Information sharing, Self-documentation, Entertainment, and Social interaction.

In order to achieve the second objective of the study, four hypotheses were proposed and tested. The results of the analysis indicated H<sub>1</sub> was supported, indicating that information sharing has a positive and significant effect on the employees' use of ESNs at work. This finding was consistent with the previous studies of Smock *et al.* (2011); Whiting and Williams (2013); Alhabash *et al.* (2014); Ali-Hassan *et al.* (2015); Alhabash and Ma (2017); Gan and Li (2018); Liu and Bakici (2019); Meske *et al.* (2019); Hossain (2019). The significant effect of information sharing on ESN usage can also be explained by identifying how ESNs function within the organization. According to Liu and Bakici (2019), in general, ESNs incorporate different features of social networks such as blogging, posting, and chatting, which allow employees to create content and share those contents with others in their organization. Therefore, employees consider ESNs as a convenient medium that satisfies the information-sharing motive (Leonardi *et al.*, 2013). Further, it was identified that the employees' desire to share required information more instantly with others might enhance their engagement with the ESN.

According to the results, H<sub>2</sub> was supported. Therefore, it indicates that there is a significant positive impact of self-documentation motive on ESN usage. This result is also confirmed by several previous empirical studies done by Liu *et al.* (2010); Alhabash *et al.* (2014), Liu *et al.* (2016); Alhabash and Ma (2017). As cited by Liu and Bakici (2019), using the features such as blogging associated with ESNs, employees can create posts and documents related to their daily activities and track their working progress. The employees can document their daily routines, such as what they are currently doing using the ESN platform. When ESNs are associated with the facilities which fulfill the employee's motivation of self-documentation, it will improve the ESN usage by employees (Liu & Bakici, 2019).

The findings revealed that H<sub>3</sub> was not supported. Hence, it can be inferred that the entertainment motive does not have a significant influence on ESN usage. This finding is consistent with several past studies conducted by Liu *et al.* (2010), Liu *et al.* (2016), Sun *et al.* (2020). According to Sun *et al.* (2020), even though employees seek those entertainment-related features of ESNs to release their stress while working, but due to their responsibility for work, they may be compelled to focus back to work after a short break rather than spending too much time with ESNs pursuing entertainment. Further, employees may not use features of entertainment as it is governed by the organization. Rather, they may prefer to use other public social networks as their activities are not monitored and controlled, and they may be able to get engage with more interactive content that is entertaining. The above-explained reasons would have contributed to the fact that entertainment motive does not have a significant effect on the use of ESNs in the present study.

Finally, the analysis revealed that H<sub>4</sub> was supported, indicating that there is a positive and significant effect of social interaction motive on ESN usage. Findings of the previous research done by Smock *et al.* (2011); Whiting and Williams (2013); Alhabash *et al.* (2014); Ali-Hassan *et al.* (2015); Chiu and Huang (2015); Alhabash and Ma (2017); Liu and Bakici (2019); Meske *et al.* (2019); Hossain (2019) are consistent with the findings of this study. According to Liu and Bakici (2019), ESNs are interactive in nature as they incorporate social networking features that allow employees to build their personal profiles, interact with other employees and build social capital. It was cited by these authors that it is easier to create social capital when people know about their coworkers and what they are doing. When more interactions are built with coworkers, it makes it easier to establish new connections with people (Leonardi *et al.*, 2013).

## THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This study contributes to the existing knowledge by applying the Uses and Gratifications Theory to the enterprise social networks context. This provides an opportunity to analyze the usage of ESNs purely from a motivational perspective. Also, exploring and validating four constructs (information sharing, self-documentation, entertainment, and social interaction) which have been cited most by the previous researchers, contributes to the existing literature. This study presented a unique theoretical framework depicting the relationships between different gratifications motivating the employees to use ESNs and ESN usage. This study fills an important research gap in the domain of using ESNs in the Sri Lankan context as there was a limited number of research conducted on the use of ESNs. Finally, this study can induce future researchers, especially in developing nations, to examine the use of ESNs due to the important role played by Enterprise Social Networks in today's organizations.

This study also provides several insights to the practitioners and organizations who have already adopted ESNs and who intend to adopt them in the future. First, with the implementation of ESNs, one of the main challenges that managers face is motivating and encouraging their employees to use ESNs for their work. The literature review revealed four important motives established through prior research, which can be focused on by organizations to induce employees to increase the use of ESN.

Especially, the findings revealed that information sharing, self-documentation, and social interaction have positive and significant effects on ESN usage. With this knowledge, organizations can especially focus on improving the capabilities and interests of employees in those three areas to significantly increase the use of ESNs at work, giving more benefits to the

organization. Further, creating a more collaborative and interactive organizational culture within organizations can increase the necessity for areas like information sharing and social interaction, which in turn can drive ESN usage.

Since the findings revealed that the most critical gratifications that induce employees to use ESNs are information sharing, self-documentation, and social interaction, ESN developers can focus on enhancing the capabilities and associated features of those three aspects leading to higher use of ESNs by the employees.

### CONCLUSION

This study focused on identifying the gratifications that affect ESN usage. Therefore, a systematic literature review was conducted in order to identify the gratifications/motives affecting ESN usage. In identifying these gratifications, the Uses and Gratifications theory was used as the primary theory. Amongst the many gratifications identified through the previous studies, the researcher identified information sharing, self-documentation, entertainment, and social interaction as the most cited by previous researchers. Consequently, they were used as the specific gratifications affecting the ESN usage for the present study. The conceptual model and hypotheses were developed based on these four gratifications.

PLS-SEM was used to test the hypotheses. The analysis revealed that information sharing, self-documentation, and social interaction motives significantly affect ESN usage, while entertainment does not have a significant effect on ESN usage.

### LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTION

This research study consists of several limitations. Data were collected only from the employees working in the software industry. Hence, it affects the generalizability of the findings to other industries. In addition, the smaller sample size too can restrict the generalizability of the results. Also, the study only focused on testing the direct effects between gratifications and ESN usage. However, the possible indirect and mediation effects were not examined in this study.

The findings and the limitations discussed in the study clearly reflect different avenues which can be examined in future research. This study focused only on four factors affecting ESN usage. Future researchers can expand this framework to incorporate more factors. Further, future researchers can examine possible indirect and mediating effects, in addition to the direct effects examined in this study. Rather than focusing on a single theory, future researchers can integrate several theories to identify the factors motivating employees to use ESNs. The motivations identified can differ from industry to industry. Therefore, future researchers can replicate this study in a different industry or conduct a cross-industry analysis and compare the results.

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