Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

A Thesis Submitted to the University of Hertfordshire in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the utilisation of Enterprise Social Systems (ESS) within a major UK retail organisation, aiming to understand the interplay between digital transformation and organisational dynamics. Despite the rapid integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) across various sectors, the specific implications for internal communication within retail have been less explored, particularly through the lens of ESS. This study explores how ESS are used within organisational settings, focusing on the impacts of cultural, technological, and operational factors on ESS integration.

Using an interpretivist approach and a single-case study design, this research explores the complexities of digital transformation by examining how ESS influence and are influenced by the existing organisational culture and practices. Data were collected through a series of semi-structured interviews across three distinct timelines, offering longitudinal insights into the evolving use of ESS before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, a group of 12 participants was interviewed three times across distinct phases: in Timeline Zero (July to September 2020), Timeline One (May to August 2021), and Timeline Two (January to April 2023). The intervals between these phases, approximately eight months between the first and second, and sixteen months between the second and third, allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the evolving changes in ESS usage over time, capturing both immediate and long-term impacts of the digital transformation initiatives. This longitudinal approach aligns with similar studies that highlight the importance of examining temporal changes to capture the complexities of digital transformation.

The study identifies several key themes that influence the utilisation of Enterprise Social Networks (ESNs), categorised into organisational culture, daily working practices, and external pressures. Themes such as Partnership Structure, High-Quality Customer Service, and Proactiveness illustrate how ESNs support and sometimes challenge existing cultural frameworks, enhancing collaborative efforts and communication efficiency. Concurrently, issues like Coupling with Procedures and Material Constraints, such as digital literacy barriers, highlight practical challenges and the discretionary use of technology in daily operations. Moreover, the research explores the dynamic interplay between internal organisational dynamics and external forces, including policy directives and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly shaped digital tool usage. The findings reveal a complex

evolution in digital tool integration, from initial resistance to strategic utilisation, illustrating the organisation's responsiveness to both internal needs and external pressures.

This study extends institutional theory by examining the discretionary coupling of technology with organisational practices, highlighting how cultural and operational dynamics shape digital transformation. It contributes to the academic literature on digital transformation in the retail sector by providing a detailed understanding of how ESNs are integrated within organisational culture and practices. It also offers practical insights for retail organisations aiming to navigate their digital transformation journeys effectively.

Keywords: Enterprise Social Systems (ESS), Digital Transformation, Organisational Culture, Retail Sector, Technology Utilisation, Enterprise Social Networks (ESN)

Dedication

To my wife, Dr. Mona Mortazian, and my daughter, Miss Jana Ghanizadeh,

In the garden of my life, you are the most vibrant blooms.

Your love and support nourish my every endeavour.

This achievement blossoms from the strength you give me.

Acknowledgements

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF TABLES

TABLE OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBERVIATIONS

DOI	DIFFUSION OF INNOVATION
DT	DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
ESM	ENTERPRISE SOCIAL MEDIA
ESN	ENTERPRISE SOCIAL NETWORKS
ESS	ENTERPRISE SOCIAL SYSTEM
ICT	INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY
IRT	INNOVATION RESISTANCE THEORY
IS	INFORMATION SYSTEMS
IT	INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
OSN	ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORK
TAM	TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE MODEL
TRA	THEORY OF REASONED ACTION
UTAUT	UNIFIED THEORY OF ACCEPTANCE AND USE OF TECHNOLOGY

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research undertaken within this thesis. It aims to highlight the importance of the topic, define information communication technologies (ICTs) and their types, and identifies the research problem. This is then followed by a section that describes the aim and research question of the study. Furthermore, this chapter includes a brief explanation of the research approach used in this study.

1.1 Research Problem

Digital innovation and transformation due to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs[1]) has enabled organisations to create opportunities that support their competitive advantage (Demirkan et al., 2016). This rapid pace of digital change in organisations has encouraged researchers to investigate strategies that accelerate the digital transformation (DT) (Westerman et al., 2012). As DT is still being understood, there are various definitions used to understand it. For instance, Fitzgerald et al. (2014) described DT as the adoption of new digital technologies leading to significant business improvements. Demirkan et al. (2016) viewed DT as the process of swiftly incorporating digital technologies into an organisation's activities, processes, competencies, and models to fully capitalise on the opportunities presented. A more

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[1] The term ICT encompasses various definitions in the literature. For instance, ICTs are defined as "…the varied collection of technological gear and resources which are made use of to communicate. They are also made use of to generate, distribute, collect and administer information" (Sarkar, 2012: 31). ICTs are also defined as "technical systems that accept, manipulate, and process information and facilitate communication between at least two parties" (Hilbert and Katz, 2003: 14). Finally, ICTs are "any electronic device or technology that has the ability to gather, store, or send information, and it is a ubiquitous part of today's work world" (Day et al., 2012: 473).

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

strategic aspect was provided by Hess et al. (2016), who referred to DT primarily pertaining to the changes that digital technologies can bring about in a company's business model, which can lead to different products, organisational structures, or processes. A process and organisational perspective were offered by Kane et al. (2017) who emphasised the impact of DT on an organisation's processes, noting that it involves adapting business processes and practices to effectively compete in the digital world.[2]Supplementing these views, Vial (2021) conceptualised DT as a process that seeks to improve an entity by significantly altering its properties through the synergistic application of information, computing, communication, and connectivity technologies. This broadened perspective suggests that DT not only encompasses technological adoption but also innovation and improvisation at both the managerial and operational levels, driving organisations towards offering new digital products/services and enabling them to adopt attributes akin to born-digital companies (Baiyere et al., 2020; Arvidsson et al., 2014). Such comprehensive understanding highlights the strategic integration of IT capabilities with organisational practices as essential to realising the transformative potential of digital investments (Baiyere et al., 2020).

To fully leverage the competitive advantage of ICTs and sustain it during DT, understanding the dynamics of technology acceptance and usage becomes imperative (Doherty and Terry, 2009; El-Haddadeh, 2020). Research across various sectors, including healthcare, education, banking, government, and e-commerce, has extensively explored technological development, implementation, and user interaction with ICTs (Eley et al., 2009; Bidin and Ziden, 2013; Choudrie et al., 2018; Abubakar Aliyu and Tasmin, 2012; Zou and Cheshmehzangi, 2022). While significant attention has been directed towards the surge in online retail sales, especially in the wake of Covid-19's preventative measures such as lockdowns (Sayyida et al., 2021; Han et al., 2022; Pantano and Willems, 2022), a critical examination reveals a pressing need to explore beyond mere gaps. It calls for a meaningful engagement with the complexities of digital innovation within retail organisations, particularly through the lens of Enterprise Social Systems (ESS). Chatterjee and Davison (2021) argue for a shift from gap-spotting to problematisation, emphasising the value of research that questions underlying assumptions and

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[2] Koch and Windsperger (2017) contend that digitization is profoundly altering the nature of products, the process of value creation, and the competitive landscape for firms. Therefore, the integration of digital technologies into products, services, and operations holds crucial implications for firms seeking to gain and sustain a competitive advantage. On the other hand, Karimi and Walter (2015) highlight that while digital technologies offer opportunities for competitive advantage, they also play a key role in creating and reinforcing disruptions at the societal and industry levels. Vial (2021) categorised disruptions into three groups: changes in consumer behaviour and expectations, shifts in the competitive landscape, and the availability of data.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

challenges established findings. This approach not only highlights the practical and academic relevance of studying ESS within retail but also aligns with the need to examine and understand the transformative potential of ICTs in creating sustainable competitive advantages. By problematising the use of ESS, this research will discover the strategic implications of digital technologies in the retail sector, thereby, contributing to a deeper understanding of DT as a complex, multifaceted process that reshapes organisational practices and competitive landscapes.

The retail sector is important to consider as being one of the most vibrant and dynamic retail industries in the world (Schwab and Zahidi, 2020).

1.1.1 UK Retail Sector

Retail sector is defined as the UK's largest private sector employer as it provides 3 million jobs across the country (BRC, 2018). Moreover, as reported in BRC (2018), retail is one of the most competitive sectors in the UK economy. It is also reported that the retail industry in the UK is known as one of the most vibrant and dynamic retail industries in the world (Schwab and Zahidi, 2020).

Figure 1.1: UK Retail Sector

Source: Office for National Statistics (UK), Statista.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study
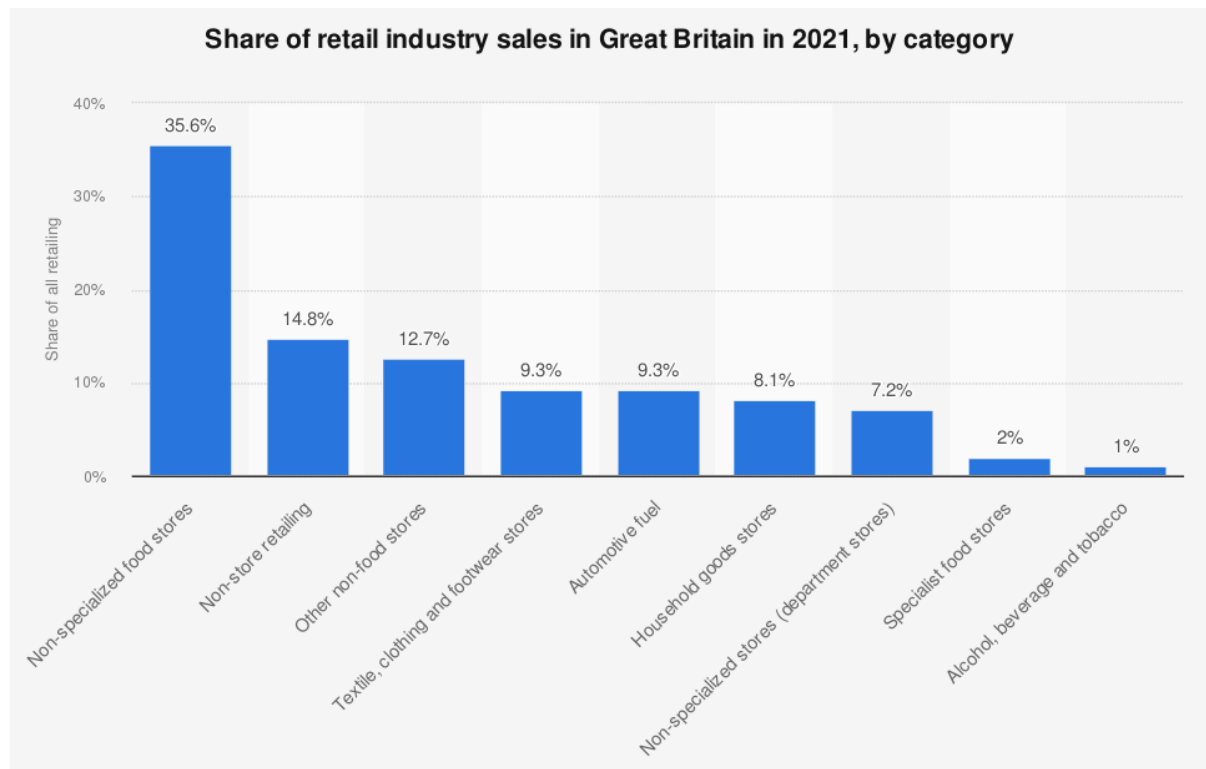
Moreover, as reported in Lewis (2024), the retail industry income is around 5.2% of the UK's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2020 and 9.3% of all UK employees in 2019 (see Figure 1.1 for share of different categories in the retail industry total sales). This industry also experienced significant growth, total retail sales (volume) in the UK have doubled since 1989 See Figure 1.2), with a rapid rise in online sales, compared with a 17% (9.7 million) rise in the UK population and a 68% rise in Household Disposable Income Per Capita (CPI adjusted).

Figure 1.2: All Business Index- UK

RSI:Value Seasonally Adjusted:All Retailers inc fuel:All Business Index

Source: Office for National Statistics (UK), ONS

As reported by Schwab and Zahidi (2020), the Global Consumer Insights Pulse Survey took place in June 2021 and involved more than 8,600 people across 22 territories. This survey found that the use of smartphones for online shopping has increased to more than doubled since 2018. This report reveals that the shift to online shopping was because people were restricted by lockdowns, and then many continued to work from home. As reported by Sabanoglu (2023) in Statista, the revenue of e-commerce has been increasing significantly (see Figure 1.3).

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Figure 1.3: UK E-Commerce Revenue
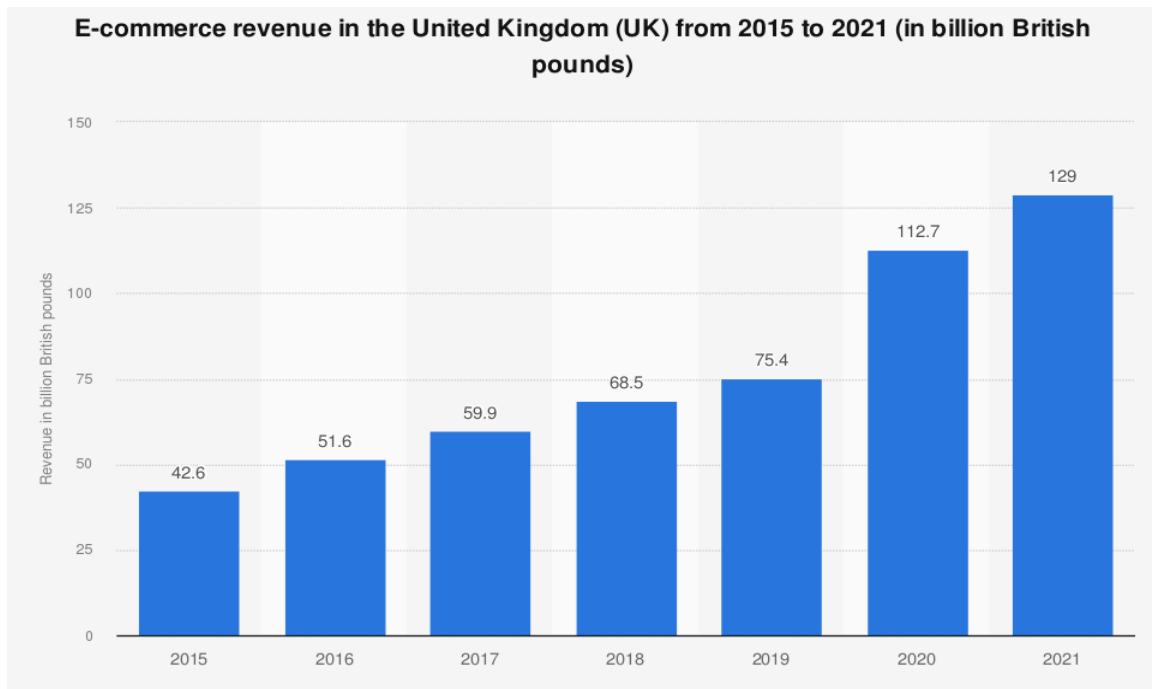
Source: Office for National Statistics (UK), Statista.

However, Schwab and Zahidi (2021) also discussed other trends that enhanced the shift towards digital consumption such as being keen to find the best price, choosing more healthy options and being more eco-friendly by shopping locally where possible. Furthermore, the result of this survey shows that consumer shift to digital channels will remain after the pandemic.

Advanced technologies and the subsequent rapid development of systems supporting online shopping and enhancing the consumer experience have garnered significant attention from researchers over the last decade (Gunday et al., 2008; Pantano and Viassone, 2014). The surge in online shopping during and after the pandemic has further amplified interest in exploring the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on e-commerce (Sayyida et al., 2021; Han et al., 2022; Pantano and Willems, 2022). However, while much of the focus has been on external consumer engagement and e-commerce platforms, the role of technology in transforming internal communication and fostering organisational innovation within the retail sector remains underexplored. This gap highlights the need to examine how innovative technologies can enhance internal communication processes to support retail organisations' strategic objectives and adaptability in a rapidly changing digital landscape.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

1.1.2 Leveraging Technology for Internal Communication in Retail Organisations

Innovation through technology in online retail sales has been viewed to be a strategic vehicle deriving effective business processes to further develop and sustain their competitive advantage (Mckeen and Smith 2003; Smith, 2007; Nguyen et al. 2015). However, maintaining a consistent and coherent strategy in utilising technology as a source of internal communication has been restricted to organisations in other industries.

In an information age of rapid advances and transformations, for organisations, innovative forms of communication, particularly internal communication enable organisations to engage the intellect and creative assets of their workers to produce value for the organisation (Karanges et al., 2015). Internal communication efforts involve establishing and maintaining relationships between an organisation's managers and employees (Karanges et al., 2015). It is believed that internal communication has shifted from a process of information distribution to a process of conversion, in which received information is converted into meaning to help managers make the right decisions based on the use of innovative technologies (Quirke, 2017).

One innovative form of ICT that has been used widely for communication and to transfer knowledge is online social networks (OSNs) that are also more commonly known as social media (ITU, 2021). OSNs are defined as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Choudrie et al., 2017; 4). Examples of OSNs are social networking sites (such as Facebook, X and Instagram), digital platforms (such as Uber, JUST EAT and Deliveroo), blogs (such as health and fitness blogs, DIY blogs and sports-focused blogs) and wikis (such as Wikipedia, MediaWiki and PmWiki). OSNs can enhance the transfer of knowledge between employees through developing communication, gathering professional information, and promoting knowledge sharing and resources (Brandel, 2008; Cao et al., 2012; Skeels and Grudin, 2009; Leonardi, 2014; Ellison et al., 2015; Wehner et al., 2017). This way, communication technologies can enhance the spread of information in an organisation and can be exploited as part of organisational learning processes that enable innovation (Palacios-Marqués et al., 2015; Kragulj, 2016). Recent communication research shows that internal communication practitioners are either planning for, or are using OSNs as part of their internal communication strategy when sharing knowledge, ensuring smooth collaboration and attaining long-term organisational goals such as increased reputation,

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

employee engagement and enhanced relationships with employees (Ewing et al., 2019; Estell and Davidson, 2019).

The wider use of OSNs within organisations has led to the emergence of terms such as Enterprise Social Systems (ESSs) (Turban et. Al, 2011). ESS is a form of OSN that is defined as Web-based platforms enabling employees to (1) communicate with particular colleague or send messages to all members of staff within the organisation; (2) write, amend and manage comments and documents belong to themselves or others; (3) decide and choose particular member of staff as communication colleagues; and (4) view the comments, messages and documents written, amended and managed by others in the organisation at their any convenience time (Leonardi et al., 2013). ESSs have improved organisational communication processes by creating visibility, persistence, editability, and association (Leonardi and Treem, 2012).

Considering the significant advantages of using ICTs within organisations and minimal studies about the use of ICTs within retail organisations, this research is motivated to understand and explore employees' use of an ESS within a large retail organisation.

1.2 Research Question, Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research was developed through a careful review of the existing literature and the unique challenges observed within the retail sector in terms of ESS. The retail industry's rapid adoption of digital technologies and its competitive nature highlighted a gap in understanding how internal digital tools, such as ESS, are integrated into organisational practices. Recognising the potential for these tools to reshape internal communication and enhance operational efficiency, the study's aim was formulated to address this underexplored area, ensuring a focused exploration of the interplay between digital transformation and organisational culture. Building on the gaps identified in the literature, the aim of this research is:

To explore, understand and explain how Enterprise Social Systems (ESS) are adopted and utilised within a large UK retail organisation, focusing on the interactions between organisational culture, employee engagement, and external pressures that shape their integration and effectiveness.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The objectives were derived directly from the primary aim, designed to break down the study's central focus into more targeted, actionable goals. By identifying specific areas of inquiry, such as employee engagement with ESS, barriers to adoption, and the influence of external pressures, these objectives provide a clear framework for investigating the factors that shape ESS usage. This structured approach ensures that each objective contributes to building a comprehensive understanding of the study's aim.

The following objectives break down this primary aim into specific, focused objectives.

- To examine how organisational culture supports or challenges ESS adoption and utilisation.
- To identify the barriers and facilitators that influence ESS integration within the retail organisation.
- To analyse how external pressures, such as the pandemic, impact ESS usage and organisational practices.

The research questions emerged as a logical extension of the objectives, created to guide the inquiry into the factors influencing ESS adoption. These questions were carefully chosen to probe how organisational culture, employee behaviours, and external influences interact with ESS usage, helping to illuminate the key drivers and challenges. By framing the questions in this way, the study is positioned to not only address the stated objectives but also generate deeper insights into the dynamics of digital transformation within the retail sector.

- How do employees at different levels engage with and utilise ESS, and what role does organisational culture play in shaping these interactions?
- What are the primary barriers and facilitators to ESS adoption, and how do these vary across organisational levels?
- How do external pressures, such as the pandemic, influence the integration and long-term effectiveness of ESS within the retail organisation?

By addressing these questions, the research focuses on uncovering the key drivers and challenges of ESS utilisation. This distinction ensures the study not only meets its objectives but also provides deeper insights into the conditions under which ESS can be effectively integrated within the organisation. The next section outlines the research methodology used to investigate these questions.

1.3 Research Methodology

The research epistemology of this study is interpretivism that is understood utilising a single case study. The case study is Sellers (name substituted for anonymity purposes), a large retail organisation in England. For the data collection, primary data was acquired using semi-structured interviews, and secondary data involving reference to archival documents, or websites to ensure triangulation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The semi-structured interviews contained open-ended questions that were used as formative evaluation to help enhance the study's trustworthiness (Saunders and Townsend, 2016). Prior to commencing the data collection, content and construct validity of the interview questions was assessed by a panel of 15 experts comprising diverse industries' practitioners and academics who have knowledge of the thematic areas (Appendix 2). The Timeline Zero participants, representing diverse demographics, were selected using a non-random sampling approach that included snowball, convenience, and purposive sampling methods. The criteria for purposive sampling were strategically chosen to ensure a comprehensive exploration of technology use within the organisation. This involved selecting employees from diverse departments to account for variations in technology behaviour, as departmental affiliations may significantly influence the usage of technology (Al-Zaabi, Choudrie and Lebcir, 2012). Additionally, demographic factors such as age, gender, and educational level were considered, recognising their impact on individuals' ability and willingness to adapt to and utilise new technologies (Al-Ghaith et al., 2010). Finally, participants were chosen across different organisational levels to capture the varied behaviours towards the introduced ESS, acknowledging that position within the organisation can influence perspectives on and interactions with technology (Choudrie and Zamani, 2016).

Overall, 12 participants were interviewed in Timeline Zero. The data from this timeline were analysed using thematic analysis and open coding. Data collection for Timeline Zero study commenced during the first Covid-2019 lockdown phase in July 2020. The Timeline Zero study revealed that most of the employees' working practices shifted from offline to online during the lockdown. Also, studies such as Vargo et al. (2021) believe that the Covid-2019 pandemic resulted in an accelerated diffusion of emerging digital technologies among ordinary people, while the digital divide further increases between people with versus without access to the technologies. Consequently, unprecedented changes in both employee's behaviour and emerging technology diffusion generate a new opportunity for this study to explore, understand

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

and explain the use of an ESS during and after the lockdown. In an effort to meet this, the study has followed a longitudinal interview.

The number of participants for this study have been determined using theoretical saturation; (Yin, 2003). This research includes a total of 36 interviews, conducted with 12 participants, with each participant being interviewed three times (Timeline Zero, Timeline One and Timeline Two) during and after the COVID-2019 lockdowns.

1.4 Contributions of this study

This study contributes to academia, industry, and policymaking in the realm of Enterprise Social Systems (ESS) within the retail sector, particularly in the post-COVID-19 landscape. It uncovers the complex relationship between organisational culture, working practices, and ESS utilisation, advancing theoretical frameworks on technology acceptance and highlighting the mutual influence of organisational culture and technology. The research explains how organisational culture elements and hierarchy levels affect ESS engagement, offering a detailed view on technology strategies and organisational digital transformation.

For industry leaders, it provides actionable insights for navigating digital transformation, emphasising the need for aligning technological initiatives with organisational goals and fostering a supportive environment for digital literacy. It also highlights the importance of agility in response to external pressures like the COVID-19 pandemic, advising on comprehensive training programs to enhance digital fluency.

For policymakers, the study advocates for digital transformation strategies that integrate ESS into daily operations, supported by policies that promote responsible use and address digital literacy and organisational culture management. It calls for policies that recognise the diversity in digital fluency, ensuring ESNs are central to organisational activities and align with broader societal objectives of digital inclusivity and workforce empowerment.

1.5 Research Scope

This research aims to explore and understand the utilisation of an ESS within the retail sector. Specifically, the study is contextualised within the UK retail industry, selecting ""Seller"" (name changed for anonymity) as the focal case study. ""Seller"" refers to a large retail organisation known for its comprehensive range of products and services across multiple departments. The choice of ""Seller"" as the case study is strategic, considering its adoption of

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Google apps since 2014 for various operational purposes, including internal communications. This focus allows for exploration the dynamics of ESS usage in a well-established retail setting, shedding light on the broader implications and applications of such systems in enhancing organisational communication and workflow.

Having introduced the aim, research questions and scope guiding this thesis, the next section offers an overview of this thesis.

1.6 Thesis outline

To familiarise the readers to each chapter of this dissertation a textual description in the following table (Table 1.1) is provided.

Table 1.1: Thesis Outline

Chapter	**Content**
1. Introduction	Sets the stage for the research by outlining the study's background, objectives, scope (focusing on "Sellers,"), and significance within the context of the UK retail sector and ESS utilisation. This chapter also highlights the gap that this study aims to fill.
2. Literature Review	Reviews relevant literature on Organisational Culture, Trust, working practices, and the impact of organisational culture on ESS utilisation. This chapter also establishes the first conceptual framework.
3. Research Methodology	Describes the research design, data collection, and analysis methods. Details the ethical considerations, including the anonymisation of the case study organisation to "Sellers".
4. Timeline Zero Analysis and Findings	Presents the initial findings from the timeline zero study, analysing the preliminary use of ESN within "Sellers" and setting the foundation for a deeper investigation in subsequent timelines.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

5. Timeline one and Two Analysis and Findings	Provides an in-depth analysis of the data collected during timelines one and two, examining the evolving use of ESN within "Sellers" and its impact on organisational communication and culture.
6. Discussion and Implications	Discusses the study's findings, drawing connections to the literature review and theoretical framework. It includes sections on the study's implications for academia, industry, policymakers, and theoretical and practical contributions. It also involves reflections on the research process.
7. Conclusion	Concludes the research with a summary of findings, reflections on the study's limitations, and suggestions for future research in the field of ESN and organisational culture in retail.

1.7 Summary

This chapter gave an introduction about this research and provided a background of the research problem. In addition, the aim, research question and the manner that the research will be undertaken is explained in this chapter. To reiterate, this research study aimed to explore, understand and explain the use of an ESN within a large organisation when DT occurs. For this, a longitudinal, qualitative approach involving semi-structured interviews containing open-ended interviews will be used. To form a theoretical understanding of this study, chapter two is proffered.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

In today's fast-paced digital era, the utilisation of novel ICTs has become crucial for organisations seeking to enhance communication, collaboration, and knowledge sharing among employees (Choudrie and Zamani, 2016). ESNs have emerged as a significant ICT tool that enables organisations to connect employees across various departments and locations, fostering continuous communication and collaboration (Aboelmaged and Hashem, 2018). However, the successful effective usage of ESNs within organisations are not without challenges (El-Haddadeh, 2020). This chapter presents a comprehensive exploration of the theoretical background that underpins the usage of ESNs within organisations. It identifies key factors influencing ESN adoption, highlighting areas where gaps exist in the current literature and where this research aims to contribute. Building upon this extensive theoretical foundation, the chapter will articulate a robust conceptual framework that will guide the empirical investigation into the usage of ESNs within organisational settings. By synthesising existing studies and identifying the gaps they leave behind, this chapter sets the stage for a focused examination of the complex dynamics shaping ESN integration in modern organisations.

2.1 A Novel ICT: The emergence of Enterprise Social Systems

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2021) identifies critical indicators for ICTs, such as various subscription types and internet access metrics. These technologies, encompassing both hardware like smartphones and software applications including the internet, significantly contribute to the developmental prospects of individuals and organisations alike (Michikyan et al., 2015; Kretschmer, 2012). The rapid proliferation of ICTs is particularly reshaping social, national, and organisational landscapes (Choudrie et al., 2017). An indication of this growth is the substantial increase in internet usage, which, by 2021,

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

encompassed around 63% of the global population, or approximately 4.9 billion people (ITU, 2021). This marks a nearly 17% rise since 2019, highlighting the accelerating expansion and influence of ICTs across the globe.

Emerging under the umbrella of ICT advancements, OSNs have experienced exceptional growth. According to Statista (2021), the user base of OSNs worldwide reached 4.48 billion in 2021, more than doubling from 2.07 billion in 2015. This transition towards mobile-first internet access, with 99% of OSN users connecting via mobile devices, reflects broader digital transformation trends impacting organisational and individual communication (Choudrie et al., 2010). The proliferation of OSNs within organisations has transformed workplace communication, making it more inclusive and accessible (Leonardi and Treem, 2012; Ewing et al., 2019). These networks support rapid information sharing and are instrumental in facilitating knowledge exchange among employees, enhancing professional relationships across geographical boundaries (Estell and Davidson, 2019; Bughin and Chui, 2013; Pfisterer et al., 2013; Ewing et al., 2019; Grace, 2009; El Ouirdi et al., 2015; Chatterjee et al., 2021; Javed et al., 2020). This evolution has highlighted the role of computers and ICTs in restructuring resource management within organisations, leading to the emergence of Enterprise Social Systems (ESS) as a key digital infrastructure for enhancing organisational efficiency (Omotayo, 2015; Burégio et al., 2015).

The core objective of ESS is to integrate social relations with organisational practices and actions (Burégio et al., 2015). ESS encompasses a variety of tools aimed at two principal objectives: teaming support to foster work practices and stakeholder collaborations, and social support designed to link employees interested in specific information or tasks (Leonardi et al., 2013). McAfee (2009) observed the significant impact of ESS tools on an organisation's communication, both with external stakeholders and among internal teams. Examples of communication with external stakeholders, include developing and implementing pages on open source, public OSN sites such as Facebook or MySpace, or publishing messages and announcements through Twitter. Organisational representatives sometimes also post comments on news websites. On the other hand, examples internal communication and social interaction within an enterprise (Choudrie and Zamani, 2016; Aboelmaged and hashem, 2018) can be use of different types of OSNs have been used for internal communication and interaction between staff within an organisation, (McAfee, 2009). Large organisations have therefore begun to implement OSNs in their portfolio of ESSs, and this has led to the emergence of the Enterprise Social Networks (ESNs).

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

The implementation of ESS technologies for both external and internal communications, empowers organisations to redefine their customer experience journey, innovate new values, optimise operations, and develop new business models that ultimately transform value chains and provide competitive advantages (Westerman et al., 2014). Particularly in the retail sector, this technological evolution plays a dual role, enhancing both external stakeholder engagement and internal communication efficiency. Studies by Liu and Ko (2012) and Småros (2005) explore ESS's external utility in engaging customers and reorganising supply chain collaborations. Conversely, Patroni et al. (2015) and Hütsch (2021) investigate its internal advantages, highlighting the innovation and efficiency it brings to retail operations. Specifically, Hütsch (2021) examines how integrating neural networks with ESS can significantly improve demand forecasting and delivery, crucial for inventory control and timely distribution.

Therefore, ESS enables broad organisational transformation by supporting social collaboration and operational efficiency (Alimam et al., 2015). This transformative potential is leveraged through dual applications: developing enterprise social media (ESM) for external communications with customers, suppliers, and the community (Piskorski, 2011; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016), and utilising Enterprise Social Networks (ESNs) for enriched internal communication and social interaction among staff (Choudrie and Zamani, 2016; Aboelmaged and Hashem, 2018). The integration of OSNs into ESS portfolios highlights a strategic move towards comprehensive communication solutions that cater to both external and internal needs, marking the emergence of ESNs as a pivotal tool for internal organisational dynamics.

This narrative reveals a gap in understanding the specific challenges of implementing ESS for internal communication within retail environments. Addressing this gap, this study aims to explore the complexities of ESN in enhancing internal collaboration and engagement, aiming to discuss both the challenges and opportunities it presents for retail organisations.

As this research focuses on the utilisation of ESNs for internal communication, the subsequent section will explore into a comprehensive examination of the emergence and evolution of ESNs. This exploration aims to provide a deeper understanding of the key characteristics, functionalities, and significance of ESNs within organisational contexts.

2.1.1 Enterprise Social Networks (ESNs)

ESNs are encompassed by numerous definitions within the academic and professional discourse. Scholars and practitioners have approached the concept of ESNs from various perspectives, resulting in a diverse range of definitions. These definitions shed light on the multifaceted nature of ESNs and offer insights into their distinct features and functionalities.

One commonly cited definition characterises ESNs as web-based platforms that enable employees to construct public or semi-public profiles within a bounded system (Leftheriotis and Giannakos, 2014). Another definition emphasises the social networking aspect of ESNs, highlighting the role of profiles, connections, and the networked nature of communication and collaboration (Leonardi et. al, 2013). Furthermore, ESNs are defined as technological platforms that accept, manipulate, and process information, facilitating communication between at least two parties (Leonardi, et. al, 2013). This definition highlights the importance of technology as an enabling tool for effective communication and information exchange within the organisational context (Riemer and Tavakoli, 2013; Buettner, 2015). While these definitions provide a robust understanding of ESNs in general, much of the existing literature focuses on their external-facing functionalities, such as customer engagement and brand management. The internal applications of ESNs, particularly in sectors like retail, remain underexplored, highlighting a critical research gap.

As technological platforms, ESNs have been praised for their ability to facilitate communication and exchange information. However, a notable research gap exists in understanding their potential to foster internal collaboration and knowledge sharing, especially within industries that depend on dynamic operational environments like retail. Addressing this gap requires not only exploring the general capabilities of ESNs but also examining how these systems can be effectively integrated into industry-specific contexts.

It is important to note that these definitions are not comprehensive and that the concept of ESNs continues to evolve alongside advancements in technology and changing organisational dynamics (Leonardi et. al, 2013). Some examples of different definitions are provided in Table 2.1. Nevertheless, these varied definitions provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding the diverse aspects and potential applications of ESNs in the context of internal communication within organisations. In retail environments, for instance, these evolving definitions could inform how organisations conceptualise and implement ESNs to foster

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

greater collaboration, enhance information flow, and adapt more swiftly to market shifts (Patroni et al., 2015).

Furthermore, studies focusing on retail environments illustrate how ESNs can support not just communication, but also operational agility. The literature highlights a gap in understanding how these platforms enable employees to learn and innovate within complex, fast-paced retail settings (Leonardi et al., 2013; Patroni et al., 2015). Considering the various different definitions provided for ESNs, it could be concluded that the factors that make ESNs distinct from the other communication technologies that are typically used by organisations are that they (i) provide employees with a visible trace of communicative actions over time, as a result of expanding the range of users, networks and comments from which employees could learn within the organisation; and (ii) increase opportunities for learning by employees (Leonardi et al., 2013).

Table 2.1: Definitions of ESN

Definitions of Enterprise Social Network		
Author(s)	**Definitions**	**Page**
Scott, Sorokti, and Merrell (2016)	Platform for tight integration of multiple types of Web 2.0 tools into a single private/semi-private network for businesses and organisations.	76
Buettner (2015)	ESN is a social networking site that a company operates that has restricted access to employees, creating opportunity for connecting employees.	2
Leftheriotis and Giannakos (2014)	a web-based service, which allows individuals to create and maintain online public or semi-public profiles and foster connections with other members of that organisation.	135

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Leonardi, Huysman and Steinfield (2013)	Web-based platforms which enables employees to (1) communicate with particular colleague or send messages to all members of staff within the organisation; (2) write, amend and manage comments and documents belong to themselves or others; (3) decide and choose particular member of staff as communication colleagues; and (4) view the comments, messages and documents written, amended and managed by others in the organisation at their any convenience time.	2
Alarifi and Sedera (2013)	(ESNs) refers to the application of social media platforms that facilitate short message communication and the establishment of social connections within organisations.	3
Riemer and Tavakoli (2013)	ESN is a platform, which allows organisations to create space in which co-workers can connect, communicate, collaborate, and exchange information.	3
Jarrahi (2011)	ESNs are normally inspired by public social networking websites (i.e. Facebook), but they are operated on the host organisation's servers, and protected by firewalls by being restricted employees only.	688

The integration and effectiveness of ESNs in organisations have been extensively studied, shedding light on their potential to enhance internal communication, collaboration, and knowledge sharing. Cao et al. (2013), Skeels and Grudin (2009), Leonardi et al. (2013), Ellison et al. (2015), and Wehner et al. (2017) emphasise ESNs' capacity to strengthen professional connections among employees, facilitating a culture of open information exchange and collaborative problem-solving. In retail, such capabilities are particularly critical given the sector's need for rapid decision-making and coordinated responses to market demands (Patroni et al., 2015). This environment is conducive to innovation and operational efficiencies, as noted by Chui et al. (2012) and Turban et al. (2011), who highlight the business advantages such as accelerated problem resolution, knowledge dissemination, and enhanced employee productivity.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Nonetheless, integrating ESNs within retail organisations involves unique challenges, including organisational resistance and varied technological readiness (Chitrao, 2014). The sustained use of ESNs present challenges, with studies illustrating instances of underutilisation and questioning the return on investment in such technologies (Wehner et al., 2017). Specific obstacles to ESN usage have been identified across different sectors: Eley et al. (2009) in e-healthcare pointed out barriers like awareness, training, and access to necessary tools, along with individual preferences and resistance, particularly among older employees. In the realm of e-government, Choudrie et al. (2018) identified age and trust as critical factors affecting system usage by employees and citizens alike. Similarly, Chin et al. (2015) conducted studies in multinational consulting firms and utility companies, concluding that ESN usage is influenced by a blend of technological, organisational, social, and individual factors, which can either enable or inhibit usage.

Despite extensive research into ESN usage across industries, understanding its adoption and utilisation within the UK retail sector remains limited. Building on the insights provided by previous studies, this research explores how organisational culture, employee engagement, and external pressures interact to shape ESN integration and effectiveness. By examining these dynamics, the study provides a comprehensive perspective on the factors that influence ESN adoption, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities that arise as these systems are embedded within a retail organisation's operations. A particular emphasis will be placed on the unique technological and operational challenges present in retail, which distinguish this sector from others (Patroni et al., 2015; Kane et al., 2014).

Building on the understanding of ESN implementation within retail organisations, it's crucial to consider the broader technological landscape that supports ESS in this sector. The interplay of emerging digital platforms, cloud computing, mobile connectivity, and advanced analytics forms the foundation for successful ESS integration. These technological drivers not only enhance operational efficiency and data-driven decision-making but also enable retail organisations to adapt more quickly to market changes. By examining these key drivers, the next section provides a comprehensive overview of how evolving technologies shape the adoption and effectiveness of ESS in the retail environment.

19

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

2.1.2 Technological Drivers of ESS in the Retail Sector

The advancement of ESS within the retail industry is driven by the continual evolution of underlying technologies (Basker, 2016). These technological drivers are not static; they are dynamically advancing, pushing the capabilities of ESS to new heights, which in turn reshapes retail operations (Pinto et al., 2023). Each component plays a specific role in fostering a more connected, efficient, and innovative retail environment. For example, as described in the research by Patroni et al. (2015), ESS platforms enable enhanced communication networks that integrate with operational practices, significantly improving workflow and data accessibility across different retail branches. Moreover, studies by McAfee (2009) and Kane et al. (2014) illustrate how evolving cloud technologies and analytics capabilities contribute to the operational agility and strategic data utilisation that are pivotal in today's retail sector.

At the core of these advancements are advanced digital platforms, which facilitate the flow of information and enhance connectivity within the retail environment (Reinartz et al., 2019; Patroni et al., 2015). These platforms support the creation and maintenance of user profiles, articulate networks, and facilitate extensive information tracking and sharing across the organisation. Designed to be intuitive and accessible across various devices, they promote connectivity in diverse retail environments, from the sales floor to corporate headquarters (Patroni et al., 2015). This level of integration is crucial for ensuring that all employees, regardless of their location, can access vital information and communicate effectively.

Following these platforms, cloud computing and mobile connectivity play essential roles. The integration of cloud computing provides scalable and flexible resources crucial for handling the vast data volumes typical in retail (McAfee, 2009; Har et al., 2022). This technology supports continuous communication and data availability, crucial for operational agility (Har et al., 2022). Mobile connectivity complements this by ensuring that employees can access the ESS from anywhere, enhancing their ability to make informed decisions swiftly and respond accurately to dynamic market demands (Jayaram, 2017). Together, these technologies empower retail employees with real-time data, facilitating rapid decision-making and enhancing responsiveness to customer needs and market changes (Kane et al., 2014).

Analytics and data utilisation are next in transforming retail operations. Advanced analytics embedded in ESS platforms help organisations process vast amounts of data to generate actionable insights (Sun et al., 2020; Ghani et al., 2019). This capability is critical for optimising operations, understanding consumer behaviour, and predicting market trends,

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

thereby supporting strategic decision-making (Ustundag et al., 2018). In the retail sector, where understanding consumer behaviour is crucial, the ability to analyse and act on data quickly can dramatically enhance market responsiveness and operational efficiency (Sun et al., 2020; Har et al., 2022).

Another crucial aspect is the integration of ESS with existing systems. To maximise effectiveness, ESS platforms must integrate smoothly with existing IT infrastructure within retail organisations (Jokonya and Mugisha, 2019). This integration ensures that ESS can leverage existing data and systems, such as Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), to enhance the overall information architecture without creating new information barriers (Bughin and Chui, 2013). Effective integration promotes a unified approach to data management and communication, fostering a collaborative culture that is vital for innovation and growth (Jokonya and Mugisha, 2019).

Finally, securing sensitive information and maintaining user privacy are paramount as the adoption and utilisation of ESS expand (Marriott et al., 2017). Effective security measures within ESS help protect against data breaches and cyber threats, crucial for maintaining the integrity and confidentiality of business operations (Patroni et al., 2015). As retailers increasingly rely on digital platforms, ensuring robust security protocols is essential for building trust within the organisation and with its customers (Marriott et al., 2017).

Through these interconnected technologies, ESS not only supports day-to-day retail operations but also fosters a culture of innovation and continuous improvement. Each technological driver contributes uniquely to creating a more agile, responsive, and interconnected retail operation, illustrating the comprehensive technological ecosystem necessary for successful digital transformation in the retail sector. Table 2.2 outlines each technological driver, its function, and its impact on retail operations:

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Table 2.2: Tech Drivers in Retail

Technology	Function	Impact on Retail Operations	References
Advanced Digital Platforms	User profile management, network articulation, information sharing	Enhances internal communication and collaboration	Patroni et al., 2015; Reinartz et al., 2019
Cloud Computing and Mobile Connectivity	Data management, real-time access	Enables rapid decision-making and operational flexibility	Har et al., 2022; McAfee, 2009
Analytics and Data Utilisation	Data processing for actionable insights	Supports strategic planning and market responsiveness	Har et al., 2022; Kane et al., 2014
Integration with Existing Systems	Seamless data integration	Promotes unified data management and eliminates silos	Jokonya and Mugisha, 2019; Bughin and Chui, 2013
Security Measures	Data protection and privacy maintenance	Builds trust and secures sensitive information	Marriott et al., 2017; Patroni et al., 2015

Each of these components plays a critical role in driving the effectiveness and efficiency of ESS in the retail sector, illustrating the comprehensive technological ecosystem necessary for successful digital transformation. As retail organisations continue to adapt and evolve, these technological drivers will remain central to their strategic execution and operational excellence.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

As these technologies continue to evolve and integrate into the daily operations of retail organisations, they not only promise significant operational enhancements but also introduce complexities and challenges that may hinder their full adoption and utilisation (Chitrao, 2014). While many studies have explored the technological advancements and their potential, there remains a limited understanding of the barriers that prevent organisations from fully realising these benefits. This research seeks to address this gap by examining the factors that contribute to resistance and understanding how these challenges can be mitigated to achieve smoother ESS integration and utilisation. The upcoming section will therefore shift focus from the technological capabilities of ESS to the resistance these systems face within retail environments. This discussion will explore the various barriers to ESS utilisation, providing insights into the internal and external challenges that retailers must navigate to fully leverage the potential of these advanced systems. Understanding these resistances is crucial for developing strategies that facilitate smoother integration and utilisation of ESS.

2.2 Resistance to using ESNs

In exploring the dynamics of ESN usage within organisations, resistance emerged as a pivotal concept. This section aims to explore the nature of resistance encountered during ESN implementation, defining it as an organisational response to the introduction of new technologies. Within the retail sector, resistance is not just a theoretical concern but a practical barrier that influences adoption rates and overall system success. Recognising the importance of retail-specific resistance patterns, this section seeks to identify the unique challenges that retail organisations face when integrating ESNs into their operations. Understanding resistance is crucial for developing strategies to foster ESN usage withing organisations.

Resistance, as it pertains to innovation, has been described as a lack of willingness to accept new innovation (Tansuhaj et al., 1991). Tansuhaj et al. (1991) also highlighted how some individuals or consumers may be hesitant to embrace innovation. In the early exploration of this concept, Ram and Sheth (1989) provided insights into consumer resistance by defining it as the reluctance to adopt and use innovation due to a perceived threat to the established status quo. This reluctance is mirrored in the retail sector, where employees may resist new ESNs because they disrupt established workflows, require new skills, or are seen as threatening existing job roles (Beier and Wagner, 2016; Kacker and Perrigot, 2016). The ongoing gap in the literature, which this research aims to address, lies in understanding these resistance factors within the context of retail ESN adoption. By identifying the specific psychological and

functional barriers in retail environments, this study offers insights into how organisations can overcome these challenges and realise the full potential of their ESN investments. They also emphasised that resistance to innovation is caused by both functional and psychological barriers, further shedding light on the underlying factors contributing to this phenomenon. These foundational understandings play a crucial role in comprehending the complexities surrounding the reluctance to embrace novel ideas and technologies.

Within the broader landscape of organisational IT adoption, compliance refers to users who engage with a system in the intended manner, guided by cultural and technical mechanisms (Fernie and Metcalf, 1998; Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992; Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016). Compliance represents a successful approach; however, within the context of information systems, resistance becomes an inevitable phenomenon (Choudrie and Zamani, 2016; Talwar et al., 2020; Ahmad, 2021). User resistance is frequently cited in the literature as a critical factor that undermines IT project success.

Resistance to IT systems has been a central theme in understanding the challenges associated with digital transformation. Scholars have identified five core components that illustrate how resistance manifests and evolves: manifestations of resistance (Kankanhalli, 2009; Lapointe and Rivard, 2009; Talwar et al., 2020), subject of resistance (Rivard and Lapointe, 2012; Talwar et al., 2020), object of resistance (Lapointe and Rivard, 2005; Lapointe and Rivard, 2006; Rivard and Lapointe, 2012; Talwar et al., 2020), perceived threats (Kim and Kankanhalli (2009); Rivard and Lapointe, 2012; Nel and Boshoff, 2020), and initial conditions (Rivard and Lapointe, 2012; Nel and Boshoff, 2020). These elements are discussed below and are summarised in Table 2.2.

Understanding resistance is crucial, as it highlights the gap in existing literature regarding internal resistance patterns, especially in sectors like retail. By examining these components, this study contributes to bridging that gap, shedding light on resistance factors unique to organisational ESN integration and offering insights into strategies that can mitigate them.

The first element, manifestations of resistance, refers to the range of behaviours exhibited by users to express their discontent with the implementation of a new IT system (Kankanhalli, 2009; Lapointe and Rivard, 2009; Talwar et al., 2020). These manifestations can include apathy, sabotage, destructive behaviour, persistence of former behaviour, and the formation of coalitions (Rivard and Lapointe, 2012). Apathy refers to a lack of interest or motivation, while sabotage involves intentional actions aimed at disrupting or undermining the system's

24

functionality (Weritz et. al, 2022; Jabar and Mahinderjit Singh, 2022). Destructive behaviour involves deliberately damaging or deleting data or system components (Rivard and Lapointe, 2012). Persistence of former behaviour refers to users clinging to their old ways of working and resisting changes brought about by the new system (Rivard and Lapointe, 2012). The formation of coalitions refers to the development of alliances among users who share similar resistance attitudes and work together to oppose the system (Keen, 1981; Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Kim and Kankanhalli, 2009; Lapointe and Rivard, 2017).

In the retail sector, similar manifestations of resistance are evident. For instance, employees may persist in traditional communication methods rather than adopting new ESN features, or they may form groups that collectively oppose the system's rollout. Such coalitions can slow down adoption rates, while individual acts of apathy or sabotage can disrupt overall productivity (Beier and Wagner, 2016). Moreover, workflow disruptions caused by new systems often exacerbate these manifestations, as employees perceive changes as inefficient or incompatible with their established routines (Iyamu, 2020; Aithal et al., 2023). Similarly, technological apprehension can amplify apathy or lead employees to avoid engagement with the system altogether, further hindering its adoption (Beier and Wagner, 2016; Kacker and Perrigot, 2016).

The second element, subject of resistance, focuses on the actors or groups exhibiting resistance behaviours. Resistance can occur at the individual, group (Lapointe and Rivard, 2006; Markus, 1983), or organisational level (Ang and Pavri, 1994). At the individual level, resistance may arise from technological apprehension, where employees struggle to adapt to the complexity of the system or fear that it may increase their workload. Studies in the retail sector specifically highlight that technological complexity and usability concerns can deter employees from effectively engaging with ESNs (Beier and Wagner, 2016; Kacker and Perrigot, 2016). Additionally, inadequate training, often prevalent in retail organisations, can leave employees feeling unprepared and frustrated, further fostering disengagement and resistance (Rabak and Cleveland-Innes, 2006). Group-level resistance in retail may stem from shared norms and values that conflict with the system, as well as workflow disruptions caused by changes to established practices. For example, Aithal et al. (2023) and Iyamu (2020) noted that teams within retail organisations may resist collectively when new technologies fail to align with existing processes, leading to inefficiencies. At the organisational level, high employee turnover poses a significant barrier to consistent technology adoption in retail, with the continual onboarding of new employees disrupting efforts to establish a cohesive digital culture

25

(Jones et al., 2015). Strategic misalignments or cultural resistance to change within retail organisations further complicate the widespread adoption of ESNs (Markus, 1983; Rivard and Lapointe, 2012).

In retail environments, these subject-based resistance factors are highly contextualised. Individual retail employees, such as sales associates, may resist ESNs due to a perceived irrelevance of the system to their immediate tasks, seeing it as an unnecessary addition rather than a beneficial tool for improving performance (Meyer et al., 2020). Teams may reject the system collectively if it fails to support their specific workflows, especially when workflow disruptions caused by insufficient system integration hinder their ability to perform routine operations efficiently (Aithal et al., 2023). At the organisational level, frequent turnover rates in retail exacerbate these challenges, as employees may leave before fully integrating into the system, further impeding adoption efforts (Jones et al., 2015). Additionally, cultural resistance to change within retail organisations often creates an overarching barrier, preventing the system from being fully utilised to enhance internal communication and collaboration (Markus, 1983; Rivard and Lapointe, 2012).

The third element which is object of resistance refers to the target of resistance behaviours (Rivard and Lapointe, 2012). It encompasses various aspects, including the system itself and its features (Gunawardane 1985; Wagner and Newell 2007). Users may resist the system if they perceive it as difficult to use, lacking in functionality, or incompatible with their existing work practices (Sakala and Chigona, 2020). In retail environments, technological apprehension is a significant factor influencing the object of resistance, as employees often view complex or unfamiliar systems as barriers to their daily tasks (Beier and Wagner, 2016; Kacker and Perrigot, 2016). Furthermore, concerns about workflow disruption amplify resistance, with employees perceiving ESNs as disruptive to their well-established routines and job processes (Iyamu, 2020; Aithal et al., 2023). The significance that the system has to the user, such as a perceived loss of power (Markus, 1983) or autonomy, can also become an object of resistance (Lapointe and Rivard, 2005). In the retail organisations, employees may reject ESNs not only due to complexity but also because of a perceived irrelevance of the system to their specific roles, particularly when its features do not align with their job responsibilities or fail to offer tangible benefits (Meyer et al., 2020).Additionally, a perceived imbalance in power dynamics or autonomy caused by these systems can further drive resistance, as employees fear losing control over their tasks or decision-making processes (Beier and Wagner, 2016; Kacker and Perrigot, 2016; Iyamu, 2020). In some cases, the implementers of the system may become the

26

object of resistance, particularly when users perceive the implementation process as flawed or when the system becomes a pawn in power struggles between users and implementers (Lapointe and Rivard, 2005; Lapointe and Rivard, 2006; Rivard and Lapointe, 2012; Sakala and Chigona, 2020).

The fourth category which is perceived threats relates to negative assessments made by users regarding the fairness of the exchange between their inputs and the outcomes of their interaction with the IT system (Joshi, 1991). Users may perceive threats such as increased workload, changes in job security, or the loss of familiar work routines (Kim and Kankanhalli, 2009). In the retail context, concerns about job security are particularly heightened by automation and the potential for certain roles to become redundant, further fuelling resistance (Ghani et al., 2022). Additionally, inadequate training exacerbates these perceived threats, as employees who feel unprepared to use new technologies may view their introduction as a risk to their performance and job stability (Rabak and Cleveland-Innes, 2006). Switching costs, both in terms of time and effort required to adapt to the new system, can also be perceived as a threat (Leong et al., 2020). Furthermore, users' perceived value of the system, including its usefulness and relevance to their work, can influence their resistance tendencies (Marakas and Hornik, 1996; Kim and Kankanhalli, 2009; Rivard and Lapointe, 2012; Kaur et al., 2020). If retail employees see the system as irrelevant to their day-to-day responsibilities, they are more likely to resist adoption, viewing it as an unnecessary burden rather than a beneficial tool (Meyer et al., 2020; Maruping et al., 2017).

Finally, the fifth category, the initial conditions is about the characteristics of the environment that interact with the object of resistance and influence users' assessments of the situation (Martinko et al., 1996). Environmental influences can include factors such as the organisation's culture, structure, and leadership style (Clohessy and Acton, 2019; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016). In the retail sector, these environmental factors often involve dynamic staffing patterns, fluctuating leadership approaches, and a customer-facing culture that can amplify apprehension toward new systems. High employee turnover rates, for instance, disrupt continuity in ESS usage and delay the establishment of a cohesive digital culture, further complicating the initial conditions for adoption (Jones et al., 2015). The constant need to onboard new employees into ESS platforms exacerbates resistance, as the lack of institutional knowledge and experience makes it harder to establish widespread usage (Kim and Kankanhalli, 2009). Users' prior experiences with IT implementations and their expectations of outcomes and performance can shape their resistance tendencies. For instance, negative experiences or perceptions of past IT

projects may lead to heightened resistance in subsequent implementations (Martinko et al., 1996; Rivard and Lapointe, 2012).

The summary of these five elements of resistance to the use of IT is provided in Table 2.3, which outlines the key components of resistance identified in the literature. To further contextualise this discussion, Table 2.4 presents an overview of resistance themes specifically encountered in the retail sector, highlighting the unique challenges retail organisations face in the adoption and utilisation of ESS.

Scholars have also classified resistance to innovations into two primary categories, namely, active and passive resistance (Heidenreich and Kraemer, 2016; Talwar et al., 2020; Seth et al., 2020). Active innovation resistance captures the dynamic aspect of resistance, where individuals develop a negative attitude towards a new product or idea after conducting a thorough evaluation (Kaur et al., 2020). In the retail environment, active resistance often arises when employees perceive that new systems demand excessive time to learn or threaten their existing workflows. This is especially true when new technologies are seen as irrelevant to their daily responsibilities, further reinforcing resistance (Meyer et al., 2020). At this stage, they encounter various psychological and functional barriers that hinder their willingness to embrace the innovation wholeheartedly (Heidenreich and Handrich, 2016). These barriers may include concerns about the potential risks associated with adopting the new technology, uncertainties about its compatibility with existing systems, or apprehensions about the changes it might entail (Talwar et al., 2020; Seth et al., 2020).

On the other hand, passive innovation resistance represents a more latent form of reluctance that exists even before the evaluation process begins (Heidenreich and Spieth, 2013). In the retail sector, this latent resistance often emerges from employees' reliance on established routines and their reluctance to adapt to new processes (Maruping et al., 2017). This predisposition towards resistance arises from an inherent inclination to maintain the status quo and resist any changes or disruptions to familiar routines and practices (Talwar et al., 2020). Often, individuals who display passive resistance may not actively engage with the innovation, dismissing it without fully exploring its potential benefits or implications (Heidenreich and Handrich, 2016). Table 2.5 summarises the main characteristics of active and passive resistance.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Table 2.3: Elements of resistance to the use of IT

Element of resistance to the use of IT	Examples	Authors
Manifestations of resistance	Apathy, sabotage, destructive behaviour, persistence of former behaviour, formation of coalitions	Keen, 1981; Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Kim and Kankanhalli, 2009; Lapointe and Rivard, 2009; Seth et al., 2020; Talwar et al., 2020
Subject of resistance	Individual, group, organisation	Markus, 1983; Lapointe and Rivard, 2006; Rivard and Lapointe, 2012; Seth et al., 2020; Talwar et al., 2020
Object of resistance	The system itself and its features; the significance that the system has to the user, such as a loss of power; the implementers themselves may become an object of resistance when a situation has been politicised to the point where the system becomes a pawn in a power struggle between the users and the implementer	Lapointe and Rivard, 2005; Lapointe and Rivard, 2006; Rivard and Lapointe, 2012; Seth et al., 2020; Talwar et al., 2020
Perceived threats	Negative user assessments of the fairness of the exchange between their inputs and the outcomes of their interaction with an IT; switching costs; perceived value.	Marakas and Hornik (1996); Kim and Kankanhalli (2009); Rivard and Lapointe, 2012; Nel and Boshoff, 2020; Leong et al., 2020
Initial conditions	Environmental influences; outcomes and performance expectations	Martinko et al., 1996; Rivard and Lapointe, 2012; Nel and Boshoff, 2020

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Table 2.4: Themes of Employee Resistance to ESS Utilisation in the Retail Sector

Theme	Description	Impact on Retail Sector	References
Technological Apprehension	Concerns about the complexity of technology and potential to complicate tasks.	Leads to reluctance in adopting new technologies due to fear of increased workload or change in established routines.	Beier and Wagner, 2016; Kacker and Perrigot, 2016
Workflow Disruption	Fear that technologies will disrupt established ways of working.	Creates resistance due to uncertainty about changes to daily operations and job roles.	Iyamu, 2020; Aithal et al., 2023
Data Privacy and Security	Worries about the safety of information shared within technologies.	Hinders adoption due to concerns over confidentiality and data protection.	Singh and Sinha, 2020
Perceived Irrelevance	Belief that ESSs do not directly benefit specific job tasks.	Reduces motivation to use technologies, seen as unnecessary additions rather than tools for efficiency.	Meyer et al., 2020
Inadequate Training	Lack of proper training on how to effectively use technologies.	Leads to underutilisation and incorrect use of technologies, limiting their potential benefits.	Rabak and Cleveland-Innes, 2006

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

High Employee Turnover	Frequent changes in staff within the retail sector.	Disrupts momentum toward widespread ESS usage and necessitates continuous training efforts.	Jones et al., 2015

Table 2.5: Active Resistance vs Passive Resistance

Aspect	Active Resistance	Passive Resistance
Definition	Negative attitude towards innovation after evaluation (Kaur et al., 2020)	Predisposition to resist innovation before evaluation (Kaur et al., 2020)
Nature	Overt, conscious resistance (Heidenreich and Handrich, 2016)	Latent, unconscious resistance (Heidenreich and Handrich, 2016)
Evaluation Stage	Occurs during or after evaluating the innovation (Heidenreich and Handrich, 2016; Talwar et al., 2020; Seth et al., 2020)	Occurs before evaluating the innovation (Heidenreich and Handrich, 2016; Talwar et al., 2020; Seth et al., 2020)
Attitude	Openly expressing negative attitudes towards the innovation (Talwar et al., 2020)	Reluctance to explore or engage with the innovation (Talwar et al., 2020)

Although workforce resistance to the acceptance and usage of ICTs has largely been viewed as negative behaviour, studies have indicated that resistance can also manifest in positive ways (Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016), shown in Table 2.6.

Negative resistance encompasses behaviours that impede the successful implementation of IT systems. These behaviours may include manifestations of resistance, which includes apathy,

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

sabotage, destructive behaviour, persistence of former behaviour, and the formation of coalitions (Keen, 1981; Kim and Kankanhalli, 2009; Lapointe and Rivard, 2017) as discussed above.

Positive resistance is characterised by behaviours that deviate from prescribed processes or covertly seek to support or improve working practices (Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006). These behaviours may involve users finding alternative ways to accomplish tasks or developing workarounds to overcome perceived limitations of the system (Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006). In retail settings, positive resistance could be observed when employees discover more efficient methods to utilise technology, such as developing innovative approaches to handle peak inventory periods or improve customer service workflows. Positive resistance can arise from users' desire to enhance productivity, efficiency, or the overall effectiveness of their work (Petrides et al., 2004; Kobayashami et al., 2005; Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016).

Table 2.6: Positive vs Negative Resistance

Aspect	Positive Resistance	Negative Resistance
Definition	Behaviours that deviate from prescribed processes or covertly seek to support or improve working practices (Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016)	Behaviours that impede the successful implementation of IT systems (Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016)
Nature	Constructive, seeks to enhance productivity and improve outcomes (Petrides et al., 2004; Kobayashami et al., 2005; Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016)	Hinders progress and opposes change (Petrides et al., 2004; Kobayashami et al., 2005; Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016)

Behaviour	Finding alternative ways to accomplish tasks and developing workarounds to overcome perceived limitations (Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016)	Include apathy, sabotage, destructive behaviour, persistence of former behaviour, and the formation of coalitions against the change (Lapointe and Rivard, 2009; Talwar et al., 2020)
Purpose	Desire to optimise work processes and outcomes (Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016)	Opposition to change and dissatisfaction with the new systems (Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016)

Both negative and positive resistance behaviours are displayed by users who struggle to adapt to the new system, and these behaviours can significantly impact their interaction with the system (Vrhovec et al., 2015; Wibisono et al., 2019). This phenomenon is often referred to as a workaround, which is defined as a way in which users engage with the system but fail to conform to the prescribed "rules of engagement" (Kobayashami et al., 2005; Petrides et al., 2004). Workarounds can take various forms, and they highlight users' attempts to navigate the system's limitations or perceived inadequacies to achieve their desired outcomes (Alter, 2014). Understanding workarounds is crucial in studying resistance to IT systems, as they provide insights into users' strategies for overcoming challenges and adapting to the system in their own unique ways (Alter, 2014; Wibisono et al., 2019).

In the sequent section, the topic of workarounds is considered where an exploration of the different types of workarounds and their implications for the use of IT systems is achieved.

2.3 Workarounds

As discussed in the previous section, a workaround is an action arising from resistance (Petrides et al., 2004; Kobayashami et al., 2005; Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Alter, 2014; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016). Alter (2014) classified a workaround as a necessary activity or creative art, and viewed them in terms of behaviour, resistance, sources of future improvements, quick fixes, add-ons and shadow systems. In retail settings, workarounds often reflect the dynamic

nature of the industry, where employees use these actions to address system shortcomings while maintaining operational efficiency (Beier and Wagner, 2016).

A multitude of studies have categorised factors influencing user workarounds into three areas: system-oriented, people-oriented, and interaction-oriented aspects (Ali et al., 2016; Haddara and Moen, 2017; Klaus and Blanton, 2010; Markus, 1983). The system-oriented approach attributes resistance to technology-related factors, such as user interface design, performance, security concerns, ease of use, and centralisation levels (Persson and Vesterlund, 2022; Klaus and Blanton, 2010). These factors can hinder user adoption and system interaction. In the retail context, poorly designed ESS platforms may lead employees to create manual processes, such as recording inventory outside the system or bypassing digital workflows entirely (Iyamu, 2020). Conversely, the people-oriented approach suggests that resistance arises from individual or group characteristics, including user attitudes, traits, and prior experience with technology (Markus, 1983; Norzaidi et al., 2008; Ratten, 2015). Lastly, the interaction-oriented approach posits that resistance emerges from the interplay between user and system characteristics (Ali et al., 2016; Klaus and Blanton, 2010). In retail organisations, this interplay is particularly pronounced, as diverse employee roles and skill levels interact with ESS in varied ways, further shaping resistance patterns. In retail organisations, this interplay is particularly pronounced, as diverse employee roles and skill levels interact with ESS in varied ways, further shaping resistance patterns (Iyamu, 2020; Davison et al., 2019). The workarounds areas and the factors that influence user resistance and the development of workarounds are summarised in Table 2.7.

Table 2.7 Factors Affecting User Workarounds

Area of resistance	Factors	Author(s)
System-oriented	User interface, ease of use	Markus, 1983; Nov and Ye, 2008; Jin, 2014; Klaus and Blanton, 2010; Ali et al., 2016; Borisova et al., 2019
	System reliability and data quality issues	Ali et al., 2016; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016; Dickson and Wetherbe, 1985; Hirschhiem and

		Newman, 1988; Klaus and Blanton, 2010; Markus, 1983
	Ease of using a new system	Dickson and Wetherbe, 1985; Dwivedi et al., 2015; Klaus and Blanton, 2010; Ali et al., 2016; Edwards, 2019
	Improved task performance and decision quality	Lapointe and Rivard, 2005; Ali et al., 2016; Edwards, 2019
	User involvement	Ives and Olson, 1984; Edwards, 2019
	Experienced-based perceptions	Carney, 2002; Venkatesh and Davis, 1996, 2000
People-oriented	Background, traits, attitudes and experiences	Markus, 1983; Borisova et al., 2019
	Impact of internal and external influences	Choudrie and Zamani, 2016; Martinko et al., 1996
	Positive expectancies	Bukhari, 2005; Norzaidi et al., 2008
	Individual vs. group level resistance	Lapointe and Rivard, 2005
	IT skills	Besson and Rowe, 2001; Jiang et al., 2000; Krovi, 1983; Markus et al., 2000; Ratten, 2015; ; Orser et al., 2019
	Changes in job content	Dwivedi et al., 2015; Jiang et al., 2000; Stein et al., 2015; Chin et al., 2020
	Special training programs to reduce anxiety and negative attitudes	Orser et al., 2019; Borisova et al., 2019
	Cynicism	Selander and Henfridsson, 2012; Lawrence and Tar, 2018

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

	Personality factors (such as age, education, needs, communication, training)	Dickson and Wetherbe, 1985; Dwivedi et al., 2015; Fuerst and Cheney, 1982; Gërguri-Rashiti et al., 2017; Sander and Courtent, 1985
Interaction-oriented	Perceived social losses caused by interactions between people and technology	Markus, 1983; Kim and Kankanhalli, 2009; Aalbers and Whelan, 2021
	Increased access to data but lower autonomy	DeSanctis and Courtney, 1983; Dickson and Wetherbe, 1985; Jiang et al., 2000; Joshi, 1991; Lapointe and Rivard, 2005, 2007; Borisova et al., 2019; Chin et al., 2020
	Psychological contracts and new technology	Klaus and Blanton, 2010; Stein et al., 2015
	Lack of organisational fit	Meissonier et al., 2013; Orser et al., 2019
	Social influence	Eckhardt et al., 2009; Kim and Kankanhalli, 2009; Borisova et al., 2019; Chin et al., 2020
	Uncertainty	Dwivedi et al., 2015; Jiang et al., 2000; Waddell and Sohal, 1988; Chen and Kuo, 2017

The factors discussed above and presented in Table 2.7 highlight the multidimensional nature of workarounds and their underlying influences in each area. Understanding these factors can assist organisations in identifying potential challenges and developing strategies to mitigate user resistance, particularly in diverse and fast-paced environments like retail. In retail organisations, where the interplay between varied roles, technological capabilities, and operational demands is complex, addressing these factors becomes even more critical for effective and successful ESN usage (Davison et al., 2019; Iyamu, 2020).

Recognising that each factor requires a distinct response, users employ various types of workarounds to navigate the obstacles presented by the different areas (Alter, 2014). By understanding the underlying factors and the corresponding workarounds, organisations can

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

gain insights into user behaviour and tailor their approaches to enhance system acceptance and utilisation. In the retail sector, this insight is especially valuable, given the sector's reliance on seamless collaboration and communication for operational success (Woods et al., 2022).

To explore deeper into the nature of these workarounds and investigate their implications, the subsequent section will provide a comprehensive examination of the different types of workarounds. This analysis will shed light on the specific strategies employed by users, the motivations behind their choices, and the potential benefits and limitations associated with each workaround type. By incorporating examples from retail, this discussion will further contextualise how employees in this sector adapt to technology, offering a perspective on resistance and workaround dynamics. Understanding the details of these workarounds will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of user resistance and inform strategies for managing and mitigating resistance in the context of ESN usage.

2.3.1 Types of Workarounds

The concept of workarounds, extensively examined in the literature, encompasses various types categorised based on their nature and function. Alter (2014) identified eleven distinct types, each addressing specific challenges within work systems. These types include strategies devised to overcome inadequate IT functionality, such as setting minimum costs for free items in enterprise software systems (Strong and Volkoff, 2010). Additionally, workarounds are designed to navigate constraints or anomalies within established processes, like submitting temporary data to bypass entry requirements (Strong and Miller, 1995). Tactics employed to tackle temporary disruptions within work processes are also observed, such as adapting barcode systems in healthcare to accommodate process disturbances (Koppel et al., 2008).

Quick solutions implemented to circumvent transient issues are common, particularly in service-oriented industries like healthcare (Niazhami et al., 2011). Workarounds also involve enhancements to existing processes without additional resource allocation, such as sharing log-on sessions to avoid repetitive log-ins (Boudreau and Robey, 2005). In the retail sector, similar strategies might involve employees bypassing limitations in inventory systems by manually recording stock discrepancies or sharing credentials to expedite processes during peak periods (Iyamu, 2020; Davison et al., 2019). Improvisations are made when resources are lacking, like nurses performing procedures in emergency situations due to physician unavailability (Yang et al., 2012). In retail environments, this could translate to staff manually reconciling sales data

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

during system downtimes, ensuring minimal disruption to customer transactions (Davison et al., 2019).

Development of software workarounds or modifications to address resource deficiencies is another aspect, exemplified by the introduction of shadow systems (Brazel and Dang, 2008). Such workarounds are particularly relevant in retail settings, where resource constraints often compel employees to create alternative systems or processes to address gaps in functionality or accommodate unique operational requirements (Beier and Wagner, 2016). Workarounds aimed at averting errors through manual verification or double-checking are also common, commonly seen in data accuracy verification (Petrides et al., 2004). For example, retail employees may manually verify inventory records or use ad-hoc spreadsheets to maintain consistency across systems, particularly during high-demand periods (Iyamu, 2020). Additionally, workarounds are created to appear compliant with regulations or expectations, such as logging incomplete cases as completed to meet targets (Broadhurst et al., 2009).

Moreover, workarounds involving unethical or illegal activities are observed, such as medical coding based on payment incentives (Whooley, 2010). In retail, these might include manipulating sales records or altering inventory data to meet performance benchmarks or avoid penalties (Kacker and Perrigot, 2016).Workarounds involving collaboration with management approval are also present, such as strategies to enhance hospital inspection results through staffing manipulation (Pitches et al., 2003). Similarly, retail managers may approve unconventional practices, such as reallocating resources or temporarily bypassing system protocols, to ensure smooth operations during peak shopping periods or system outages (Beier and Wagner, 2016). Table 2.8 provides a concise summary of these workarounds and their key characteristics, as synthesised by Alter (2014), drawing from various studies exploring workaround phenomena (Gasser, 1986; Koopman and Hoffman, 2003; Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Halbesleben et al., 2008; Ignantiadis and Nandhakumar, 2009). Table 2.6 summarises eleven types of workarounds and lists the main characteristics of each.

Table 2.8: Different types of Workarounds

Type of Workaround	Main Characteristics	Author(s)
Overcoming Inadequate IT Functionality	Inadequate software, hardware, functions	Davison and Ou, 201; Alter, 2014

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Bypassing Obstacles in Existing Routines	Constraints, obstacles, anomalies	Alter, 2014; Supachayanont, 2011
Addressing Transient Obstacles or Mishaps	Barcode systems, process disturbances	Alter, 2014; Supachayanont, 2011
Responding with Quick Fixes	Quick solutions, service-oriented jobs	Alter, 2014; Niazhami et al., 2011
Augmenting Existing Routines	Share log-on sessions, bypass systems	Alter, 2014; Niazhami et al., 2011; Saleem et al., 2011
Substituting for Unavailable Resources	Inadequate staffing, improvisation	Alter, 2014; Boudreau and Robey, 2005
Designing and Implementing New Resources	Software workarounds, shadow systems	Alter, 2014; Fitzpatrick and Ellingsen, 2012
Preventing Mishaps	Manual double-checking, accurate data	Alter, 2014
Pretending to Comply	Creating appearance of compliance	Alter, 2014; Alojairi, 2010
Engaging in Unethical Practices	Lying, cheating, stealing, unethical	Alter, 2014
Colluding for Mutual Benefit	Collusion with management, mutual gain	Alter, 2014; Thomas, 2011

In addition to the various types of workarounds identified in different work contexts, studies such as those conducted by Kobayashami et al. (2005), Ferneley and Sobreperez (2006) and Choudrie and Zamani (2016) have specifically examined workarounds in the area of ICT. In

39

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

the retail sector, where technology is deeply integrated into operations, these workarounds often reflect employees' responses to system inadequacies or constraints during day-to-day operations (Iyamu, 2020).According to their research, generally workarounds in using ICT are categorised into three main types: hindrance workarounds, harmless workarounds, and essential workarounds (Choudrie and Zamani, 2016), which are summarised in Table 2.9. Each type represents a different scenario and purpose for employing workarounds in order to navigate challenges within the system.

Hindrance workarounds occur when the system processes are hindered or delayed, making it time-consuming and difficult for users to accomplish their tasks. In such cases, users resort to finding workarounds to bypass the obstacles and complete their intended actions (Lankshear et al., 2001; Prasad and Prasad, 2000; Van et al., 2019; Malaurent and Karanasios, 2020). For example, in retail settings, hindrance workarounds may manifest when employees face slow point-of-sale systems or limited inventory management functionality, leading them to use manual processes or parallel tracking systems to ensure customer service continuity (Beier and Wagner, 2016; Iyamu, 2020). These workarounds are necessary for users to proceed with their tasks in the absence of a fully functioning system (Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016; Van et al., 2019).

On the other hand, harmless workarounds do not have any adverse effects on the workflow or the accuracy of the data (Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016; Van et al., 2019; Wijnhoven et al., 2023). Users employ harmless workarounds as alternative methods or shortcuts to accomplish their tasks without compromising the integrity of the system or the outcomes (Button et al., 2003; Lapointe and Rivard, 2005). In retail, harmless workarounds might include employees streamlining inventory data input processes to save time during busy sales periods without affecting the accuracy of records (Iyamu, 2020). These workarounds enable users to navigate within the system more efficiently or streamline their workflow without negatively impacting the overall functionality or quality of the system (Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016; Van et al., 2019).

Essential workarounds are indispensable for users to successfully complete their tasks (Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016; Van et al., 2019; Wijnhoven et al., 2023). In situations where the system lacks the necessary functionality or features, essential workarounds become essential for users to fulfil their objectives (Kobayashami et al., 2005; Lankshear et al., 2001; Van et al., 2019). In the retail context, essential workarounds might

occur when point-of-sale systems are down, and employees resort to manual tracking of sales and inventory to ensure business continuity and customer satisfaction (Beier and Wagner, 2016). These workarounds are not merely convenient alternatives but are crucial for users to overcome system limitations and achieve their desired outcomes (Van et al., 2019; Wijnhoven et al., 2023).

By understanding the different types of workarounds, organisations can gain insights into the specific challenges users face and the strategies they employ to work around system deficiencies and limitations while interacting with the system. These adaptive strategies, demonstrate users' resourcefulness and ingenuity in navigating complex environments. However, despite their apparent usefulness in facilitating task completion and problem-solving, workarounds are not always the preferred approach within organisations (Van et al., 2019). Workarounds may introduce inefficiencies, bypass established protocols, and potentially lead to data inaccuracies or compromised system integrity (Van et al., 2019; Wijnhoven et al., 2023). For retail organisations, such inefficiencies can disrupt operational workflows, erode trust in system reliability, and negatively impact the customer experience (Iyamu, 2020). The next section explores the direct effects of workarounds, discussing how these adaptive behaviours can impact individual performance, system functionality, and overall work outcomes. By comprehending the consequences of workarounds, this study gained valuable insights into the consequences of these behaviours and their implications for organisational processes and technology utilisation.

Table 2.9: Types of workarounds

Type of Workaround	Key Characteristics	Author(s)
Hindrance Workarounds	Hindered, delayed processes, time-consuming, difficult, bypass obstacles	Lankshear et al., 2001; Prasad and Prasad, 2000; Van et al., 2019; Malaurent and Karanasios, 2020; Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016; Van et al., 2019

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Harmless Workarounds	No adverse effects, alternative methods, shortcuts, efficient, streamline workflow	Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016; Van et al., 2019; Wijnhoven et al., 2023; Button et al., 2003; Lapointe and Rivard, 2005
Essential Workarounds	Indispensable, lack functionality, crucial, overcome limitations, achieve objectives	Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016; Van et al., 2019; Wijnhoven et al., 2023; Kobayashami et al., 2005; Lankshear et al., 2001

2.3.2 Impact of Workarounds

Workarounds have direct effects that impact various aspects of work processes and outcomes (Alter, 2014). These effects encompass the continuation of work despite obstacles, mishaps (Koppel et al., 2008), or anomalies, the creation of hazards, inefficiencies, or errors (Alter, 2014), impacts on subsequent activities (Gasparas and Monteiro, 2018), and compliance or noncompliance with management intentions (Sobreperez et al., 2005).

Continuation of work despite obstacles, mishaps, or anomalies involves the repeated choices individuals face when work practices, hardware/software features, and the local environment do not align seamlessly (Alter, 2014; Wolf and Beverungen, 2019). Workarounds in such situations allow users to proceed efficiently and fulfil their objectives while bypassing cumbersome or counterproductive prescribed processes (Wolf and Beverungen, 2019). In the retail sector, this could include employees manually logging sales data during a point-of-sale system failure to ensure smooth customer transactions or using temporary fixes to update inventory records when faced with system glitches (Beier and Wagner, 2016).

For instance, in a call centre facing issues with a customer management system, customer service representatives employed workarounds by "lying to the computer" and "cheating the system" to navigate the contradictory requirements of using the new technology and fulfilling customer expectations (Russell, 2007; Alter, 2014). In medical contexts as well, workarounds enable the continuation of work despite physical obstacles and missing information (Koppel et

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

al., 2008; Cornford et al., 2009; Alter, 2014). Similarly, in retail, front-line staff might devise ad-hoc methods, such as using paper records or collaborative tools like WhatsApp groups, to communicate and coordinate during system downtimes, ensuring minimal disruption to operations (Iyamu, 2020).

Workarounds can also inadvertently create hazards, inefficiencies, or errors (Alter, 2014; Wolf and Beverungen, 2019). In the retail sector, these issues may arise when employees bypass official protocols to expedite processes, such as manually overriding inventory systems, which can result in inaccurate stock data or discrepancies in financial reporting (Beier and Wagner, 2016). In some cases, safety devices or alarms may be disabled to accomplish specific goals, potentially compromising safety (Alter, 2014). Notable examples include turning off safety systems in the Chernobyl nuclear disaster and disabling warning alarms at a telecommunication switching station that later caused flight disruptions (Cvach, 2012; Anthes, 1991; Alter, 2014).

Furthermore, workarounds may impact subsequent activities in diverse ways. They may lead to inaccurate data, defective products, or obscure latent errors and inefficiencies that should be addressed directly (Kmetz, 1984; Gasparas and Monteiro, 2018; Alter, 2014; Wolf and Beverungen, 2019). In retail, such inaccuracies could lead to misplaced orders, incorrect pricing, or insufficient inventory levels during peak periods, disrupting the customer experience and reducing operational efficiency (Iyamu, 2020). Additionally, workarounds may expose information that should remain private, compromising data security (Boudreau and Robey, 2005; Alter, 2014). Retail employees might rely on unsecure platforms, such as personal messaging apps, for communication, potentially exposing sensitive customer or organisational data (Singh and Sinha, 2020).

Finally, workarounds can exhibit varying degrees of compliance with management intentions (Alter, 2014). In some cases, workarounds align with management objectives, enabling organisations to adapt to changing realities or business needs when existing systems are insufficient (Strong and Miller, 1995; Baker and Nelson, 2005; Alter, 2014). However, workarounds can also challenge management intentions when supervisors agree to bypassing official systems and methods, or when contracts mandate using software that hinders efficient work practices (Sobreperez et al., 2005; Bowers et al., 1995; Alter, 2014; Wolf and Beverungen, 2019). In retail settings, this could involve employees neglecting mandatory system workflows to meet customer demands quickly, creating inconsistencies in data and reducing adherence to organisational policies (Beier and Wagner, 2016).

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Understanding the concept of workarounds, their types, and their effects is crucial to comprehending their implications for organisational performance and overall effectiveness. It can be observed that resistance and workarounds have been extensively studied across different sectors, often highlighting the challenges associated with technology adoption. However, while some studies focus on resistance and workarounds in the retail sector, these typically centre on ESS designed for external communication, such as customer engagement platforms (Beier and Wagner, 2016; Kacker and Perrigot, 2016). There remains a notable gap in understanding resistance and workarounds for the internal use of ESS, specifically ESNs.

This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how resistance and workarounds manifest in the internal usage of ESNs within retail organisations. By examining these dynamics, this research contributes to the literature by offering insights into the unique challenges faced by retail employees, providing strategies to mitigate resistance, and minimising the necessity of workarounds. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of tailoring ESNs to the distinct needs of internal retail operations, ensuring these systems are both effective and user-friendly.

Through its findings, this research aims to bridge the knowledge gap and contribute to the development of strategies that enhance ESN adoption and usage, fostering better collaboration, communication, and productivity within retail organisations.

To further contextualise these findings, the next section will present theoretical frameworks for understanding technology adoption and utilisation in organisations, offering a deeper lens through which resistance and workaround behaviours can be analysed.

2.4 Theoretical Frameworks for Understanding Technology Adoption and Utilisation in Organisations

This section provides a detailed examination of foundational theoretical frameworks that analyse technology adoption and usage within organisations. These frameworks are crucial for understanding how new technologies are integrated into corporate practices and how they influence individual behaviours and organisational processes. They offer valuable insights into the dynamics of technology acceptance in the workplace, particularly in the context of ESNs, by exploring the interplay between technological innovations and established organisational structures.

44

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

2.4.1 Diffusion of Innovations (DOI)

The Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) theory, introduced by Everett Rogers in 1962, examines how new technologies are adopted and diffused within a social system. In the context of ESNs, DOI offers a structured approach to understanding the factors that influence their acceptance and utilisation in organisations.

According to Rogers (2003), diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated through specific channels over time among members of a social system. An innovation, in this context, refers to a new concept or technology that is perceived as novel by individuals or units of adoption (Wang et al., 2010). ESNs can be considered innovations within organisations, as they represent new technologies or concepts introduced to enhance communication and collaboration among employees. Rogers (2003) identified five attributes of innovations, relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability, that significantly influence the likelihood of adoption. These attributes and their relevance to the adoption process are depicted in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Diffusion of Innovations (DOI)
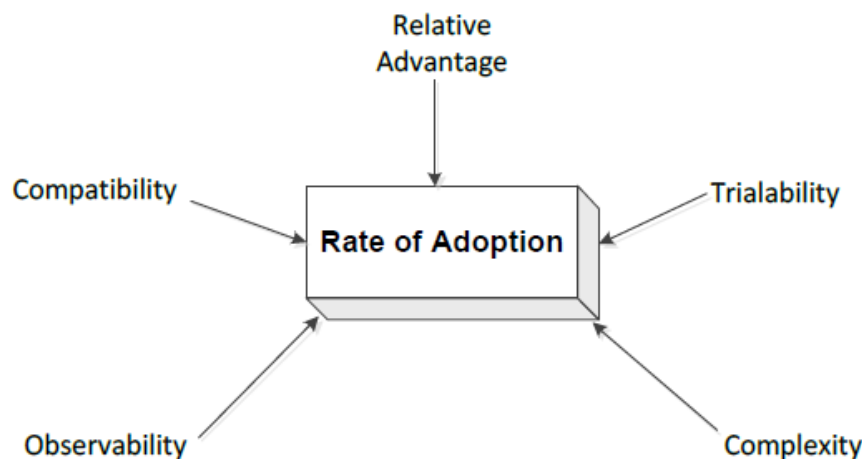
Source: Rogers, 2003: 222

The first attribute is relative advantage, which refers to the degree to which an innovation is perceived as better than the idea or technology it supersedes (Iqbal and Zahidie, 2022). In the case of ESNs, employees would be more likely to use them if they perceive them as offering advantages over traditional communication methods (Tajudeen et al., 2018). This attribute

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

refers to the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being better than the idea it supersedes (Rogers, 2003; Wang et al., 2010; Iqbal and Zahidie, 2022).

The second attribute is compatibility (Rogers, 2003). This attribute pertains to the degree to which an innovation is perceived as consistent with the existing values, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters (Rogers, 2003; Wang et al., 2010). If ESNs align with the existing work practices and values of employees, they are more likely to be used (Tajudeen et al., 2018).

The third attribute of DOI is complexity (Rogers, 2003). Complexity relates to the degree to which an innovation is perceived as difficult to understand and use (Rogers, 2003; Iqbal and Zahidie, 2022). If employees perceive ESNs as complex or challenging to use, it may hinder their usage and diffusion (Tajudeen et al., 2018).

The fourth attribute defined by DOI is trialability (Rogers, 2003). This attribute refers to the degree to which an innovation can be experimented with on a limited basis. If employees have the opportunity to try out ESNs and experience their benefits in a controlled environment, it can facilitate their diffusion (Tajudeen et al., 2018).

The fifth attribute introduced by DOI is observability, which signifies the degree to which the results or outcomes of an innovation are visible to others (Rogers, 2003). If employees can observe the positive outcomes and benefits of using ESNs, it can influence their decision to use them (Tajudeen et al., 2018). Furthermore, Rogers (2003) categorises individuals into different groups based on their usage behaviour. These groups include innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards.

Innovators are the first individuals to adopt an innovation (Rogers, 2003; Valle-Cruz, and Sandoval-Almazán, 2015; Iqbal and Zahidie, 2022). They are adventurous, risk-takers, and eager to try out new technologies (Iqbal and Zahidie, 2022). Innovators are often well-informed and have a high tolerance for uncertainty (Iqbal and Zahidie, 2022). In the context of ESNs, innovators would be the early adopters of these platforms, actively seeking out new ways to enhance their communication and collaboration.

Early adopters are opinion leaders within a social system (Rogers, 2003; Valle-Cruz, and Sandoval-Almazán, 2015; Iqbal and Zahidie, 2022). They are respected individuals who have a significant influence on the decisions and behaviours of others (Değerli et al., 2015). Early adopters have a keen interest in new technologies and are willing to adopt them relatively early in the diffusion process (Valle-Cruz, and Sandoval-Almazán, 2015). They serve as role models and help bridge the gap between the innovators and the early majority (Değerli et al., 2015).

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

The early majority represents the largest group of adopters (Rogers, 2003). They adopt innovations after a certain degree of uncertainty has been resolved and when the innovation becomes more established (Valle-Cruz, and Sandoval-Almazán, 2015; Iqbal and Zahidie, 2022). The early majority tends to be deliberate in their decision-making process and relies on the experiences and recommendations of the early adopters (Iqbal and Zahidie, 2022). Their adoption of ESNs would be influenced by observing the positive outcomes and benefits experienced by the early adopters.

The late majority starts using innovations once they have become well-established and widely accepted (Rogers, 2003). They tend to be more sceptical and cautious in their usage decisions, often requiring strong evidence of the innovation's benefits and success (Valle-Cruz, and Sandoval-Almazán, 2015; Iqbal and Zahidie, 2022). The late majority may use ESNs as the platforms become more prevalent and integrated into standard organisational practices.

Laggards are the last group to implement innovations (Rogers, 2003). They are often resistant to change and have a preference for traditional methods (Valle-Cruz, and Sandoval-Almazán, 2015; Iqbal and Zahidie, 2022). Laggards may only use ESNs when they have become the norm or when there is significant pressure from the organisation or peers.

2.4.2 Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), introduced by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), is a social psychology-based theory that aims to distinguish between beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviours. TRA provides a framework for measuring and understanding the relationships among these variables. Ajzen (1985) further explains that TRA is based on the assumption that individuals generally act in a rational manner by considering available information and deliberating on the implications of their actions.

TRA encompasses several variables, including attitude and subjective norm, as depicted in Figure 2.2. Attitude refers to an individual's overall feeling of favourableness or unfavourableness towards a specific stimulus object (Yzer, 2013). According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), attitudes play a significant role in shaping an individual's behavioural intentions. An individual with a positive attitude towards a specific behaviour is more likely to exhibit that behaviour.

Figure 2.2: Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)
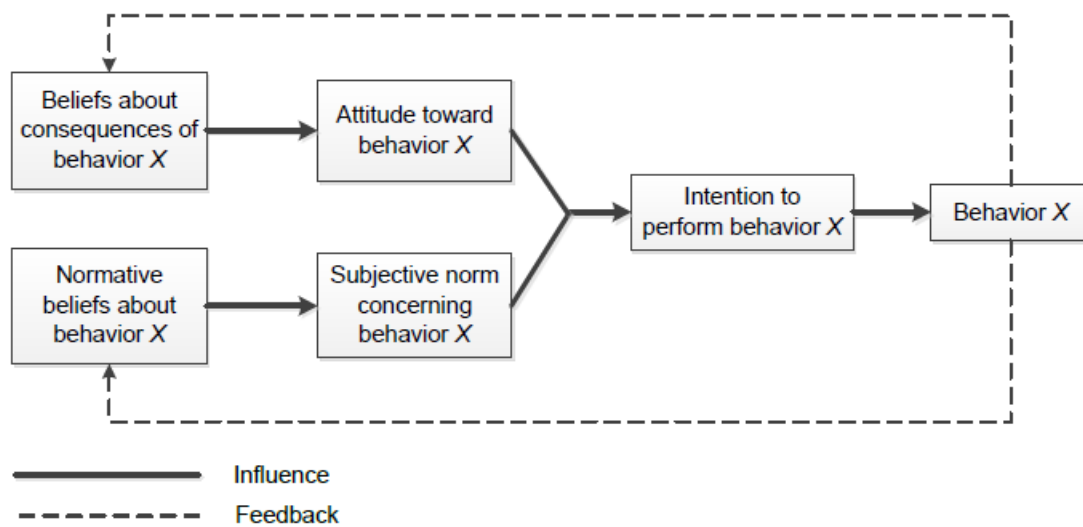
Source: Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975: 16

Subjective norm, as defined by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), refers to an individual's perception of the expectations held by important others regarding the performance or non-performance of a specific behaviour. This variable highlights the influence of peers or superiors on an individual's behaviour (Wooley and Eining, 2006; Wu and Liu, 2007Yzer, 2013; Montano and Kasprzyk, 2015). An individual's behaviour may be influenced by their perception of what others expect them to do or not do (Yzer, 2013).

In the context of the usage and diffusion of ICTs and ESNs, TRA can provide valuable insights into individuals' intentions and behaviours. By examining their attitudes towards ESNs and their perceptions of subjective norms within their social network or organisational context, it becomes possible to understand the factors that shape individuals' usage decisions and subsequent behaviours (Peslak et al., 2012; Cooke and French, 2008). Organisations can use TRA to identify key influencers and stakeholders whose attitudes and opinions may have a significant impact on the usage and diffusion of ESNs within the organisation.

2.4.3 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

To build upon the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and provide a more comprehensive framework for understanding user acceptance of computer technologies, Davis et al. (1989) developed the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). TAM focuses specifically on predicting, explaining, and increasing user acceptance of computer technologies (Ajibade, 2018). It has

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

been widely used in research related to technology usage and implementation, particularly within organisational contexts (Al-Qeisi, 2009).

The main factors considered in TAM are perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Davis et al., 1989; Al-Qeisi, 2009; Ajibade, 2018), as depicted in Figure 2.3. Perceived Usefulness refers to the degree to which an individual believes that using a particular system will enhance their performance or productivity (Davis, 1986). It encompasses the potential benefits and advantages that users perceive in adopting and utilising the technology (Ajibade, 2018). On the other hand, perceived ease of use pertains to the individual's perception of the system's simplicity, intuitiveness, and the absence of physical and mental effort required to use it (Davis, 1986; Ajibade, 2018). It focuses on the user's subjective assessment of the system's ease of learning, understanding, and operation (Ajibade, 2018).

Figure 2.3: Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)
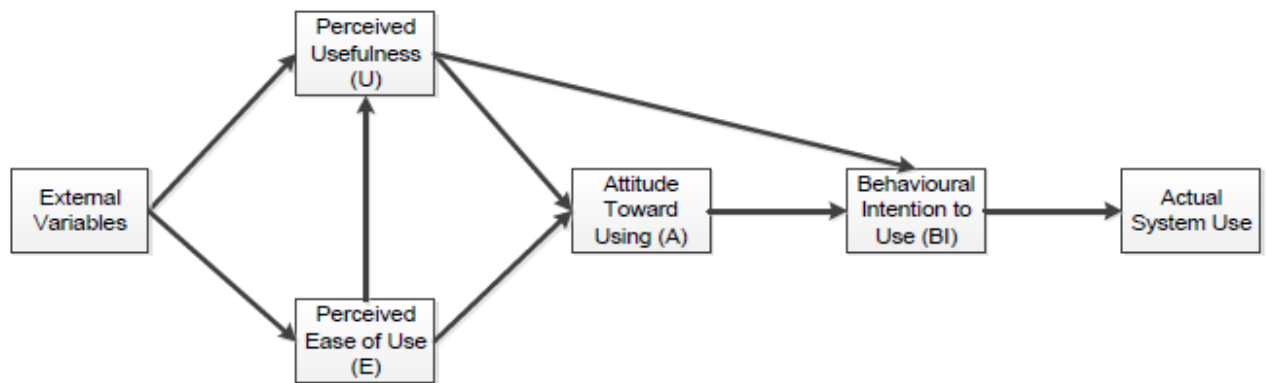
Source: Davis et al., 1989: 985

TAM suggests that users' intentions to use a technology are determined by their perceived usefulness and ease of use (Katebi et al., 2022). When individuals believe that a system will be useful in improving their performance and find it easy to use, they are more likely to accept and utilise the technology. Several studies have found that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are significant predictors of user acceptance and actual usage behaviour (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000; Moon and Kim, 2001).

2.4.4 Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)

The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), developed by Venkatesh et al. (2003), provides a comprehensive model that integrates various perspectives on user and innovation acceptance (Bin-Nashwan et al., 2023). UTAUT suggests that four core constructs

49

- performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions - directly influence behavioural intention and ultimately user behaviour (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Chang, 2012) (see Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5: Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) I
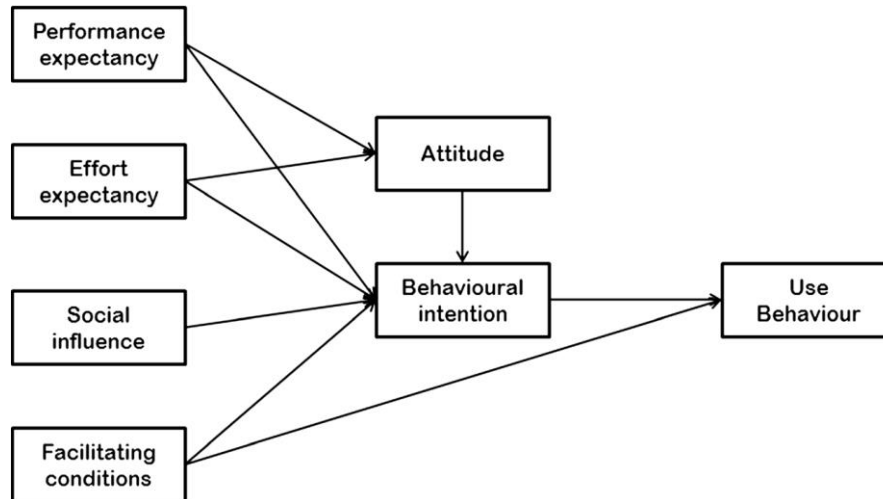
Source: Adapted from Venkatesh et al. 2003

Performance expectancy refers to the degree to which an individual believes that using the system will enhance their job performance (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Chang, 2012; Bin-Nashwan et al., 2023). It reflects the anticipated benefits and positive outcomes associated with using the technology (Williams et al., 2015). Effort expectancy, on the other hand, pertains to the perceived ease of use and the level of effort required to interact with the system. It addresses users' perceptions of the system's usability and user-friendliness (Williams et al., 2015; Bin-Nashwan et al., 2023).

Social influence captures the impact of social factors on individuals' acceptance and use of technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Chang, 2012; Dwivedi et al., 2019). It considers the influence of important others' expectations and opinions regarding the usage of the new system (Chang, 2012). The degree to which individuals believe that important others expect them to use the technology affects their behavioural intentions (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Chang, 2012).

Facilitating conditions encompass the perceived organisational and technical infrastructure that supports the use of the system (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Chang, 2012; Dwivedi et al., 2019). It reflects individuals' beliefs about the availability of necessary resources, training, and support to facilitate their engagement with the technology (Dwivedi et al., 2019).

50

The UTAUT model highlights the interplay between these four core constructs and their impact on behavioural intention and behaviour (Dwivedi et al., 2019). By considering these factors, organisations can gain insights into the key determinants of user acceptance and usage behaviour, allowing them to design interventions and strategies that promote successful technology adoption and implementation.

Moreover, recent studies have recognised the role of individual factors beyond the rational assessment of technology and the situation. Research in psychology suggests that technology usage decisions and usage behaviour are influenced by both deliberate, rational, conscious decision-making factors and non-conscious automatic cognition factors (Khatri et al., 2018). These non-conscious automatic cognition factors directly influence technology usage decisions and usage behaviour and indirectly shape the deliberate and rational cognition factors (Khatri et al., 2018).

To incorporate the impact of individual factors, Venkatesh et al. (2012) revised the UTAUT model. The revised model introduced four moderators, gender, age, experience, and voluntariness, to enhance the predictive power of the model by considering individual differences (see Figure 2.6). These moderators recognise that individual characteristics and contextual factors can influence the relationships between the core constructs and behavioural outcomes (Venkatesh et al., 2012; Chang, 2012; Alharbi, 2014; Bin-Nashwan et al., 2023).

Figure 2.6: Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) II
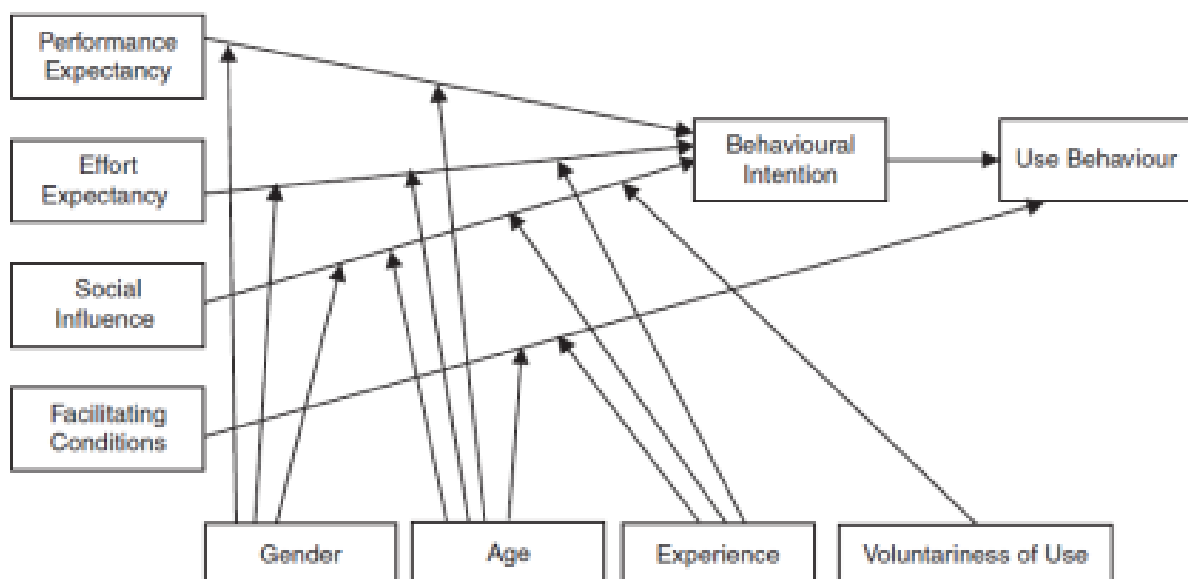
Source: Venkatesh, Sykes and Zhang (2011)

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

2.4.5 Innovation Resistance Theory (IRT)

While the previously discussed theories such as DOI, TRA, TAM and UTAUT focus on factors influencing individuals' acceptance, and use of technology, Innovation Resistance Theory (IRT) takes a different perspective by exploring the reasons for resistance and non-usage of innovations by consumers (Talwar et al., 2020). Addressing consumer resistance towards innovation is crucial for developing effective marketing strategies for new products (Sivathanu, 2018). Understanding why people resist using new products, despite intentions to do so, becomes especially challenging for firms launching radical innovations in the market (Talwar et al., 2020; Claudy et al., 2015; Ram and Sheth, 1989).

IRT provides a theoretical framework for comprehending this resistance-oriented behaviour of consumers (Ram and Sheth, 1989; Talwar et al., 2020; Claudy et al., 2015; Kaur et al., 2020). Initially proposed by Ram in 1987 and later modified by Ram and Sheth in 1989, IRT identifies various barriers that hinder the adoption of innovations (Talwar et al., 2020; Chakraborty et al., 2022). By exploring consumer resistance, IRT offers valuable insights into how individuals respond to new ideas and products (Talwar et al., 2020; Chakraborty et al., 2022). According to Innovation Resistance Theory (IRT), barriers that hinder the usage of innovations can be categorised into two main groups: functional barriers and psychological barriers (Ram and Sheth, 1989; Talwar et al., 2020; Claudy et al., 2015; Kaur et al., 2020). Functional barriers encompass practical concerns related to the functionality and utility of the innovation, while psychological barriers are linked to individuals' cognitive and emotional perceptions and attitudes towards the innovation (Ram and Sheth, 1989; Talwar et al., 2020) (Figure 2.7).

Figure 1.7: Innovation Resistance Theory (IRT)

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW
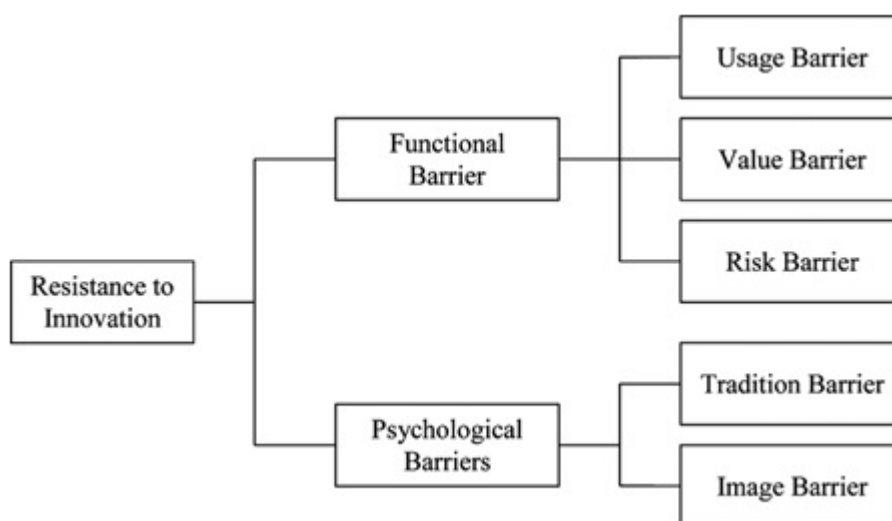
Source: Inspired by Ram and Seth (1989)

Functional barriers include three key types: usage barriers, value barriers, and risk barriers (Ram and Sheth, 1989; Talwar et al., 2020; Migliore et al., 2022). A usage barrier pertains to the ease of using the innovation and the changes consumers need to make in their existing routines or behaviours to incorporate the new technology or product effectively (Talwar et al., 2020; Migliore et al., 2022). It reflects the practical challenges consumers may face in using and integrating the innovation into their daily lives (Talwar et al., 2020).

The second functional barrier, the value barrier, revolves around the perceived comparative performance of the innovation in terms of its value proposition, particularly in relation to existing substitutes or alternatives (Ram and Sheth, 1989; Talwar et al., 2020). Consumers evaluate the innovation's benefits, advantages, and cost-effectiveness in comparison to other available options, influencing their willingness to adopt it (Migliore et al., 2022).

The third functional barrier, the risk barrier, deals with consumers' perceptions of the potential risks associated with adopting the innovation (Ram and Sheth, 1989; Talwar et al., 2020; Claudy et al., 2015; Kaur et al., 2020). These risks may involve financial implications, concerns about product reliability, or uncertainty regarding the outcomes of adopting the new technology (Claudy et al., 2015; Kaur et al., 2020). Perceived risks can act as significant deterrents to adoption, as individuals may be hesitant to take on potential negative consequences (Talwar et al., 2020; Migliore et al., 2022).

On the other hand, psychological barriers encompass two types: tradition barriers and image barriers (Ram and Sheth, 1989; Talwar et al., 2020; Claudy et al., 2015; Kaur et al., 2020). Tradition barriers are rooted in individuals' habits and established ways of doing things. Consumers may resist using innovations that challenge their familiar routines or customs, preferring to stick to familiar practices rather than embracing change (Talwar et al., 2020).

The second psychological barrier, the image barrier, is related to consumers' perceptions of the innovation's ease of use and its alignment with their self-image or identity (Ram and Sheth, 1989; Talwar et al., 2020; Claudy et al., 2015; Kaur et al., 2020). Individuals may resist innovations if they perceive them as complicated, difficult to use, or if they believe that adopting the innovation might negatively impact how they are perceived by others (Talwar et al., 2020).

The DOI, TRA, TAM, UTAUT, and IRT frameworks have provided valuable insights into the factors influencing user adoption and diffusion of ICTs. These theories have illuminated the role of individual beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and innovation attributes in shaping technology

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

acceptance and use. However, while these frameworks have been widely applied in various organisational and technological contexts, studies specifically addressing the adoption and utilisation of ESNs for internal communication within retail organisations remain limited.

Research has predominantly focused on external-facing ESS tools, leaving a notable gap in understanding how organisational factors—such as institutional norms, leadership styles, and workplace dynamics—affect ESN adoption for internal purposes. By situating ESN usage within the broader organisational context, this study aims to bridge this gap by exploring the unique challenges and opportunities that arise in leveraging ESNs for internal communication and collaboration.

The next section introduces institutional theory, a framework well-suited for examining how organisational structures, cultural norms, and external pressures influence the adoption and integration of ESNs. By synthesising these perspectives, this study seeks to contribute to the existing literature by providing a focused understanding of ESN utilisation within organisational settings, particularly in the retail sector.

2.5 Institutional theory

To fully appreciate the scope of institutional theory, it is important to first understand its foundation within broader organisational theories. Institutional theory examines how organisations are influenced by their environments, particularly the cultural norms, values, and regulatory frameworks that shape their behaviour and practices. For a comprehensive overview of the various theories that inform understanding of rational organisations, including the Garbage Can Theory, Organisational Social Psychology, and Institutional Theory itself.

Moreover, in order to understand institutional theory, it is important to have a clear definition of an institution. Various researchers have defined the concept of institutions, for example as "constellations of established practices guided by enduring, formalised, rational beliefs that transcend particular organisations and situations" (Lammers and Barbours, 2006, p. 357). Institutions are social structures, and include cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulative components that together with resources and associated activities bring stability and meaning to social life (Scott, 2005). Organisational legitimacy is therefore achieved based on social acceptability, credibility, and cultural support (Delmestri, 2007; Weerakkody et al., 2009; Genus and Iskandarova, 2020), which ultimately drives the institution's ability to survive and

54

thrive in its environment. This theory is particularly relevant for studying how external institutional pressures, such as cultural expectations or regulatory demands, influence the adoption and utilisation of ESNs.

Institutional theory considers organisations to be institutionalised, meaning that they have a distinct personality, and that monitoring is an important process, which involves the occurrence of specific forms, processes, strategies, outlooks and competences as they arise from patterns of organisational interaction and adaption (Selznick, 1957; Lammers and Garcia, 2017; Kemal and Shah, 2023). In other words, institutional theory aims to clarify the "the elaboration of rules and requirements to which organisations must conform if they are to receive support and legitimacy" (Scott, 1983, p. 140). This perspective provides a critical lens for examining the extent to which external pressures, including cultural expectations and regulatory demands, shape organisational structures and behaviours.

Thus, when technology is institutionalised, its acceptance and usage within the organisation are converted into routine activities, and users do not perform their day-to-day jobs without implementing the technology (Pishdad et al., 2012). For ESNs, this institutionalisation can be observed when employees incorporate the platform into their workflow as an essential communication tool, rather than as an optional feature. Technology acts as a necessary factor that integrates the sub-institutions within the organisation and shapes its system and legitimacy. This integration highlights the importance of aligning technological adoption with organisational values and routines to achieve legitimacy and foster sustainable use. These sub-institutions and the concept of organisational legitimacy are discussed in the following subsections.

2.5.1 Institutional View and Legitimacy

The institutional view posits that organisations operate within a broader environment influenced by various sub-institutions, such as organisational culture, social structure, and competitive forces (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Grewal and Dharwadkar, 2002; Zsidisin et al., 2005; Delmestri, 2007; Powell and DiMaggio, 2012; Genus and Iskandarova, 2020). Interactions between these sub-institutions contribute to the organisation's legitimacy, which describes how it evolves in terms of its structures, culture, and systems (Delmestri, 2007; Weerakkody et al., 2009; Pishdad et al., 2012; Genus and Iskandarova, 2020). In the context of ESNs, legitimacy is achieved when their adoption aligns with both internal organisational

55

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

norms and external expectations, fostering acceptance among employees and stakeholders. According to institutional theory, organisations tend to adopt behaviours and practices that are already institutionalised outside the organisation (Bag et al., 2021; Currie, 2011; Kabengele and Hahn, 2021; Kemal and Shah, 2023). This external adoption, however, often leads to resistance within the organisation, as employees maintain established behaviours and resist new practices mandated by management (Cachon-Rodríguezn et al., 2021).

The concept of isomorphism is a key mechanism in institutional theory, which refers to the process that forces organisations to resemble other units facing similar environmental conditions (Mola et al., 2023). Isomorphism arises from three underlying pressures in the institutional environment: mimetic, normative, and coercive (Mola et al., 2023; Currie, 2011; Kabengele and Hahn, 2021; Kemal and Shah, 2023). Mimetic pressures motivate organisations to imitate successful actors in their environment. Normative pressures stem from shared respect for unwritten codes of conduct or traditions, leading organisations to adopt similar practices to achieve legitimacy (Mola and Carugati, 2012). In retail, normative pressures might manifest in the adoption of ESNs as part of an industry trend towards digital transformation (Dvorak et al., 2021; Akram et al., 2021). Coercive pressures result from top-down control, compelling organisations to adopt certain behaviours (Mola et al., 2023; Currie, 2011; Kabengele and Hahn, 2021). These pressures collectively shape how ESNs are institutionalised and utilised, highlighting the interplay between external influences and internal adaptation.

Isomorphic pressures can act as inhibitors or accelerators of change depending on the situation. For instance, the widespread use of OSNs outside the work context accelerates the usage of ESNs in an organisation (Mola et al., 2023). However, behaviours dictated by management may face resistance if they conflict with already institutionalised behaviours outside the organisation (Cachon-Rodríguezn et al., 2021; Mola and Carugati, 2012). In retail organisations, this dual effect is particularly pronounced. The familiarity with OSNs among retail employees often drives mimetic adoption of ESNs. However, resistance may emerge when these systems disrupt long-standing operational routines or fail to align with the specific demands of the retail environment.

Legitimacy involves adherence to rules and regulations governing social relations, either directly or indirectly, as non-compliance may lead to resource rejection, formal sanctions, or disapproval from key stakeholders crucial to the organisation's success (Scott, 2008; Pishdad et al., 2012; Genus and Iskandarova, 2020). In the context of ESNs, legitimacy is achieved

56

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

when their implementation satisfies both organisational objectives and stakeholder expectations, ensuring seamless integration into existing workflows. This is particularly critical in the retail sector, where customer-facing operations and dynamic environments require ESNs to demonstrate immediate relevance and efficiency (Akram et al., 2021; Fortuna et al., 2021).

In the context of technology development within institutions, institutional legitimacy provides a valuable lens to examine the evolution and adoption of technologies (Azad and King, 2011; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016; Kemal and Shah, 2023). This framework is particularly relevant for understanding how ESNs are integrated into organisations, offering insights into employees' acceptance and usage patterns. By exploring the dynamics of institutional legitimacy, this study seeks to bridge the gap in understanding how organisational factors influence the effective utilisation of ESNs.

The development and use of specific technologies are influenced by a multitude of institutional pressures, stemming from social, cultural, organisational, technical, and other sources (Pishdad et al., 2012; Genus and Iskandarova, 2020; Jansma et al., 2020). These pressures can originate externally, such as from competitors, customers, and government regulations, or internally from legitimated norms, rules, and logics embedded within the organisation (Pishdad et al., 2012; Genus and Iskandarova, 2020). Organisations often respond to these pressures by aligning their technological practices with external demands or adapting internal working practices to better integrate new technologies (Azad and King, 2011; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016).

Institutional pressures are frequently categorised into two types: macro-level or top-down pressures, which include external and environmental factors, and micro-level or bottom-up pressures, which involve individual and collective behaviours within organisations (Azad and King, 2011; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016). At the macro level, external and environmental characteristics serve as conduits for institutionalised behaviour, while at the micro level, institutionalised behaviour is reproduced as a result of institutionalisation (Table 2.10). This dual perspective helps to understand the broader and more granular factors influencing ESN adoption and usage within organisations.

Table 2.10: External and internal pressures

Source of Pressure	Key Characteristics	Authors

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Macro level (top-down)	Originates externally (e.g., competitors, customers, government regulations). Driven by environmental characteristics.	Azad and King (2011); Choudrie and Zamani (2016)
Micro level (bottom-up)	Originates internally (e.g., legitimated norms, rules, and logics within the organisation). Reproduces institutionalised behaviour.	Azad and King (2011); Choudrie and Zamani (2016)

In terms of the usage of ESNs within organisations, top-down pressures, operating at the macro level, arise from the external organisational environment. These pressures include regulatory directives and compliance requirements, such as guidelines and rules set by entities like the FTC, which enforce global compliance policies and Codes of Business Conduct. Such external pressures shape organisational behaviours by establishing formalised expectations for ESN adoption and integration into IT systems (Choudrie and Zamani, 2016). For instance, in retail environments, compliance policies may drive the adoption of ESNs to streamline communication and ensure adherence to industry regulations, highlighting the external influences on internal technology use.

On the other hand, bottom-up pressures, emerging at the micro level, reflect the day-to-day challenges and constraints within organisations. These pressures are shaped by internal dynamics, such as employees' work ethos, how closely the ESN aligns with organisational values and established working practices. For example, in retail settings, the compatibility of ESNs with frontline employees' operational workflows is critical to ensuring their effective utilisation. Discretion to decouple signifies the user's flexibility to interpret the rules for ESN usage and how they couple with the system in their daily work. Material constraints are also considered, reflecting any limitations that may hinder employees from effectively utilising the ESN without interrupting their regular work activities (Choudrie and Zamani, 2016).

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Azad and King (2011) and Choudrie and Zamani (2016) conducted studies on institutional workaround practices, exploring the interactions between day-to-day activities within organisations and the extra-organisational environment to understand how they encourage the use of workarounds and influence the types of workarounds employed. Their research highlights the dual influence of internal and external factors on workaround behaviours. For instance, Choudrie and Zamani's (2016) research on ESN usage in large organisations revealed that the existence and types of workarounds in daily activities were influenced by material constraints, work ethos, and the organisational level. Similarly, the existence and types of workarounds in the extra-organisational environment were affected by the organisation's policy-based systems and the availability of formal guidelines.

Choudrie and Zamani's (2016) findings further revealed that in retail organisations, the practical challenges of aligning ESN functionality with operational workflows often necessitate workarounds to meet specific goals. For example, material constraints such as insufficient access to devices or unreliable networks may drive employees to adopt informal practices that bypass system limitations while ensuring task completion. Table 2.11 summarises the factors influencing workaround behaviours within institutional contexts, drawing on insights from Azad and King (2011) and Choudrie and Zamani (2016).

Based on these types of workarounds, it is evident that they predominantly occur during time-sensitive tasks or when existing systems fail to support users' immediate needs. In retail organisations, for instance, employees may develop informal practices to overcome system bottlenecks during peak shopping periods, highlighting the pressures of aligning technology use with time-critical operations. This underscores how workaround pressures can exacerbate user resistance, impacting the overall success of technology adoption (Azad and King, 2011; Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016). Understanding the interplay between institutional pressures and workarounds provides organisations with valuable insights to optimise technology utilisation while mitigating resistance.

Table 2.11: External and internal organisational factors affecting workarounds

Source of Pressure	Components	Explanation	Authors

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Day-to-day work	Material constraints	The availability of sufficient resources and materials to use the ESN.	Azad and King (2011); Choudrie and Zamani (2016)
	Work ethos	Perceptions of the ESN's usefulness and its value in terms of quality and time.	
	Organisational level	The position of the user within the organisation.	
Extra-organisational	Policy-based systems	The presence of strict, formal procedures that restrict workarounds.	Azad and King (2011); Choudrie and Zamani (2016)
	Formal guidelines	Availability of specific guidelines for ESN usage.	

The insights gained from institutional theory serve as a foundation for understanding how external pressures and social forces shape organisational behaviours, particularly in the context of ESN usage and digital transformation. Retail environments, characterised by dynamic consumer demands and competitive pressures, illustrate how such influences drive the alignment of organisational practices with institutional norms and expectations. Working practices in this context encompass the cognitive techniques, values, and norms employees adopt to perform tasks and address challenges within the organisation. Recognising the interplay between institutional influences and working practices is essential for understanding how employees respond to technological changes, whether through resistance, workarounds, or conformity. The next section examines the impact of institutional pressures on working practices, exploring how these responses emerge during the adoption of ESNs and digital technologies and their implications for organisational transformation and the cultivation of a digital culture.

2.5.2 Institutional Theory and Working Practices

The utilisation of modern computational technology, particularly ESNs, has significant implications for working practices within organisations. Traditionally, social structure and culture were considered the main modes of regulation in formal organisations. However, with

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

the introduction of technology, a third regulative model emerged, impacting both regimes of work and regimes of control (Kallinikos and Hasselbladh, 2009). Regimes of work encompass the cognitive techniques, values, norms, and orientations used to perform tasks, while regimes of control involve managerial methods to control the organisation (Kallinikos and Hasselbladh, 2009).

ESN utilisation directly affects working practices by influencing specific tasks and their execution (Kallinikos, 2003). Indirectly, ESNs introduce new modes of control and coordination within the organisation (Kallinikos and Hasselbladh, 2009). As a result, the roles and skills of employees undergo transformations to adapt to the changing digital landscape (Yeow et al., 2018; Dremel et al., 2017; Vial, 2019, 2021). To achieve a successful digital transformation, leaders must cultivate a digital mindset within the organisation and respond effectively to the disruptions brought about by digital technologies (Benlian and Haffke, 2016; Hansen et al., 2011). This might involve introducing new leadership roles, such as a Chief Digital Officer (CDO), to strategically align digital technologies with organisational objectives and foster collaboration between business and IT functions (Horlacher et al., 2016; Singh and Hess, 2017). These strategies are particularly significant in retail environments, where customer-centric operations demand seamless integration of technology.

Furthermore, digital transformation necessitates changes in employee roles and skills (Yeow et al., 2018). Employees who were not part of the IT function may now lead technology-intensive projects, while IT members are expected to actively participate in project realisation (Dremel et al., 2017). The advent of digital technologies also raises questions about skill development for existing and future workers (Colbert et al., 2016). Analytical skills become increasingly crucial in solving complex business problems, requiring a new focus on human capital and employee development (Dremel et al., 2017; Watson, 2017). This transition poses challenges beyond human resources, as organisations must accompany their employees through the process of skill adaptation and integration into new working practices (Karimi and Walter, 2015; Singh and Hess, 2020; Bawack et al., 2023). In retail organisations, where the workforce often consists of diverse roles and skill levels, ensuring effective upskilling and alignment with technology becomes particularly challenging (Rabak and Cleveland-Innes, 2006). These organisations must not only provide training but also address resistance that may emerge from employees unfamiliar with digital tools (Rabak and Cleveland-Innes, 2006; Meyer et al., 2020).

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

As a result, organisations must navigate these changes effectively to harness the full potential of digital transformation while addressing potential resistance and workarounds that may arise during this transformative journey.

The concept of working practices within organisations, as described previously, can be explained by institutional theory. It has been mentioned that institutional theory is concerned with how organisations conform to and are influenced by external norms, rules, and values in their environment (Choudrie and Zamani, 2016). It suggests that organisations adopt certain practices and structures because they are considered legitimate and socially acceptable within their institutional environment (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). For example, in the retail sector, adopting ESNs may be perceived as a step toward maintaining legitimacy by aligning with broader technological trends and customer expectations, even as employees and systems adapt to these new practices (Pinto et al., 2023).

In the context of ESN usage, working practices are subject to institutional pressures (Mola et al., 2023). As organisations undergo digital transformation, they may feel compelled to utilise ESNs and other digital technologies as a response to the changing norms and expectations within their industry or sector. This pressure to conform to digital trends and practices may come from competitors, customers, industry associations, or government regulations (Mola et al., 2023; Currie, 2011; Kabengele and Hahn, 2021). In the retail sector, such pressures are particularly pronounced, as consumer-facing organisations must rapidly adapt to technological trends to meet evolving customer expectations and maintain competitive advantage (Basker, 2016; Pinto et al., 2023).

Institutional theory also helps to understand the resistance and workarounds that may arise during the implementation of ESNs and other digital technologies (Mola et al., 2023). When organisations introduce new working practices, employees may experience uncertainty and resistance to change (Cachon-Rodríguez et al., 2021). Some employees may be hesitant to use new technologies or may try to find ways to avoid them altogether ((Mola et al., 2023). This resistance can be attributed to the strong influence of existing institutional norms and practices within the organisation. In retail environments, where established routines are often tightly aligned with operational efficiency and customer interaction, these norms can amplify resistance, making it crucial for organisations to address concerns and provide sufficient training to integrate new systems effectively (Iyamu, 2020; Aithal et al., 2023). Employees may

prefer to stick to familiar ways of working rather than embracing the new practices (Mola et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the introduction of ESNs and other digital technologies may challenge existing institutional norms and routines within the organisation (Bag et al., 2021). Institutionalised practices that were once deeply ingrained may be disrupted or replaced by the digital transformation. This can lead to conflicts between the old and new ways of working, creating a tension between what is considered socially acceptable and what is perceived as innovative and necessary for organisational growth (Kabengele and Hahn, 2021). In retail settings, where daily operations are often tightly structured to optimise efficiency, such disruptions can have a significant impact on employee productivity and overall organisational performance. These tensions highlight the need for carefully managed transitions to maintain balance between tradition and innovation (Iyamu, 2020; Aithal et al., 2023).

Moreover, institutional pressures play a pivotal role in shaping working practices, including resistance, workarounds, and conformity (Mola et al., 2023). Ads discussed earlier, these pressures are categorised into three main types: coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures (Mola et al., 2023). Coercive pressures stem from external regulations and mandates, leading to resistance from employees who may be hesitant to embrace the changes brought by ESNs and digital technologies. Some employees may resort to workarounds to avoid the new practices, while others conform to avoid potential penalties (Kabengele and Hahn, 2021). Mimetic pressures arise when organisations imitate successful practices of others, and this can result in resistance from employees who observe challenges faced by other adopters. However, some may adopt similar workarounds to cope with these challenges (Mola et al., 2023). Normative pressures, driven by social norms and values within the organisation, can lead to resistance if employees perceive the new practices as conflicting with their personal values (Mola et al., 2023). In the retail industry, these pressures can manifest uniquely, as employees juggle the need for efficiency in customer-facing roles with the expectations of adopting industry-standard digital practices. They may devise workarounds aligned with their beliefs or conform to the new digital practices to be socially accepted within the organisation and industry. Table 2.12 summarises how institutional theory influences working practices in the context of adopting ESNs.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Table 2.12: Institutional Theory and its Impact on Working Practices

Key Concepts of Institutional Theory	Mechanisms	Impact on Working Practices	Author(s)
Institutional Pressures	Internal	Organisations initiate digital transformation due to internal recognition of the need for innovation and efficiency.	Choudrie and Zamani, 2016; Mola et al., 2023
	External	External stakeholders, such as customers and partners, demand digital collaboration and communication, leading to the adoption of ESNs.	Choudrie and Zamani, 2016; Mola et al., 2023
Working Practices	Resistance	Employees resist the adoption of ESNs due to the disruption of existing institutionalised working practices.	Kabengele and Hahn, 2021; Mola et al., 2023
	Workarounds	Employees devise workarounds to avoid using ESNs if they perceive them as conflicting with established routines.	Kabengele and Hahn, 2021; Mola et al., 2023
	Conformity	Employees conform to the new digital working practices to align with the changing institutional norms and values.	Kabengele and Hahn, 2021; Mola et al., 2023
Institutional Isomorphism	Coercive	Organisations adopt similar digital practices to avoid sanctions and penalties from regulatory bodies.	Mola et al., 2023; Ramotar, 2016; Alexander, 2016

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

	Mimetic	Organisations adopt ESNs and digital practices similar to their competitors to be seen as legitimate within the industry.	Mola et al., 2023; Ramotar, 2016; Alexander, 2016
	Normative	Organisations align their digital transformation efforts with industry norms and best practices.	Mola et al., 2023; Ramotar, 2016; Alexander, 2016

Understanding the organisational and institutional context is critical, as this study focuses on the use of ESNs within organisations. However, it is equally vital to recognise that employees, as the end-users of these systems, bring individual characteristics and attitudes that significantly influence their engagement with ESNs. The literature highlights the importance of demographic factors such as age, gender, income, and education in shaping individual resistance and acceptance of new technologies (Laukkanen, 2016; Leong et al., 2020). Exploring these factors provides deeper insights into how diverse employee profiles impact the adoption and effective usage of ESNs. Therefore, the next section will examine the role of demographic factors, addressing their influence on employees' perceptions and usage of ESNs, and advancing our understanding of this pivotal aspect of the study.

2.6 Employees' demographics characteristics

Demographic factors such as age, education, and income are pivotal in shaping employees' use of technology, impacting the utilisation of ESNs. Age notably affects technology utilisation, with younger individuals generally more adept at embracing new technologies (McDonough, 2016; Fox and Connolly, 2018; Francis et al., 2019). Despite the growing adoption of ESNs across industries, research remains limited in understanding how demographic characteristics specifically shape ESN usage within organisational contexts, particularly in sectors like retail, where workforce demographics are diverse.

Moreover, the digital divide, representing disparities in technology access due to socioeconomic and educational factors further highlights gaps in existing studies. While the digital divide has been explored broadly in the context of technology adoption (Chipeva et al., 2018; Francis et al., 2019), its implications for ESN adoption and usage in workplace settings, especially in retail environments, have received limited attention. These gaps necessitate

65

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

targeted analysis to enhance digital literacy and bridge usage disparities effectively, a key contribution of this study.

2.6.1 Digital Generations

This sub-section explores how different generational cohorts, categorised by birth years, influence technology utilisation and perceptions within society and organisations. Key differences in social, political, and economic experiences shape distinct generational attitudes and behaviours towards technology (Inglehart, 1977; Padayachee, 2017).

The workforce comprises various generations: the Silent Generation (born 1925-1945), Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964), Generation X (born 1965-1980), and Generation Y (born 1981-2000). Each generation exhibits unique characteristics influenced by significant historical events and technological environments during their formative years. However, most studies tend to generalise generational influences on technology adoption without focusing on ESNs specifically. This study aims to bridge this gap by exploring how generational differences impact the use of ESNs in organisational settings, with insights summarised in Table 2.15.

Table 2.13: Generational Characteristics and Their Historical Influences

Generation	Birth Years	Characteristics	Key Historical Influences	References
Silent Generation	1925-1945	Loyalty, resistance to change	WWII, Korean War, Cold War, Great Depression	Levickaite, 2010
Baby Boomers	1946-1964	Competitive, strong work ethic, prefers face-to-face communication	Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam War	Knouse, 2011; Levickaite, 2010
Generation X	1965-1980	Flexibility, creativity, adept with technology	Rise of personal computing, end of Cold War	Hendricks and Cope, 2013; Knouse, 2011

Generation Y	1981-2000	Tech-savvy, diverse, seeks instant gratification	Rise of the internet, mobile technology	Kilber et al., 2014; Knouse, 2011

Prensky (2001) differentiates between "digital natives," those born into the digital era, and "digital immigrants," those who adapted to digital technologies later in life. This distinction highlights inherent differences in comfort and proficiency with technology across generations, a factor that significantly influences the adoption and utilisation of ESNs within organisations. In sectors like retail, where employees often span multiple generations, understanding these generational disparities becomes crucial for tailoring ESN implementation strategies (Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005; Prensky, 2001). Furthermore, the concept of the "digital divide," introduced in the mid-1990s, refers to disparities in digital access, skills, and opportunities across demographic groups. These disparities, particularly pronounced in workplaces with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, emphasise the need for targeted digital literacy initiatives to ensure equitable and effective ESN engagement across all levels of the organisation (Srinuan and Bohlin, 2011).

This section sets the stage for a deeper examination of the "digital divide" in the next part of the discussion, aiming to understand its implications and develop strategies to bridge the gap. By addressing this gap, organisations can promote a digitally inclusive environment that fosters collaboration and maximises the potential of ESNs for all generational cohorts, ensuring their effective integration into organisational processes.

2.6.2 Digital Divide

The digital divide refers to the disparity that exists between individuals who have access to technology and those who do not (Srinuan and Bohlin, 2011). This gap in access to ICT can be examined from three distinct dimensions: the global divide, the social divide, and the democratic divide (Norris, 2001). The global divide highlights the unequal distribution of ICT access among different countries, with more pronounced disparities between developed and developing nations (Norris, 2001). The social divide, on the other hand, focuses on the unequal access to ICT within a nation's society, particularly concerning the gap between the information-rich and information-poor segments (Norris, 2001; Srinuan and Bohlin, 2011). Lastly, the democratic divide pertains to the separation between those who utilise diverse digital sources to engage in public life and those who do not (Norris, 2001; Srinuan and Bohlin,

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

2011). These distinctions underscore the importance of understanding how digital access influences not only individual outcomes but also organisational engagement, particularly in the context of ESN usage. These digital sources encompass not only computers but also online materials, digital literacy, and access to community, institutional, and societal structures that support IT accessibility (Norris, 2001).

Moreover, despite having regular access to ICT, research highlights that effective and successful use of these technologies relies heavily on individuals' "digital skills" or "ICT skills" (Bonfadelli, 2002; Hargittai, 2003; Van Dijk, 2006; Warschauer, 2002; Yu et al., 2018). In organisational contexts, such as retail, digital skill gaps may influence employees' ability to utilise ESNs effectively, creating disparities in collaboration and communication (Beier and Wagner, 2016; Kacker and Perrigot, 2016). The digital divide exacerbates inequalities in opportunities, knowledge, services, and goods, hindering people from confidently and safely navigating the digital world (Serafino, 2019; Yu et al., 2018). In response to this issue, the concept of "digital inclusion" has emerged, aiming to help individuals become capable of using and benefiting from the internet (Maude, 2014). For organisations, addressing the digital divide through targeted initiatives can enhance employee engagement with ESNs and foster a more inclusive digital culture (Winasis et al., 2021). Policymakers and researchers have recognised the significance of digital inclusion and are implementing strategies to address the digital divide (Maude, 2014).

Digital inclusion is of utmost importance for employment participation in the rapidly evolving global economy, which increasingly relies on intense competition in technology utilisation (Walton et al., 2013). The prevalence of flexible production and service delivery systems has led to significant workplace changes, such as decentralised management, information sharing, cross-organisational networking, and flexible work arrangements (Kelliher and De Menezes, 2019). In retail organisations, these changes highlight the need to bridge the digital divide, as disparities in technology access and digital literacy among employees can hinder the effective utilisation of ESNs. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 accelerated the digital transformation, disproportionately impacting those who faced barriers to technology usage (Aissaoui, 2022; Bawack et al., 2023).

The preceding two sections have extensively explored two crucial aspects: institutionalised characteristics of organisations and demographic factors of employees. These factors collectively shape the extent to which employees engage with technologies such as ESNs. In

the retail sector, addressing institutional pressures and demographic disparities is particularly important to ensure effective ESN integration and usage (Dutta and Sandhane, 2022). Beyond considering the different pressures originating from the institutional context and employees' demographic characteristics, managers must also recognise the critical importance of the period of time for technology usage. Research has shown that mature companies, which allow a longer growth time for their digital transformation, can effectively alleviate concerns related to the arrival of new technologies and their potential disruption to existing business models (Henriette et al., 2016). In retail, where competitive pressures are high, allowing sufficient time for digital transformation can help organisations adapt their processes while addressing employee resistance and skill gaps. Embracing digital transformation driven by digital technologies has become strategically essential for companies aiming to not only utilise but also thrive in a rapidly evolving business landscape. Understanding the phenomenon of digital transformation within companies becomes imperative to grasp its impact, challenges, and potential strategies for successful implementation. The following section explores digital transformation, focusing on how organisations, particularly in the retail sector, can navigate its complexities to optimise ESN usage and foster innovation.

2.7 Digital Transformation

While digital technologies present opportunities for organisations to gain a competitive advantage, they also pose potential threats (Feliciano-Cestero et al., 2023; Vial, 2021). Therefore, organisations must respond strategically to navigate these challenges (Yoo et al., 2010). Vial (2021) categorises strategic responses into two groups: digital business strategy and digital transformation strategy. Digital business strategy pursues business value through the strategic use of digital technologies, inspired by business and IS strategies and aligned with the organisation's values (Bharadwaj et al., 2013; Grover and Kohli, 2013; Brown and Brown, 2019). On the other hand, digital transformation strategy guides the organisation's journey toward digital transformation and aids managers in navigating this process (Matt et al., 2015; Brown and Brown, 2019). Digital transformation strategy, particularly in sectors like retail, plays a critical role in rethinking traditional business models to integrate digital capabilities for operational efficiency and competitive advantage (Gouveia and São Mamede, 2022; Wang, 2021).

Although many definitions of digital transformation emphasise the use of digital technologies, some studies highlight that a successful transformation relies not only on technology but also on effective digital strategies endorsed by managers (Kane et al., 2015; Matt et al., 2015). In retail, this is evidenced by the adoption of advanced technologies like AI, IoT, and Big Data, which not only optimise internal operations but also enhance customer experiences (Kraus et al., 2021; Shen et al., 2019). Digital transformation strategies serve diverse goals beyond the organisation's operational or functional objectives, bringing together various threads of transformation. To achieve these outcomes, aligning digital transformation strategies with broader organisational goals, including consumer-centric approaches, is vital (Proskurnina et al., 2021). This alignment is particularly crucial in retail, where evolving consumer expectations and competitive pressures amplify the need for coherent and effective digital strategies (Har et al., 2022; Dutta and Sandhane, 2022).

Vial (2021) depicts a cycle where strategic responses, including digital business strategy and digital transformation strategy, rely on the use of digital technologies like OSNs, which fuel the disruptions and require new strategic responses. Simply employing digital technologies does not inherently create value for an organisation; instead, they must be contextualised within the organisation's specific needs and often involve significant organisational change (Markus and Robey, 1988). For example, in the retail sector, technologies like AI, IoT, and Big Data Analytics must be tailored to meet specific challenges, such as personalising customer experiences and optimising supply chains, to generate tangible value (Gouveia and São Mamede, 2022; Shen et al., 2019). Thus, the remainder of this section explores the various changes required for a successful digital transformation journey.

2.7.1 Organisational change and digital transformation

In the pursuit of a successful digital transformation, the literature underscores the significance of not only changing and redefining the business model but also addressing various dimensions of the organisation (Morakanyane et al., 2017; Piccinini et al., 2015). Vial (2021) highlights a series of changes required in value creation to harness the full potential of digital technologies. In retail, this includes not only adopting advanced technologies but also aligning organisational culture with digital innovation to meet evolving consumer demands and competitive pressures (Proskurnina et al., 2021; Dutta and Sandhane, 2022). However, these alterations in value creation cannot be accomplished in isolation; they necessitate broader organisational changes across multiple facets. Retail organisations, in particular, must adapt their internal structures

and workflows to integrate technologies seamlessly while ensuring that employees are equipped with the necessary skills and training to navigate the digital landscape effectively (Ferreira et al., 2020; Kraus et al., 2021).

One of the crucial aspects that organisations must address during their digital transformation journey is the organisational structure. As digital technologies are integrated into various aspects of the organisation, the conventional structure may no longer be adequate (Yeow et al., 2018; Fischer et al., 2020; Kane et al., 2017; Kane et al., 2015). Instead, organisations need to align their structure with the goals and strategies of the digital transformation, fostering seamless integration of IT and business functions (Bharadwaj et al., 2013; Galliers, 2011). This alignment enables agility and ambidexterity, allowing the organisation to detect opportunities for innovation swiftly and adapt to changes effectively (Sambamurthy et al., 2003; Günther et al., 2017). In the retail sector, structural changes often involve creating dedicated teams for data analytics or omnichannel integration, reflecting the sector's need to merge physical and digital channels for a cohesive customer experience (Shen et al., 2019; Proskurnina et al., 2021). Organisations may also adopt cross-functional teams that include marketing, IT, and operations experts to ensure seamless collaboration in deploying customer-facing technologies (Gouveia and São Mamede, 2022; Kraus et al., 2021).

Another critical dimension that organisations must address is the organisational culture. Embracing digital transformation requires a cultural shift to foster innovation, agility, and adaptability (Berghaus and Back, 2017; Bolton et al., 2017; Morakanyane et al., 2017; Weill and Woerner, 2018). A culture that encourages experimentation, risk-taking, and continuous learning can support the organisation in its digital journey. Retail organisations, for example, must develop a customer-centric culture where employees are empowered to leverage digital tools to enhance the consumer journey and personalise experiences (Proskurnina et al., 2021; Barbosa and Casais, 2022). Leadership also plays a crucial role in driving digital transformation initiatives (Horlacher et al., 2016; Li et al., 2018; Liere-Netheler et al., 2018). Leaders need to champion the transformation efforts, set a clear vision, and provide the necessary resources and support to drive organisational change. In retail, leadership often involves bridging the gap between traditional operations and digital innovation, ensuring alignment between strategic goals and workforce capabilities (Ameen et al., 2021; Dutta and Sandhane, 2022).

Moreover, employee roles and skills must be reevaluated and adapted to align with the demands of the digital era (Demirkan et al., 2016; Dery et al., 2017; Weill and Woerner, 2018).

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Upskilling and reskilling employees to equip them with digital literacy, data analytics, and other essential competencies become imperative. In the retail sector, this involves training employees to use technologies like AI-powered recommendation systems, IoT-enabled inventory management tools, and digital payment platforms, ensuring that they can deliver seamless and personalised consumer experiences (Shankar et al., 2021; Kraus et al., 2021). Moreover, fostering digital literacy among frontline staff is critical, as they often represent the direct touchpoints with customers in omnichannel retail environments (Barbosa and Casais, 2022). As digital technologies permeate various functions within the organisation, employees must be empowered and encouraged to embrace new technologies and ways of working.

In essence, the digital transformation journey demands a holistic approach to organisational change. It entails aligning the organisational structure, fostering a culture of innovation and adaptability, and empowering employees with the necessary skills and mindset to embrace the digital future. For retail organisations, this holistic approach extends to integrating consumer-facing and operational technologies to meet evolving customer expectations and competitive pressures (Dutta and Sandhane, 2022; Gouveia and São Mamede, 2022). By addressing these dimensions, organisations can navigate the complexities of digital transformation and emerge stronger, more agile, and competitive in the rapidly evolving business landscape. In the retail context, such efforts ensure not only operational resilience but also the ability to create meaningful consumer interactions in an increasingly digital-first marketplace (Wang, 2021). The subsequent sections will explore specific strategies and approaches that organisations can adopt to achieve successful digital transformation and sustain a competitive advantage in the digital age.

2.7.1.1 Changing the Value Creation Process during Digital Transformation

In the context of digital transformation, organisations are required to redefine their value creation process to adapt to the changing business landscape. Vial (2021) identifies four prominent changes that organisations should undergo to define new paths to value creation, encompassing value propositions, value networks, digital channels, and enabling agility and ambidexterity. In the retail sector, these changes are particularly evident, as companies transition to digital-first strategies to meet the demands of an increasingly tech-savvy consumer base (Shankar et al., 2021).

The first significant change pertains to value propositions, where digital technologies play a pivotal role in creating new value for customers (Barrett et al., 2015). Retail organisations

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

increasingly utilise technologies such as AI-driven personalisation engines and IoT-enabled smart shelves to provide customised and seamless shopping experiences (Kraus et al., 2021). This shift moves beyond traditional product sales to focus on service-oriented solutions that address evolving consumer needs, such as click-and-collect options and virtual fitting rooms (Porter and Heppelmann, 2014; Gouveia and São Mamede, 2022). By leveraging digital tools, companies can enhance their value offerings and provide personalised and engaging experiences to their customers. In retail, this has redefined how value is perceived, placing greater emphasis on convenience, customisation, and omnichannel engagement (Shen et al., 2018).

Value networks constitute the second critical change that organisations must consider in their value creation paths (Vial, 2021). The introduction of new technologies leads to a redefinition of value networks, as digital technologies facilitate direct exchanges among participants (Vial, 2021). In the retail sector, digital transformation has reimagined value networks through innovations like blockchain for supply chain transparency and AI for predictive logistics (Ozdemir et al., 2022; Shankar et al., 2021). These technologies enable seamless collaboration and communication across the supply chain, streamlining the flow of goods and services while fostering co-creation of value between retailers and their partners (Klötzer and Pflaum, 2017). For instance, retailers and suppliers can collaboratively optimise inventory levels through real-time data sharing, enhancing overall efficiency and responsiveness (Gouveia and São Mamede, 2022). Enhanced customer engagement through digital channels can also drive this co-creation phenomenon, further enriching the value proposition (Saldanha et al., 2017; Yeow et al., 2018).

The third change introduced by Vial (2021) focuses on digital channels and their impact on value creation. This change can contribute to value creation in two significant ways. First, businesses can create new channels, such as OSNs, to access and engage in direct dialogues with consumers (Hansen and Sia, 2015). In retail, omnichannel strategies exemplify this transformation, integrating digital touchpoints like mobile apps and e-commerce platforms with physical stores to deliver seamless customer journeys (Shen et al., 2018; Proskurnina et al., 2021). These digital channels provide retailers with insights into consumer preferences, enabling the development of better-tailored offerings and enhancing customer experiences. Second, digital technologies facilitate new algorithmic decision-making processes (Newell and Marabelli, 2015), empowering organisations to utilise software for efficient coordination of activities across different organisational functions. Retailers, for instance, leverage data analytics and AI-powered tools to optimise inventory management, pricing strategies, and

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

marketing campaigns, ensuring operational efficiency and resource optimisation (Wang, 2021; Kraus et al., 2021).

Lastly, enabling agility and ambidexterity represents the fourth prominent change in defining new paths to value creation (Vial, 2021). Agility, defined as an organisation's ability to detect opportunities for innovation and swiftly seize competitive market opportunities (Sambamurthy et al., 2003), becomes crucial in a rapidly changing digital landscape. In the retail sector, agility manifests in the ability to adapt quickly to shifting consumer behaviours, such as the increased demand for omnichannel shopping experiences or real-time inventory management during peak shopping periods (Wang, 2021; Proskurnina et al., 2021). For instance, retailers utilising AI-driven predictive analytics can anticipate and respond to trends, enabling faster restocking or targeted marketing campaigns (Kraus et al., 2021). Digital technologies also enable organisations to achieve ambidexterity, allowing them to effectively explore digital innovation while simultaneously leveraging existing resources (Haffke et al., 2017; Li et al., 2018; Svahn et al., 2017). Retailers achieving ambidexterity often balance investments in emerging technologies like augmented reality for enhancing customer experiences while optimising legacy systems, such as supply chain operations, to maintain operational efficiency (Ozdemir et al., 2022; Gouveia and São Mamede, 2022). This duality of exploration and exploitation can position organisations to remain adaptable and competitive in a digitally driven environment.

By embracing these changes in the value creation process, organisations can unlock new possibilities and capitalise on the transformative potential of digital technologies. In retail, redefining value propositions through personalisation, integrating digital channels for seamless customer engagement, and fostering agile, collaborative ecosystems ensure retailers can navigate evolving market demands and stay competitive in the digital era (Shen et al., 2018; Proskurnina et al., 2021). The subsequent sections will explore the specific strategies and approaches that organisations can adopt to effectively implement these changes and achieve a sustainable competitive advantage in the digital era.

2.7.1.2 Organisational Structure and Digital Transformation

As organisations embark on the journey of digitisation, they are confronted with the need to make various adjustments to their business scope. The previous sub-section highlighted the different changes in value creation that organisations undergo when implementing digital technologies. To ensure the successful integration of these changes into their operations, structural adjustments become imperative (Matt et al., 2015; Yeow et al., 2018; Fischer et al.,

2018; Vial, 2021). Matt et al. (2015) defines these structural changes as "variations in a firm's organisational setup, especially concerning the placement of the new digital activities within the corporate structures" (Matt et al., 2015, P341). The traditional view often treats IS and the business as separate structures that need alignment (Yeow et al., 2018). However, digital strategy emphasises the critical importance of integrating IT strategy with overall business strategy (Bharadwaj et al., 2013; Galliers, 2011), necessitating corresponding adjustments in the organisational structure (Yeow et al., 2018; Vial, 2021). In the retail sector, this alignment is evident in strategies such as integrating e-commerce platforms with supply chain management systems, ensuring seamless online and offline operations (Wang, 2021; Proskurnina et al., 2021). Retailers increasingly prioritise restructuring their operations to incorporate digital channels and streamline omnichannel approaches, aligning with the industry's evolving consumer demands and competitive pressures (Gouveia and São Mamede, 2022).

In the context of digital transformation, agility and ambidexterity emerge as essential capabilities (Earley, 2014; Maedche, 2016). To foster these capabilities and align IT and business strategies, various solutions have been proposed in the literature (Vial, 2021). One approach, suggested by Maedche (2016) and Sia et al. (2016), involves creating a separate team that operates independently from the rest of the organisation. This new structure is designed to offer a degree of flexibility that encourages innovation while still leveraging existing resources. On the other hand, Dremel et al. (2017) and Svahn et al. (2017) advocate for the creation of cross-functional teams that remain within the current organisational setup. In the retail context, such structures can take the form of digital innovation teams tasked with exploring cutting-edge technologies like AI for customer engagement or blockchain for supply chain transparency, while cross-functional teams focus on enhancing existing processes like integrating digital payment systems across channels (Kraus et al., 2021; Ozdemir et al., 2022). According to Dremel et al. (2017), a successful digital transformation is not solely reliant on extensive technology support within the organisation, but it also hinges on effective collaboration and alignment between the IT and business departments. Retailers navigating digital transformation have highlighted this alignment as crucial for implementing seamless omnichannel strategies and achieving customer-centric operational agility (Proskurnina et al., 2021). These strategies can help organisations foster a harmonious integration of technology and business objectives, allowing them to navigate the challenges of digital transformation more effectively.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

However, the literature also highlights that to overcome the digital divide and fully embrace digital transformation, organisations must consider cultural aspects (Dremel et al., 2017; Vial, 2021). While significant research has explored digital transformation in retail, much of this focuses on external communication with stakeholders such as suppliers and customers (Gouveia and São Mamede, 2022; Proskurnina et al., 2021). However, there is a notable gap in the study of internal communication within retail organisations, particularly how technologies like ESNs are adopted and used to enhance internal collaboration and streamline organisational processes. This lack of focus is critical as effective internal communication is integral to aligning employees with organisational goals and fostering a culture of innovation (Barbosa and Casais, 2022).

The cultural aspect refers to the mindset and values prevalent within an organisation, which can significantly impact its ability to adapt and thrive in the digital era (Dremel et al., 2017). In retail, fostering a digital culture that supports internal communication is essential, especially when transitioning to tools like ESNs, which are designed to enhance employee collaboration. Existing studies primarily examine the cultural alignment needed to meet customer expectations, but limited attention is given to how culture influences the successful adoption of internal technologies that connect employees (Ameen et al., 2021; Barbosa and Casais, 2022).

This study aims to address this gap by investigating how organisational culture shapes the adoption and utilisation of ESNs for internal communication in retail. By focusing on this underexplored area, it contributes to the broader understanding of digital transformation as not only an external-facing strategy but also an internally driven process. In the next sub-section, this chapter will explore deeper into the significance of organisational culture and how it influences the success of digital transformation initiatives. By addressing both structural and cultural elements, organisations can create a conducive environment for successful digital transformation.

2.7.1.3 Organisational Culture and Digital Transformation

Organisational culture plays a significant role in influencing various aspects of an organisation, such as job satisfaction, leadership, performance measurement, firm effectiveness, quality improvement, and customer experience (Roodt, 2002; Tuan, 2011; Den Hartog and Verburg,

2004; Maull et al., 2001; Mosley, 2007). As a result, it has been subject to diverse definitions by different researchers. However, most of these studies focus on how culture supports external digital transformation strategies, leaving a gap in understanding how culture shapes internal communication through technologies like ESNs in retail (Wang, 2021). In this context, culture is pivotal in shaping how employees engage with internal technologies, influencing their willingness to adopt tools designed for collaboration and operational efficiency (Barbosa and Casais, 2022). Table 2.14 presents a compilation of some of these definitions, showcasing the varied perspectives on organisational culture.

Among the definitions, Hofstede (1990) describes organisational culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one organisation from another." This definition emphasises the unique mental frameworks that shape the behaviours and perceptions of individuals within a specific organisation. Smircich (1983) complements this perspective, stating that organisational culture also includes "shared meanings, patterns of belief, symbols, rituals, and myth that evolve across time and that function as social glue."

Deshpande et al. (1993) conducted a comprehensive review of studies from anthropology, organisational behaviour, and sociology to define organisational culture as "the patterns of shared values and beliefs that help individuals understand organisational functioning and provide them with the norms for behaviour within the organisation." This definition highlights the role of shared values and beliefs in shaping employee behaviour and interactions. In the retail sector, where customer-facing activities often dominate cultural discussions, understanding how these shared values and beliefs translate into internal communication and collaboration is equally crucial. The integration of technology like ESNs within retail organisations offers a unique lens to examine how organisational culture influences internal operations and employee behaviours.

Another influential definition comes from Schein (1985), who views organisational culture as "the pattern of shared assumptions that a group learned as it solved its problems of external adoptions and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to a new member as a correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems." Schein further categorises organisational culture into three levels: Artefacts and behaviours, Espoused values, and Basic assumptions and beliefs. Artefacts and behaviours represent the visible aspects of culture that mark its surface and are observable elements within the organisation. Espoused values refer to the publicly stated beliefs and values that the

77

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

organisation upholds. Lastly, Basic assumptions and beliefs are the deeply ingrained, often subconscious, values and beliefs shared by members of the organisation that influence their actions and decision-making. In retail organisations, these levels of culture can be observed in how stores display their values to customers, but they also play a critical role in shaping internal interactions and the integration of technologies like ESNs for employee collaboration and communication.

Trompenaars (1993) adds that an organisational culture contains the models and standards that impact the behaviour of employees, further emphasising how culture shapes employee actions and responses within the organisational context. This perspective aligns with the retail industry's need to adapt internal cultural standards to accommodate digital transformation, particularly in fostering collaboration among diverse teams and roles.

Table 2.14: Definitions of Organisational Culture

Definition of Organisational Culture	Author(s)
The way we do things around here.	Deal and Kennedy (1983)
Deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs; shared by members of an organisation	Schein (1985)
Collective programming of the mind; distinguishes members of one organisation from another	Hofstede (1990)
Abstract and general concept; encompassing many aspects of organisations	Anthony (1994)
Deeply seated values and beliefs shared by personnel	Martins and Terblanche (2003)

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Pattern of values, norms, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions; may not have been articulated but shape behaviour	Armstrong (2006)
Set of values, meanings, behaviours, and organisational practices; representing the main filter in interpreting reality; fulfilling the function of behaviour orientation; organisational behaviour is influenced by culture; implementation of strategies affected by alignment with culture	Câpeanu-Sonea et al. (2010)

Various classifications of organisational culture have been proposed in the literature to offer insights into the different dimensions and levels that shape an organisation's cultural fabric. Among the most renowned models are Hofstede's five cultural dimensions, Schein's three levels of organisational culture, Trompenaars' four corporate cultures, and Deal and Kennedy's four generic cultural types (Table 2.15). In retail organisations, these models can be instrumental in understanding how cultural factors influence both external customer interactions and internal dynamics, particularly during periods of digital transformation.

Hofstede's model is based on five cultural dimensions that contribute to understanding organisational culture. These dimensions include power distance, which reflects the extent to which there is a belief among employees that certain individuals within the organisation hold more power than others. Uncertainty avoidance pertains to the level of concern employees have about the future, leading to hesitancy to change jobs in cultures with high uncertainty avoidance. Individualism vs. collectivism focuses on the degree to which employees are expected to perform based on their own interests or aligned with the organisation's interests. Masculinity vs. femininity dimension represents traditional male and female values, such as assertiveness and material possessions vs. healthy interpersonal relationships and quality of life. Finally, long vs. short-term orientation relates to the significance attached to the future vs. the past and present (Hofstede, 2003; Chhokar et al., 2001). For retail, these dimensions may manifest in various ways, such as the distribution of decision-making power across store hierarchies, the emphasis on teamwork in customer-facing roles, and the prioritisation of long-term customer relationships over immediate sales goals.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Schein's model explores the three cognitive levels of organisational culture: artifacts, espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions. Artefacts encompass the visible elements of an organisation, such as its physical attributes and observable interactions among employees. Espoused values reflect the expressed culture, including the mission statement, strategies, goals, and philosophies that are communicated throughout the organisation. Basic underlying assumptions represent the deepest level, comprising implicit hypotheses that remain unspoken and drive the organisation's core identity (Clark, 2002). In the retail sector, these levels are evident in the visible layout and branding of stores (artefacts), the customer-centric goals and strategies communicated to employees (espoused values), and the deeply ingrained practices that define the organisation's approach to customer service and internal teamwork (basic assumptions).

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's research introduced four ideal types of corporate culture: family culture, Eiffel Tower culture, guided missile culture, and incubator culture. Family culture is characterised by a power-oriented focus on individuals based on hierarchies, often led by a powerful father-figure boss. Eiffel Tower culture is task-oriented and emphasises organisational structure over the purpose of the business. Guided missile culture is objective-oriented and not based on hierarchies, with employees expected to do whatever is required to achieve the company's goals. Incubator culture prioritises employee development and is characterised by minimal structure and hierarchy (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2004). Retail organisations often adopt a hybrid cultural model, where family culture may influence small or family-owned retail businesses, while larger chains may exhibit traits of Eiffel Tower or guided missile cultures, prioritising structured workflows and goal achievement.

Additionally, Deal and Kennedy's classification identifies four generic cultural types: tough guy, work hard/play hard, bet-your-company, and process culture. Tough guy culture involves employees accepting high risk and receiving rapid feedback, often associated with high rewards and a demanding working environment. Work hard/play hard culture is commonly seen in sales organisations, where employees accept low risk but receive rapid feedback, and high-quality customer service is prioritised. Bet-your-company culture involves significant decisions made with results appearing after a period of time, common in development and construction businesses. Process culture, often found in public service organisations, emphasises adherence to work processes rather than focusing on end results, with limited risk-taking and feedback (Deal and Kennedy, 1983). In retail organisations, work hard/play hard culture often dominates due to the prioritisation of customer service and sales performance. However, elements of

80

process culture may also emerge in areas such as inventory management and compliance with standard operating procedures.

While these models provide valuable insights into organisational culture, they have also faced criticism and limitations. For instance, Hofstede's dimensions have been questioned for not considering the diversity within national cultures and underestimating the role of individuals in shaping cultures (Hsu et al., 2013; Cacciattolo, 2014; Taras, 2017). Schein's model has been criticised for not adequately addressing the active role of assumptions and beliefs in forming and changing organisational culture (Hatch, 1993; Martins and Terblanche, 2003). For retail organisations, such critiques are particularly relevant, as cultural dynamics often vary significantly between global and local operations, requiring a refined approach to understanding and adapting organisational culture.

Table 2.15: Dimensions of Organisational Culture

Dimensions	Keywords	Author(s)
Power distance, Uncertainty avoidance, Individualism vs. collectivism, Masculinity vs. femininity, Long vs. short-term orientation	Power distance, Uncertainty avoidance, Individualism, Collectivism, Masculinity, Femininity, Long-term orientation, Short-term orientation	Hofstede (1990)
Artefacts, Espoused values, Basic underlying assumptions	Artefacts, Espoused values, Basic assumptions	Schein (1985)
Family culture, Eiffel Tower culture, Guided missile culture, Incubator culture	Family culture, Eiffel Tower culture, Guided missile culture, Incubator culture	Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2004)

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Tough guy, Work hard/play hard, Bet-your-company, Process culture	Tough guy, Work hard/play hard, Bet-your-company, Process culture	Deal and Kennedy (1983)

Organisational culture plays a significant role in the success of digital transformation efforts. It affects how change is embraced and how creativity and innovation are fostered within the organisation (Cropley and Cropley, 2017; Laforet, 2016; Ogbeibu et al., 2018). In the retail sector, where digital transformation often requires significant shifts in both customer-facing and internal processes, a culture that encourages innovation and supports adaptation is particularly crucial. Cultures that are open to change and provide the necessary resources for employees to navigate transformation led to more successful outcomes (Wolf and Brennan, 2014).

For digital transformation to succeed, leaders need to foster a supportive and innovative culture that encourages employees to embrace change, learn new skills, and adopt new technologies. This transformational leadership style plays a crucial role in driving the organisation towards a successful digital transformation (Winasis et al., 2021). In retail organisations, fostering a culture of innovation can enable employees to align with evolving customer expectations and leverage digital tools effectively to enhance both operations and consumer experiences.

Overall, organisational culture is a complex and dynamic aspect of an organisation that significantly influences its ability to adapt to change, embrace innovation, and succeed in its digital transformation journey. Leaders must be attentive to the cultural dynamics within their organisations and foster a climate that supports creativity, innovation, and a willingness to embrace change. This supportive culture enables employees to be more receptive to digital transformation and contributes to the organisation's overall success in navigating the challenges and opportunities.

Furthermore, organisational culture plays a crucial role in shaping an organisation's working practices, and the utilisation ESNs is no exception. Implementing ESNs can significantly impact how employees collaborate, communicate, and share information within the organisation. The integration of ESNs may lead to the creation of new working practices, as employees adapt to the new digital communication channels and real-time collaboration tools. However, these changes can also be met with resistance from employees accustomed to traditional communication methods. In retail organisations, where the pace of operations and

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

reliance on frontline staff are critical, resistance to ESN adoption may be pronounced if the new tools disrupt established routines or fail to align with the fast-paced environment. Some employees may try to find workarounds or revert to familiar practices to cope with the shift in communication dynamics. The success of ESN adoption in transforming working practices largely depends on how effectively the organisational culture embraces and supports this digital transformation, encouraging employees to embrace the change and utilise the new tools to enhance productivity and efficiency.

As this study adopts the institutional theory to understand the influence of external pressures on organisational behaviours and cultural practices, it will also draw upon Schein's model of organisational culture to analyse and interpret the manifestations of these pressures within the organisation. By incorporating Schein's three levels of organisational culture - artifacts and behaviours, espoused values, and basic assumptions and beliefs - this research aims to explore how isomorphic pressures from the institutional environment drive the adoption and internalisation of specific cultural elements within the organisation. In the retail sector, these pressures may manifest in the push for digital transformation to meet consumer expectations and competitive demands, influencing both employee behaviours and organisational values. The combination of institutional theory and Schein's model provides a robust framework to examine the relationship between external influences, organisational culture, and working practices, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of how the institutional context shapes the behaviour and decision-making processes within the organisation. By leveraging both theoretical perspectives, this study seeks to gain valuable insights into the complexities of organisational change and transformation in the context of using ESNs.

Prior theoretical research has extensively examined the influence of organisational culture on digital transformation and technology adoption. However, existing studies predominantly focus on external communication and interactions with stakeholders, leaving a gap in understanding how internal organisational culture impacts the adoption and utilisation of ESS within retail organisations. This research addresses this gap by exploring the interplay between organisational culture, working practices, and the internal use of ESS, offering a focused perspective on digital transformation in the retail sector. The findings will extend existing theoretical frameworks, such as institutional theory and Schein's model of organisational culture, by applying them specifically to the internal dynamics of ESS adoption.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

The next section will present the conceptual framework, synthesising the insights from the literature and illustrating how this study contributes to bridging the identified gap, particularly in the context of internal digital transformation strategies within retail organisations.

2.8 Conceptual Framework

This section is about development of a conceptual framework that underlines how literature is integrated to extract key themes for this study. It is crucial to understand and explore the themes affecting the usage of the ESN in Sellers to develop recommendations, which lead to the successful execution of digital transformation initiatives within the Sellers.

As mentioned in the literature review, an ESN falls within the domain of IS and given that this study specifically focuses on the implementation and utilisation of an ESN within an organisation, it is taking an institutional theory perspective, as recommended by Choudrie and Zamani (2016). Therefore, the conceptual framework depicted in figure 2.1 is considering the Sellers as an institution. This perspective reveals that Sellers is influenced by both external and internal institutional pressures (Azad and King, 2011; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016).

The external pressures on digital transformation in the retail sector, influenced by factors such as competitors, customers, and government regulations, significantly impact technology usage and adoption among sellers. Drawing on insights from the usage and diffusion of ICTs theories, research highlights how these pressures not only compel retailers such as Sellers to introduce new technologies but also shape the duration and success of their digital transformation efforts (Grandon and Pearson, 2004; Kurnia et al., 2015). This dynamic is particularly evident in the retail industry, where the competitive landscape and customer expectations, as discussed earlier, necessitate a swift and strategic adoption of digital solutions to maintain market position and meet evolving consumer demands (Har et al., 2022).

Similarly, internal pressures within retail organisations, originating from established norms, rules, and organisational logics, play a crucial role in determining the trajectory of digital transformation efforts. These pressures, originating from the very culture and institutional logics that guide organisational behaviour and decision-making, can either facilitate or hinder the successful utilisation of technologies such as ESN (Pishdad et al., 2012; Genus and Iskandarova, 2020). The exploration of digital transformation accelerators in the retail sector, including the critical examination of organisational culture's role, provides a detailed understanding of these internal dynamics.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework
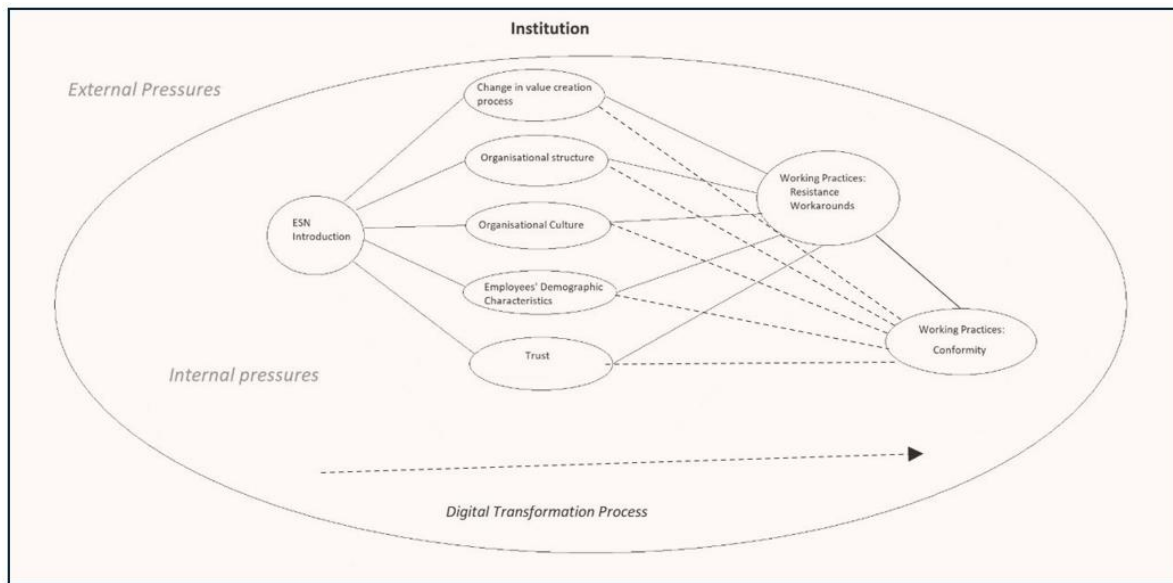
Source: Author's own illustration

This framework recognises four pivotal changes that Sellers must navigate to redefine value creation: value propositions, value networks, digital channels, and enabling agility and ambidexterity (Vial, 2021). These changes provide organisations with novel pathways to create value. The first of these changes, value propositions, emphasises the vital role of digital technologies in generating fresh value for customers (Barrett et al., 2015). Sellers can leverage digital technologies to create new, customer-centric value propositions. By implementing an ESN, Sellers can enhance communication and efficiency, ultimately leading to more effective responses to customer needs. The second critical change in organisations' value creation paths involves value networks (Vial, 2021). The introduction of new technologies triggers a redefinition of value networks, facilitated by digital technologies that enable direct exchanges among participants. For instance, through the implementation of ESN, Sellers' employees can enhance collaboration and communication, streamlining the flow of goods and services (Klötzer and Pflaum, 2017). These digitally enabled collaborations promote the co-creation of value within the organisation, with employees actively contributing to the process without being constrained by traditional limitations (Vial, 2021). The third change focuses on digital channels and their influence on value creation (Vial, 2021; Hansen and Sia, 2015). Implementing ESN enables Sellers' employees at different hierarchical levels to access and engage in direct dialogues with other employees and managers. These digital channels offer a platform for organisations to collect insights from employees in various roles and locations,

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

ultimately strengthening relationships and facilitating new algorithmic decision-making processes (Günther et al., 2017 and Newell and Marabelli, 2015). The fourth significant change refers to enabling agility and ambidexterity, which is integral to shaping fresh avenues for value creation (Vial, 2021). Sellers' agility allows the organisation to identify innovative opportunities (Sambamurthy et al., 2003) and swiftly respond to environmental shifts while capitalising on emerging prospects (Fitzgerald, 2016b; Günther et al., 2017; Hong and Lee, 2017; Huang et al., 2017; Kohli and Johnson, 2011; Vial, 2021). Moreover, Sellers' ambidexterity enables the organisation to effectively explore digital innovation by leveraging existing resources (Haffke et al., 2017; Li et al., 2017; Svahn et al., 2017a). These changes collectively shape the dynamic landscape of value creation within Sellers, driven by digital transformation and the utilisation of ESN.

As explored in previous section, organisational culture can be another theme that significantly impacts ESN usage. The impact of this theme has been viewed through the lens of institutional theory, which emphasises on the influence of Sellers' institutional culture on the integration of ESN. Incorporating Schein's organisational culture model in an institutional perspective study is particularly relevant because it allows this study to investigate into the concept of isomorphism within organisations. Institutional theory, which focuses on understanding how organisations conform to social norms and expectations, often discusses isomorphism, the process by which organisations adopt similar structures, practices, and cultures to fit into their institutional environment (Mola et al., 2023). Schein's model provides a framework for dissecting the layers of an organisation's culture, which can reveal how and why isomorphism occurs. For example, artifacts, which is the outermost layer introduced by Schein, includes the visible, tangible aspects of culture, such as symbols, behaviours, and physical structures Schein (1985). By looking through the lens of institutional theory, artifacts can reflect how organisations mimic external norms or practices to align with the expectations of their institutional environment (Mola et al., 2023; Currie, 2011; Kabengele & Hahn, 2021). Beneath the surface artifacts lie the espoused values of an organisation. These are the stated beliefs, philosophies, and goals Schein (1985). In the context of institutional theory, the espoused values can provide insights into the organisation's efforts to present itself in a way that is consistent with the institutional environment's expectations (Mola & Carugati, 2012). And finally, the core of Schein's model investigates into the deep-seated, often unconscious, basic assumptions that underlie an organisation's culture. These fundamental beliefs and values are less visible but play a very important role in shaping the organisation's actions and reactions

Schein (1985). In the context of institutional theory, these basic assumptions can uncover the true motivations behind isomorphic behaviour, shedding light on how organisations adapt to their institutional environment at a fundamental level (Mola et al., 2023; Currie, 2011; Kabengele & Hahn, 2021). By applying Schein's model to the study, this study would enable to explore the cultural dynamics at play and how they relate to Sellers' response to external and internal institutional pressures and expectations.

In addition, organisational structure adjustments are a critical component of successful digital transformation (Matt et al., 2015; Yeow et al., 2017; Fischer et al., 2018; Vial, 2021). This study explores how ESN is supported within Sellers and whether it is integrated into the daily routines of employees. This structural alignment is instrumental in ensuring the effective use of ESN.

Furthermore, demographic factors, such as age, gender, and education, exert a significant influence on the usage of technology (Laukkanen, 2016; Leong et al., 2020). Digital age has been discussed in the previous chapter and it has been discussed that age plays a pivotal role, as younger individuals tend to be more tech-savvy and comfortable with digital devices and platforms, often adopting new technologies more readily (Padayachee, 2017). For instance, the age of employees within Sellers can play a crucial role in determining their level of comfort and familiarity with ESN platforms. Younger employees may readily embrace and utilise ESN tools, recognising their potential benefits for communication and collaboration within the organisation. In contrast, older employees might require additional support and training to fully integrate ESN into their work routines, as they may face a steeper learning curve. Also, gender can affect ESN adoption within Sellers. Research suggests that men and women may have varying preferences and comfort levels when it comes to technology (Obisesan, 2014; Shaouf & Altaqqi, 2018). Understanding these gender-based differences can help tailor training and support programmes to ensure equitable ESN usage across all employees. Moreover, education levels can strongly affect technology adoption (Warschauer, 2002; Yu et al., 2018). Employees with higher levels of education are more likely to be proficient in using ESN tools and leveraging their capabilities effectively. Sellers can take this into account when providing training and support, recognising that education-related disparities can impact the utilisation of ESN within the organisation.

In addition, trust plays a fundamental role in shaping the usage of ESNs and significantly impacts the development of effective online communication (Baabdullah et al., 2014; Laumer

et al., 2018; Choudrie et al., 2018). Within the context of ESNs, trust is a foundation for fostering meaningful interactions and engagements among users. Building and maintaining trust in an online environment is of critical importance to ensure that users are comfortable and willing to engage with these technologies (Grandison and Sloman, 2000). As a leading department store, Sellers aims to foster a culture of transparency and collaboration, and the trust that employees place in the introduced ESN is central to this endeavour. This study conducted within Sellers seeks to understand how trust, encompassing dimensions of ability, integrity, benevolence, and predictability, influences the employees' interactions with the ESN and their willingness to embrace it as a tool for enhancing communication and collaboration.

Kallinikos and Hasselbladh (2009) have shown that technology impacts on working practices by defining new ways of doing tasks and by controlling these tasks via new methods. Working practices are transformed through the introduction of new methods and the redefinition of tasks, all controlled through innovative approaches (Kabengele & Hahn, 2021). In the context of Sellers, the implementation of the ESN significantly affects the organisation's work regimes and control mechanisms. It is expected that a direct relationship exists between the evolving working practices influenced by ESN utilisation and the actual usage of the network. The changes in how tasks are accomplished, communications managed, and collaborations facilitated, all driven by ESN integration, are integral to Sellers' journey toward digital transformation.

These evolving working practices and the usage of ESN are intrinsically linked to the challenges faced within an organisation like Sellers. Resistance by employees and the choice of workarounds are dynamics that can either hinder or support the adoption of ESN and digital transformation (Azad & King, 2011; Ferneley & Sobreperez, 2006; Choudrie & Zamani, 2016; Kabengele & Hahn, 2021). It is through a careful understanding of how these working practices are influenced by ESN and how employees navigate this change that Sellers can effectively address and overcome potential resistance.

In the broader context of the institutional view, organisations like Sellers operate within a dynamic environment influenced by sub-institutions. The interplay between these sub-institutions shapes Sellers' legitimacy and its evolution in terms of value creation, structures, culture, and systems. It is within this framework that the successful digital transformation journey unfolds, influenced by factors like trust, demographic considerations, and the organisation's ability to foster conformity among employees. In the case of Sellers, the

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

integration of ESN and the changes in working practices are significant aspects of this transformation, reflecting the organisation's adaptability and commitment to embracing the introduced ESN.

Moreover, Figure 2.1 depicts a significant aspect of the journey towards successful digital transformation within Sellers. It's evident that all the key themes influencing this transformation initially goes to resistance and workarounds, and then to conformity. This interconnection reflects the typical path an organisation undergoes when introducing an ESN. Upon ESN introduction, it's common to encounter resistance and workarounds as employees might not adapt to the new digital landscape immediately. However, Figure 3.1 also includes the dashed lines that bypass resistance and workarounds, linking the themes directly to conformity. These dashes denote a unique group of employees who, right from the introduction of ESN, entirely embrace the technology, implementing it into their daily routines. Although their numbers might be relatively modest, these early users are representative of the potential for swift transformation during the digital journey.

2.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has provided a comprehensive review of various literature related to the usage of a novel ICT - ESNs. It explored the emergence of ESNs and the resistance they face within organisations, leading to the development of workarounds. Different factors influencing workarounds and various types of workarounds were discussed in detail. Additionally, the chapter provided insights into the diffusion and acceptance of technology, considering both institutional and individual factors.

The digital transformation and the challenges organisations encounter during this process were also examined, shedding light on the changing dynamics within the workplace. Moreover, the chapter explored the significance of trust in online communication and knowledge sharing, highlighting its role in fostering effective collaboration.

Based on the comprehensive review of the literature and the conceptual framework proposed, it is evident that a deep understanding of digital transformation, especially within the retail sector and the utilisation of ESN, necessitates a thorough examination of both theoretical insights and practical applications. The exploration has highlighted the critical elements and dynamics that influence digital transformation journeys, underlining the significance of integrating technology with strategic business objectives to foster innovation and

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

competitiveness. Moving forward, the next chapter will explore the methodology, detailing the research design, data collection, and analysis techniques employed in this study. This discussion will provide a foundation for understanding how the theoretical constructs and models identified in the literature review are operationalised and examined within the context of the selected retail organisation. This methodological approach aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice, offering a structured pathway to investigate the factors impacting digital transformation and ESN usage effectively.

90

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

Chapter 2 of this thesis explored the literature related to ICT usage, resistance, workarounds, and digital transformation, culminating in the conceptual framework for this study. This framework aims to explore, understand, and explain the use of an ESN within a large organisation, "Sellers." To conduct this research in practice and validate the applicability of the theoretical concepts, a research methodology is required. This chapter outlines the research methodology framework employed in this study, guided systematically by Saunders et al.'s research onion model (Saunders et al., 2007, 2019). The research onion provides a structured approach, encompassing research philosophy, approach, strategy, choices, time horizons, and data collection and analysis techniques. Starting with the research philosophy, this chapter details the research approach, strategy, and techniques used in the study, aligning each with a layer of the research onion. By incorporating insights from Saunders et al. (2007, 2019), this chapter establishes a robust foundation for the research design, clearly explaining the rationale behind each methodological decision.

3.1 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy is central to shaping the course of a study, fundamentally influencing how phenomena are investigated and interpreted. It encompasses the set of beliefs about the nature of reality being examined, which profoundly impacts the entire research methodology (Bryman, 2012). Within Saunders et al.'s research onion model (2007, 2019), research philosophy is the foundational layer, guiding all subsequent methodological choices. This philosophical foundation informs the epistemological stance of the researcher, shaping perspectives on knowledge and reality while influencing the selection of approaches, strategies, techniques, and procedures.

The definition of knowledge itself underpins research philosophy (Goddard and Melville, 2004), setting parameters for what constitutes valid research and delineating pathways for acquiring knowledge. The choice of a research philosophy is inherently tied to the type of

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

knowledge being pursued, as different philosophies align with varying epistemological stances (May, 2011). This underscores the importance of selecting a philosophy that aligns with the study's goals and inquiry nature (Goddard and Melville, 2004; May, 2011). Establishing a clear research philosophy ensures coherence throughout the research process, from formulating questions to choosing data collection and analysis methods.

In line with Saunders et al.'s research onion model, the chosen research philosophy in this study serves as the cornerstone for all methodological decisions. This alignment ensures that the research is rooted in a coherent epistemological framework, enabling a systematic approach to exploring the investigated phenomena.

Collis and Hussey (2014) identify positivism and interpretivism as two primary epistemological stances that underpin research philosophy. Positivism advocates for objective analysis of observable phenomena, emphasizing quantifiable data and statistical methods. In contrast, interpretivism focuses on subjective meanings and experiences, employing qualitative methods to uncover complex social realities. Within the Information Systems (IS) discipline, a third perspective—critical realism—introduced by Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991), bridges the objective and subjective divide. Critical realism acknowledges an objective reality while recognizing that human experiences, perceptions, and social structures shape its interpretation, providing a nuanced understanding of IS phenomena.

By incorporating these epistemological perspectives, as outlined by Collis and Hussey (2014) and Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991), this study is well-positioned to navigate the complexities of ESS usage within a retail organisation. The following subsections provide a detailed exploration of each philosophy.

3.1.1 Positivism

Positivism is fundamentally concerned with explaining human behaviour and understanding the relationships between phenomena (Collis and Hussey, 2014). Positivist research typically seeks to identify and analyse defined relationships among variables, often through the formulation and testing of hypotheses, particularly in quantitative studies (Myers and Avison, 2002; Myers, 2009). As this research project does not aim to establish or test predefined hypotheses, and its primary objective is to explore and understand the dynamics of ESN usage, it is not aligned with a positivist approach.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

3.1.2 Interpretivism

Interpretivism, in contrast, is centred around understanding human behaviour by exploring the subjective and intersubjective meanings that individuals create through their interactions with society (Collis and Hussey, 2014; Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). Interpretive research is characterised by a focus on the multifaceted meanings, experiences, and interpretations of individuals (Collis and Hussey, 2014). In the context of this study, the relationships and meanings of ESN usage will be generated through communications with employees, making it inherently an interpretive study. This aligns with the research's emphasis on gaining insight into the subjective experiences and perspectives of individuals within the organisation.

3.1.3 Critical realism

Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) introduced critical realism as an epistemological perspective that goes beyond the mere explanation of human behaviour. Critical realism is concerned with critiquing existing social systems, uncovering contradictions and conflicts within their structures, and suggesting improvements. This perspective is often applied to studies that aim to challenge or transform established practices or structures (Pather and Remenyi, 2005). Since this study is not focused on critiquing existing social systems but rather on understanding the phenomenon of ESN usage, it does not fall within the area of critical research.

Therefore, following this discussion, this study pursued adopting an interpretivist research philosophy. This choice is rooted in the study's key aim to understand and interpret the experiences, behaviours, and meanings associated with ESN usage within a large retail organisation. An interpretive approach, which emphasises the subjective and intersubjective dimensions of human behaviour, is particularly well-suited to capture the richness and depth of the organisational phenomenon under investigation. This helps this study to explore the usage of ESN in a real-world context, highlighting the importance of individuals' perspectives and experiences within the organisation.

3.2 Research Approach

In the methodological framework of research, the research approach is essential, serving as a crucial intermediary within Saunders et al.'s layered research onion model (Saunders et al., 2018). Positioned directly after the foundational layer of research philosophy, the research approach plays a key role in guiding the overall strategy for data collection and analysis

93

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

(Saunders et al., 2007, 2019). It acts as a bridge, linking the deep-seated beliefs and assumptions about knowledge and reality, inherent in the research philosophy, to the practical, hands-on application of specific research methods. This bridging function outlines a clear path for gathering and interpreting data, ensuring a coherent and systematic transition from theoretical underpinnings to empirical investigation (Saunders et al., 2018).

By highlighting the importance of the research approach in connecting the philosophical to the methodological, this layer of the research onion underlines its function in defining the path of the research process. As identified by Gray (2013), the primary research approaches, deduction and induction, offer distinct paths that influence how data is collected, analysed, and understood within the context of the study's overarching aims. This positioning within the research onion model emphasises its integral role in shaping subsequent methodological choices and ensuring alignment with the research objectives.

Deductive research commences by starting with a general view or theory of a situation and then narrowing it down to specific details and observations (Saunders et al., 2018). This approach often involves the testing of predefined hypotheses, where researchers collect data to test these hypotheses. Deductive reasoning is commonly associated with quantitative research, where data is used to test and validate theoretical propositions (Gray, 2013).

On the other hand, inductive research, starts with specific details and observations and connects them to create an overview of a situation (Saunders et al., 2018). It involves moving from the particulars to the general, allowing themes and theories to emerge from the data itself. This approach is particularly well-suited for research that aims to build broader themes and theories, without imposing pre-existing theoretical propositions. It is often associated with qualitative research methods, where the goal is to generate new insights and understanding from empirical data (Gray, 2013).

In this study, the research approach employed is inductive. The primary justification for this choice lies in the nature of the research objectives and the data collection process. The aim of this study is to highlight and explore the themes and factors that affect the use of an ESN within an organisation. Rather than imposing predefined theoretical propositions, the research focuses on gathering data on employee behaviours and experiences. Moreover, the data collected from experiences and perspectives of the participants. By collecting data on employee behaviours and communications, this study aims to connect these specific details and observations to develop a comprehensive understanding of the ESN usage phenomenon. In this context, the

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

inductive approach aligns perfectly with the research's intent to explore, understand, and interpret the emergent themes and insights from the data.

Furthermore, the study does not begin with a preconceived hypotheses to be tested. Instead, it follows the path of inductive reasoning, allowing the themes and theories to naturally emerge from the participants' views and experiences. This approach is well-suited for research that seeks to gain a deeper understanding of ESN usage in a large retail organisation.

3.3 Research strategy

In navigating the complexities of research design, the selection of an appropriate research strategy is crucial, as articulated in the 'Research Strategies' layer of Saunders et al.'s research onion model (Saunders et al., 2007, 2019). This layer facilitates a choice among various research strategies, such as action research, ethnography, grounded theory, and case study research, each offering distinct methodological frameworks tailored to specific investigative needs. These strategies are not merely diverse in their approach but also flexible, allowing for customisation to meet the unique requirements of a study.

This study critically evaluates these strategies, delineating their individual merits and methodological underpinnings in the ensuing sub-sections. The aim is to explain why a particular strategy is most conducive to achieving the research objectives, ensuring a methodological alignment that is both rigorous and purposeful. By situating the discussion within the broader framework provided by Saunders et al., this section highlights the thoughtful deliberation behind the strategic selection, firmly rooting it in the study's overarching aims and the theoretical foundations established by the preceding layers of the research onion.

Therefore, to provide a clear rationale for the selection of the most suitable research strategy for this study, which was seen to be the case study, the following section explains more of its application in this research. The case study strategy is particularly well-suited to the research aim of this study that explores the use of ESNs within a retail organisation. It allows for an in-depth examination of employee behaviours, organisational dynamics, and the factors influencing ESN adoption and utilisation. For example, the case study enabled insights into how planners used Google Chat for peer-reviewed planning, integrating ESNs into their workflow to enhance efficiency. By utilising the case study method, this study ensures a robust methodological foundation that aligns effectively with its objectives, offering comprehensive insights into the phenomena under investigation.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

3.3.1 Case study

In evaluating the variety of research strategies pertinent to this study, the case study approach emerges as the most fitting to achieve the research objectives comprehensively. Yin (2009, p. 18) defines a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident." This definition highlights the value of the case study method for in-depth exploration within specific, real-world settings, making it especially relevant for examining phenomena where context plays a critical role.

The rationale for adopting a case study approach in this research is twofold. Firstly, the aim to identify, explore, understand, and explain the use of an ESN within a large organisation requires an investigative method that allows for an in-depth examination of complex, context-dependent phenomena. The case study method is inherently designed to address such needs by facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the ESN's integration and utilisation within the organisation's day-to-day operations. This approach enables the research to explore the detailed interplay between the ESN and organisational practices, which would not be as effectively captured through other methods.

Secondly, the case study's emphasis on 'real-life context' is crucial for this study because the use of ESNs in organisations is deeply influenced by specific cultural, structural, and operational contexts. By situating the research within the actual environment where the ESN is implemented and used, the case study approach allows for a detailed examination of how these contexts influence ESN usage behaviours. This aligns with the research objective to not only describe how the ESN is used but also to uncover the underlying factors and dynamics that shape its use within the organisation.

Given these considerations, a case study on the use of an ESN within "Sellers," a large retail organisation, offers a valuable lens through which to explore the phenomenon. The choice of "Sellers" as the case study site is informed by its significant size, diversity of departments, and the range of products and services it offers, coupled with its adoption of Google apps since 2014 for various purposes, including internal communications. This setting presents a unique opportunity to explore the ESN's impact on employee behaviour and the organisational communication landscape, making it an exemplary case to study within the UK retail sector.

When conducting a case study approach, single or multiple case studies might be used (Myers, 2009; Walsham, 1995). As mentioned by Yin (2003) a single case study is useful when the research is to study a person or a group of people. A single case study is also useful to evaluate the relationships originates from literature and explore new ones (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991). As Sellers is a famous retail organisation that offers immense, novel data for this study and allowed access to this researcher, the single case study approach was pursued.

This research has introduced many various terms that led to widening of the research area. To tighten and narrowed the scope the emphasis of this study was focused on using Information Systems and Management theories and concepts to explore, understand and explain the use of an ESS. Further, this study was contextualised on the UK retail sector, where Sellers was the chosen case study. The main reason for selecting the Sellers is a large retail organisation with over 10 departments providing different range of products and services. Moreover, Sellers has started using Google apps in 2014 for different purposes including internal communications.

3.4 Research Site Selection

3.4.1 Overview

The Sellers stores, substituted here for anonymity, is widely recognised for their unique business model, representing an innovative approach to retailing that places a strong emphasis on partnership and customer service. Established in 1864 in London, the company has grown from a single drapery store to a leading UK retail business, setting a benchmark for employee ownership and customer focus in the industry. This evolution into a successful enterprise is the culmination of over a century's efforts to create a distinct company ethos, owned by its Partners (employees), who are integral to the business's operations and decision-making processes. Today, the organisation boasts 85,500 permanent personnel who are Partners, owning and operating 32 Sellers' department stores across the UK, 247 Sellers' supermarkets, an expansive online catalogue business, and the comprehensive digital shopping platform, Sellers.com.

The foundation of Sellers' success lies in its commitment to reinvesting profits for the benefit of its Partners and enhancing customer experience. This unique business model has enabled Sellers to innovate continuously while maintaining a high level of service and quality. By fostering a culture where Partners are motivated to go above and beyond for their customers, Sellers has established itself as a personification of excellence in the retail sector. The effect of almost a century of striving to foster a different kind of company, one that is collectively owned

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

by its dedicated Partners, has positioned Sellers at the forefront of the industry, successfully navigating the challenges of retail evolution with agility and resilience.

3.4.2 Structure:

By an essential of widespread and venerable benefits, Sellers has an independent organisation that permits staff to pass on their own view, providing management certain straightforward and reliable visions. In Sellers, personnel are preserved as partners. The organisation's independent structure embraces a surplus of employee bodies and committees where staff can have their opinions anonymously. All staffs are recognised as associates and are undoubtedly preserved as such when it comes to distribution out the company's yearly returns. The Chairman, the Executive Directors, Partnership Board, formulates the managing body of the company (Figure 3.1). The Partnership board, which chooses five Partnership board directors, the divisional and branch level democracy, structures the democratic frames that stretches Partners an expression and clutches management to account.

Figure 3.1: Sellers' Managing Body
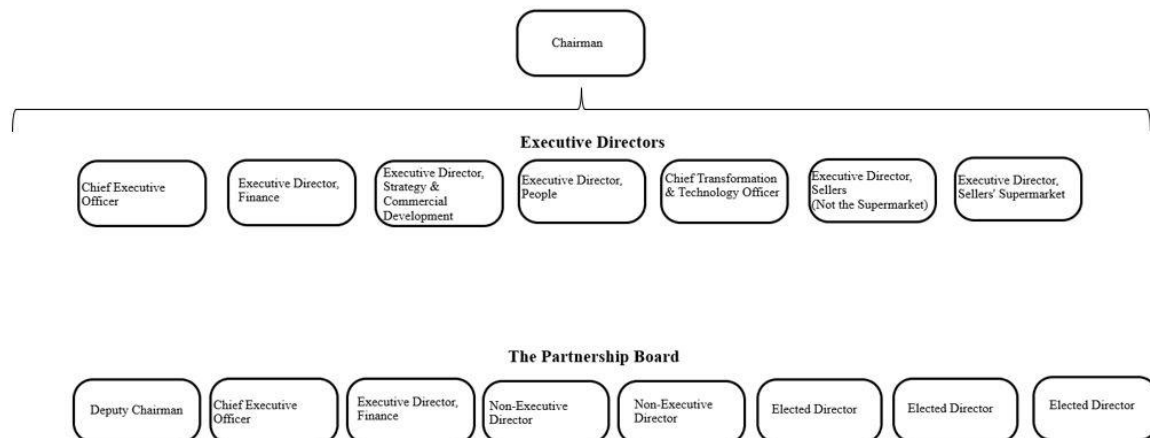
3.4.3 ESN at Sellers

To enhance internal communication among partners, Sellers began maintaining an active Google+ platform, with daily updates being posted since 2012. However, in 2014, the company announced its transition to a Google app called Hangouts for internal communication. This change aimed to address challenges in contacting partners, particularly when they were on the shop floor or visiting a site. The implementation of Hangouts across Sellers' stores and

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

supermarkets was anticipated to improve flexibility and expedite the delivery of customer updates.

Each Sellers' partner was provided with a Partnership Google account, which could be used to log into Hangouts. Through this platform, partners could share and request knowledge or information by participating in Hangouts groups, categorised by departmental areas. They could also receive responses and contributions from other partners. Additionally, Hangouts was integrated with Google Calendar and contact lists, allowing partners to arrange meetings by adding them directly through the application.

By the end of 2021, Hangouts transitioned to Google Chat and Google Meet, which introduced several enhancements over the original platform of Hangouts. Google Chat, designed to rival platforms such as Slack or Microsoft Teams, offered functionalities such as file sharing and group chatting, fostering team collaboration. Meanwhile, Google Meet developed into a dedicated video conferencing application, comparable to Zoom, offering a comprehensive suite for virtual meetings. Importantly, as Sellers already provided staff with Google accounts and email addresses, these platforms were free of charge, making them a cost-effective choice for enhancing internal communication and collaboration.

As part of its commitment to integrating digital tools into daily operations efficiently, Sellers implemented an infrastructure to manage and charge digital devices. The organisation introduced a locker area where employees could securely store and charge their devices during work hours (Figure 3.2). These lockers are specifically designed to accommodate various devices, ensuring team members have access to fully functional equipment throughout their shifts. This practical measure underscores Sellers' dedication to digital transformation and addressing the technological needs of its workforce.

To further illustrate the integration of ESNs at Sellers, Figure 3.3 depicts a staff member actively engaging with the ESN platform. This figure highlights the platform's practical application in daily operations. Additionally, Figure 3.4 presents an example of communication facilitated by ESNs, showcasing the types of interactions and information exchanges that enhance collaboration and communication efficiency within Sellers. These visual insights provide a tangible understanding of how ESNs have been woven into the organisational fabric of Sellers.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Figure 3.2: Device Lockers and Charging Station at Sellers
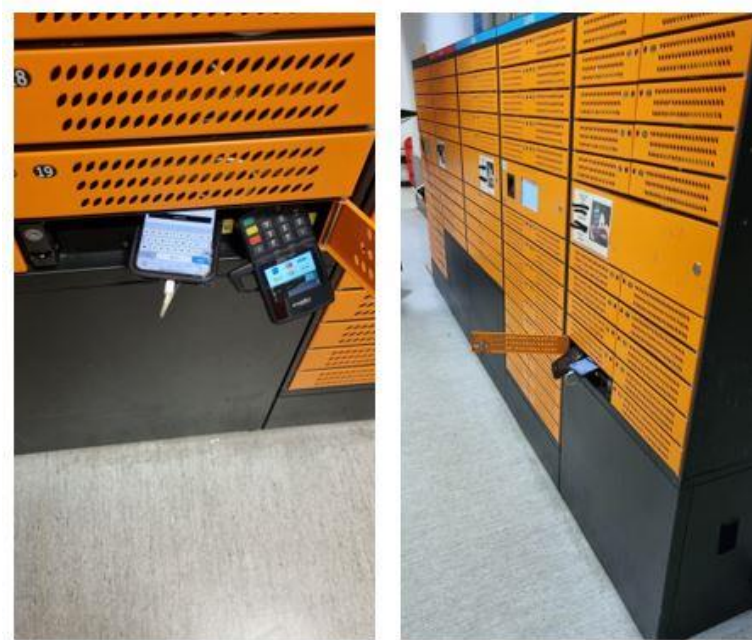
Figure 3.3: Sellers' Staff Member Utilising a Device for Work Tasks

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study
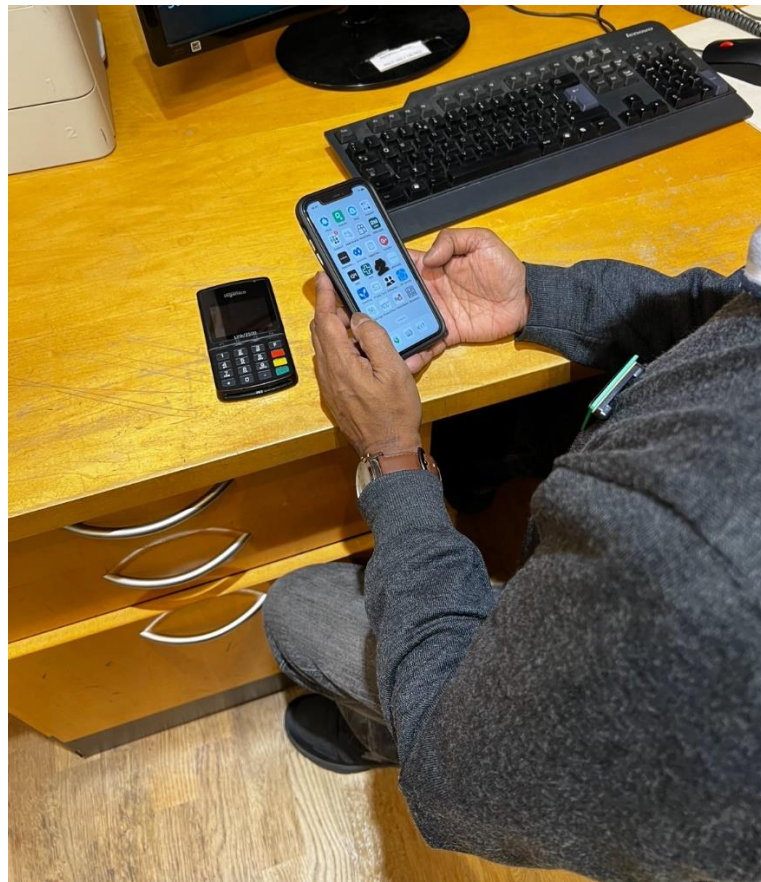
Figure 3.4: Example of ESN Communication Broadcast to All Sellers Staff
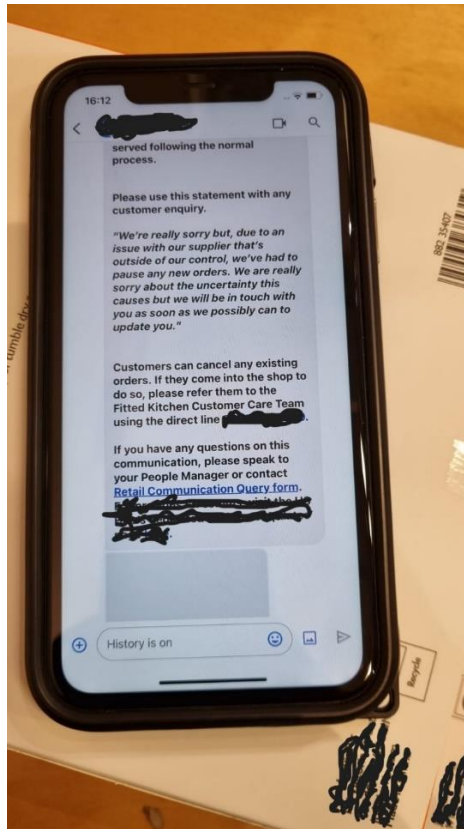
3.5 Methodological Choice

As highlighted in the chapter's introduction, the selection of a research methodology, informed by the chosen epistemology and approach, stands as a pivotal decision in the research process. This significance is further highlighted within Saunders et al.'s research onion model, where 'Methodological Choice' emerges as a critical layer that guides researchers in navigating between the realms of qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Saunders et al., 2018). This section is dedicated to exploring these two distinct methodological paths. By situating the discussion within the broader methodological framework, this study acknowledges the inherent strengths and limitations of each approach, aiming to justify the chosen methodology as the most suitable conduit for achieving the research objectives. The forthcoming subsections will explain the qualitative and quantitative methodologies in detail, providing a foundation for understanding their application and relevance to the research at hand.

3.5.1 Quantitative

Quantitative research is characterised by the collection and analysis of numerical data to make predictions and examine causal relationships through hypothesis testing (Saunders et al., 2018).

101

The first key characteristic of quantitative research is that the data is numeric. Quantitative research relies on numerical data and statistical analysis to draw conclusions, enabling precise measurement and comparison. The second characteristic of quantitative data refers to the objectivity, which emphasises objectivity in data collection and analysis, aiming for replicability and generalisability. The third characteristic of quantitative data is the structured data collection. Quantitative research often employs structured data collection methods such as surveys and experiments, ensuring consistency in responses. The fourth and final characteristic of quantitative data is that it is deductive approach: This approach involves testing predefined hypotheses and uses deductive reasoning to draw conclusions from the data (deductive and inductive approach will be discussed in detail later in this chapter).

3.5.2 Qualitative

On the other hand, qualitative research is a research approach that predominantly focuses on understanding and interpreting the complexities of social and cultural phenomena through textual data rather than relying on statistical measures or quantitative tools. The first key characteristic of qualitative research is about its emphasis on contextual understanding. Qualitative research aims to explore the specific contexts and nuances of a subject, providing a deep understanding of the 'how' and 'why' rather than the 'what' or 'how many.' The second characteristic of qualitative research is its subjectivity and interpretation: It acknowledges the role of subjectivity and interpretation in research, as researchers actively engage with the data, allowing for rich insights and varied perspectives. The third characteristic of qualitative data is that it involves open-ended data collection. Qualitative research often involves open-ended data collection methods such as interviews, observations, and content analysis, enabling the collection of rich, detailed information. The fourth and final characteristic of qualitative research is that it suited the inductive approach. This would allow the themes and theories to emerge from the data itself, rather than testing predefined hypotheses.

In the context of this study, the choice of qualitative research is strongly justified for several reasons. First, the nature of this study is exploratory as there is not extensive research undertaken on the UK retail sector. This research seeks to explore and understand the themes affecting the usage of ESN a large retail organisation. Qualitative research excels at exploring complex, multifaceted topics, making it well-suited for this exploratory study. The second reason is about the emphasis of this study on employee behaviour. Given the study focus on understanding employee behaviour within the context of ESN usage, qualitative research

allows this study to capture the richness of these behaviours, providing valuable insights. For instance, by conducting semi-structured interviews with employees, this study was able to uncover detailed perspectives on how grassroot employees resisted the ESN due to concerns about disrupting personal communication norms, and how middle-level employees developed workarounds to balance digital and traditional practices. The third reason is that this research is a context-dependent phenomena. ESN usage is inherently context-dependent, and qualitative research excels at revealing the contextual factors that influence adoption, aligning with the nature of this research. The final and fourth reason is its theory building. Rather than testing pre-defined hypotheses, this study aims to build broader themes and generate theories from the data. Qualitative research, with its inductive approach, is the ideal method for theory development.

3.6 Time Horizon

The 'Time Horizon' represents a fundamental layer within the structured approach to research methodology, as conceptualised in Saunders et al.'s (2007) research onion model (Saunders et al., 2019). It defines the temporal scope of data collection, shedding light on the period over which observations and measurements are made. This section explores the crucial aspect of time in research, distinguishing between two primary approaches: cross-sectional and longitudinal. Understanding the time horizon is essential for determining the study's design and strategy, influencing how trends are observed, and changes are analysed over time. It sets the stage for a detailed exploration of these data collection methods, clarifying their impact on achieving the research objectives (Saunders et al., 2007).

3.6.1 Cross-sectional data

Cross-sectional data is widely used specially in qualitative research. A cross-sectional data collection occurs when data is collected at a single point in time; thus, providing a snapshot of a situation. It's a one-time data collection method and enables the researchers to examine their sample at a particular time (Rindfleisch et al., 2008; Grossoehme and Lipstein, 2016).

3.6.2 Longitudinal data

Longitudinal data collection is about collecting data over two or more distinct periods of time (Menard, 2002; Hermanowicz, 2013; Neale, 2017; Audulv et al., 2022). It provides the opportunity to study changes and developments over a more extended period (Hermanowicz,

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

2013), providing a deeper understanding of processes, behaviours, and outcomes (Audulv et al., 2022). Longitudinal studies are particularly valuable for tracking trends, cause-and-effect relationships, and the impact of interventions over time (Hermanowicz, 2013; Audulv et al., 2022).

This research collected qualitative longitudinal data. Access to the research site and the participants was possible over various times, which led to consideration of the longitudinal approach. Further, to obtain a rich and deep understanding, a qualitative approach was pursued. This would enable this study to capture the rich, in-depth insights provided by qualitative research while following the same behaviour of individuals over an extended period. This allows this study to explore how experiences, perceptions, and behaviours about the use of ESN evolves as the digital transformation journey progresses.

To inform readers, the data collection happened in three distinct points in time, corresponding to the different timelines of the study. In the initial timeline, named as timeline zero, participants were interviewed to provide their experiences and perceptions of ESN use during and before the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. Subsequently, in the timeline one, the same participants' ESN usage patterns and behaviours were monitored and assessed after the pandemic lockdown. In the timeline two, participants were once again engaged to gain a comprehensive understanding of the evolution in their experiences and behaviours related to ESN usage. To inform readers, Table 3.1 identifies the various timelines of this study.

Table 3.1: Three Phases of Qualitative Longitudinal Interviews in this study

Timeline	Date
Timeline Zero	From July to September 2020
Timeline One	From May to Aug 2021
Timeline Two	January- April 2023

3.7 Data Collection

In the comprehensive methodology outlined by Saunders et al.'s research onion model, the layers of data collection and analysis are critical in guiding the research process towards its objectives (Saunders et al., 2019). While distinct, these layers are interconnected, each playing a pivotal role in the progression from empirical observation to data collection occupies an

essential layer in the research process, serving as the foundational source of evidence that informs the outcomes of the study (Saunders et al., 2007). This crucial step is determined by the methodological and analytical framework established by the researcher, highlighting its integral role in shaping the research findings (Paradis et al., 2016). According to Paradis et al. (2016), Teherani et al. (2015), and Wright et al. (2016), prevalent data collection methods include surveys, interviews, focus groups, observations, and textual or content analysis, each offering unique insights depending on the research objectives and context.

In the context of case study research, Yin (2009) elaborates on data collection techniques particularly suited to this strategy, such as direct observations, participant observation, documentation, archival records, physical artefacts, and interviews. These methods align with the detailed, contextual investigation characteristic of case studies, facilitating an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon in its real-life setting.

Table 3.2 provides a comprehensive summary of the data collection methods employed in this study, detailing their application and relevance to the research objectives. By thoroughly selecting and applying these methods, this research follows the rigorous standards set forth in the research methodology, ensuring a robust and credible collection of data that accurately reflects the phenomena under investigation.

Table 3.2: Main Qualitative Data Collection Techniques

Data Collection Method	Definition	Reference	Use in this study
Surveys	Open-ended questions with a free-text format	Paradis et al. (2016) Teherani et al. (2015); Wright et al. (2016)	Not used due to limited capability of capturing participants' reactions
Direct observation	Watching participants from the outside, with no interaction	Myers (2009)	Not used due to COVID-19 restrictions and resource constraints

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Participant Observation	Watching a participant and observer interact with the participant	Myers (2009)	Not used due to time constraints and hindrance to daily tasks
Documentation	Gathering data from informal documents that are recorded for personal reasons	Lincoln and Guba (1985); Yin (2009); Paradis et al. (2016)	Selected as the secondary data collection method
Archival Records	Data from documents stored for official use	Yin (2009)	Selected as the secondary data collection method
Physical artefact	Collection of data from physical evidence	Yin (2009)	Not used due to limited applicability to the case study
Interviews	A data collection approach involving questioning	Lincoln and Guba (1985); Yin (2009); Paradis et al. (2016)	Selected as the primary data collection method
Focus groups	Questioning involved with in a group setting and stimulate group conversations	Paradis et al. (2016); Teherani et al. (2015); Wright et al. (2016)	Not used due to potential hindrance in capturing in-depth individual reactions
Textual or content analysis	Investigate changes in official, institutional, or organisational views on a specific topic or area to document the context of certain practices or to investigate the experiences and	Paradis et al. (2016); Teherani et al. (2015); Wright et al. (2016)	Selected to explore changes in institutional views and is used in conjunction with interviews

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

	perspectives of a group of individuals.		

When conducting a case study, interviews are one of the primary methods of data collection (Walsham, 1995; Yin, 2009; Myers, 2009; Paradis et al. (2016); Teherani et al. (2015); Wright et al. (2016). Interviews can be categorised into three types: structured, unstructured and semi-structured interviews.

In this study, semi-structured interviews were utilised to facilitate both structured inquiry and spontaneous discussion. This approach enabled participants to express their views freely and allowed for probing responses to explore their experiences with technology at "Sellers." The interview questions were designed to gather diverse insights into how employees at different organisational levels, departments, and demographic backgrounds perceive and interact with ESS, specifically focusing on Hangouts as a communication tool.

To address the criteria for purposive sampling, questions were crafted to explore factors such as departmental affiliation, age, gender, educational level, and organisational level, given their potential impact on technology utilisation (Al-Zaabi et al., 2012; Al-Ghaith et al., 2010; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016). For example, questions like "Do you use any type of Online Social Networks? How do you feel about the use of Online Social Networks?" aim to capture varied personal and professional interactions with technology. Additionally, questions regarding the usage of Hangouts, such as "Do you use Hangouts/Google Chat? What are the purposes of using Hangouts/Google Chat?" were included to specifically investigate the application's effectiveness and integration into daily work practices. Secondary data, such as organisational documents, internal reports, and publicly available information about Sellers, supplemented the primary data to provide context and background, enhancing the analysis and interpretation of the findings (refer to Table 3.3)

Table 3.3: Overview of Data Types and Sources Used in the Study

Data Type	Description	Source	Purpose
Primary	Semi-structured interview transcripts	Interviews with Sellers' employees	To understand firsthand experiences, perceptions, and

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

		across different organisational levels	behaviours related to the use of ESS
Secondary	Organisational documents (e.g., policies, reports)	Internal company documents from Sellers	To provide context about the organisational culture, structure, and ESS policies
Secondary	Public information (e.g., company website, press releases)	Public domain information about Sellers	To complement primary data with background information about Sellers' history, size, and market position

For the data collection, a sampling approach was viewed as important. Sampling an entire population is impossible. Due to the time, expense and sheer number of subjects involved, data collection without forethought is not beneficial, so a sampling strategy must be used (Saunders et al., 2018). Sampling can be divided into two groups of non-probability sampling and probability sampling. Qualitative researchers whose aim is to understand and explain the interconnectedness of a series of behaviours normally use non-probability sampling (Blackstone, 2018). This is because, qualitative research involves using a pre-defined selection and not a random selection of individuals. Blackstone (2018) also explained that there are four types of non-probability sampling, which are purposive, snowball, quota and convenience sampling, which are summarised in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4: Sampling Techniques

Sampling Method	Definition	Reference	Use in this study
Purposive	The researcher starts with the certain perspectives that she or he has in mind, in the other words, researcher has a pre-assumption of what he or she is looking for. Researcher seeks out elements that meet specific criteria.	Dörnyei (2007); Blackstone (2018); Saunders et al. (2018)	Used as it allows to capture insights from employees with relevant experiences and knowledge.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Snowball	The researcher starts with one or two participants that she or he would like to include in the study and those participants help to find other participants. Researcher relies on participant referrals to recruit new participants.	Blackstone (2018); Saunders et al. (2018)	Used as it is effective for identifying and accessing participants who may not be readily available through traditional sampling methods. Also helpful to explore the network of ESN users within the organisation.
Quota	The researcher is identifying the important categories and then creates the sub-groups. Researcher selects cases from within several different subgroups.	Blackstone (2018); Saunders et al. (2018)	Not used in this study as it is less suitable for capturing the specific insights related to ESN usage in the organisation.
Convenience	The researcher collects data from people that are convenient or accessible. Researcher gathers data from whatever cases happen to be convenient.	Dörnyei (2007); Blackstone (2018); Saunders et al. (2018)	Used, as it is helpful in maximising the efficiency of participant inclusion, ensuring the study's feasibility

Incorporating the detailed methodologies of purposive, snowball, and convenience sampling, this study embarked on a multifaceted approach to participant selection, each method playing a pivotal role in understanding the ESN usage within a large retail organisation. Initially, purposive sampling was employed, guided by specific criteria reflective of the study's objectives, such as departmental affiliations, organisational levels, gender, age, educational backgrounds, and familiarity with the ESN (Dörnyei, 2007), specifically Hangouts/Google Chat. This deliberate selection aimed to gather insights from diverse perspectives within the organisation.

To expand the research's reach and uncover the intricate network of ESN users, snowball sampling was subsequently utilised. This technique started with a few initial contacts who, based on their experiences and knowledge of the ESN, facilitated connections with additional

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

participants, thereby broadening the sample size and enriching the data pool with varied user experiences (Blackstone, 2018). Snowball sampling proved instrumental in unveiling the interconnected community of ESN users, highlighting the social dynamics and knowledge sharing facilitated by the platform.

Building on the foundation laid by purposive and snowball sampling, the study further integrated convenience sampling. This strategy targeted individuals who not only aligned with the purposive criteria but were also readily accessible, streamlining the data collection process. Convenience sampling was pivotal in maximising the efficiency of participant inclusion, ensuring the study's feasibility (Saunders et al., 2018) without diluting the quality and diversity of the insights gathered.

When determining the numbers of participants, sampling was conducted until all the concepts in the theory were well understood. This is known as 'theoretical saturation' (Saunders et al., 2018) and is defined as achieved when the researcher has continued sampling to the stage where further sampling would not add more concepts to the research, and where all concepts in the theory are well-developed (Rowlands et al., 2016). Therefore, theoretical saturation can be used as a measure for deciding when the study should stop sampling the different groups of participants in a given category and was employed in this study.

3.8 Forming the Interview Questions

The formulation of interview questions is a critical aspect for achieving the research objectives of any study, and this study is no exception. These questions serve two primary goals: first, to assess the application of the conceptual framework proposed in Chapter 2, and second, to create the flexibility necessary for the emergence of themes.

To accomplish the research objectives, a comprehensive interview questionnaire comprising 28 questions was carefully developed (refer to appendix 1). These open-ended questions covered a diverse range of topics pertinent to the study's focus. The questions were open-ended to promote probing and digging deeper into an issue. The interview questions were organised into three distinct sections.

The first section, encompassing five questions, addresses the participants' basic demographic information. The second section, consisting of two open-ended questions (questions 6 and 7), explores the participants' personal use of the Internet and OSN, extracting insights into individual experiences and behaviours related to online activities. The third and most extensive

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

section of the interview questions (questions 8 to 28) concentrates on core themes influencing the utilisation of an ESS within the workplace. These themes include value creation, organisational structure, organisational culture, trust, and working practices. Participants are encouraged to express their perspectives, experiences, and opinions regarding these themes, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted factors at play.

Following the formulation process, a crucial step involves verifying and validating the interview questions to ensure they are comprehensible and suitable for individuals at different expertise levels. This particular approach aims to refine the questions, making them accessible and valuable for participants with varying backgrounds and experiences.

3.9 Credibility and validity

Credibility is a crucial aspect of research, which determines the acceptability and trustworthiness of research outcomes (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Triangulation is a method used to assess and enhance credibility in research (Yin, 2009). Triangulation is about validating research findings by using various sources of evidence. Triangulation can take different forms, including data, investigator, theory, and methodological triangulation (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009), Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: Triangulation

Type of Triangulation	Definition	Reference	Application in this study
Data Triangulation	Collecting data from different sources, times, or locations.	Denzin (1970); Yin, (2009)	This study uses secondary data from the literature to generate the conceptual framework and primary data from interviews to ensure data triangulation.
Investigator Triangulation	Involvement of multiple investigators in the research process.	Yin (2003); Yin, (2009)	This research is conducted under the supervision of a PhD supervisory team, therefore, conducting investigator triangulation.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Theory Triangulation	Multiple theories to analyse and interpret research data.	Denzin (1970); Yin, (2009)	Various theories were examined to define the conceptual framework, ensuring theory triangulation.
Methodological Triangulation	The use of multiple research methodologies or methods.	Thurmond (2001)	The study employs different qualitative methods, representing within-method triangulation (cross-method triangulation is not used).

This study comprehensively applied all four types of triangulations, contributing to the research's credibility. It employed various data sources, involved multiple investigators, used different theories to construct the framework, and incorporated within-method triangulation in data collection. This rigorous approach enhanced the overall credibility of the research and ensures robust findings.

Validity defines the degree to which the collected data originate from the research area (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2005). According to Field (2005), validity essentially represents a measurement of what is proposed for the study. In order to assess the content validity and construct validity of this study, a review of the literature was carried out to identify suitable constructs (questions) to use.

Moreover, before the interviews were conducted, the interview questions went through a rigorous verification and validation process. In this regard, the questions were carefully validated by an expert panel comprising 15 individuals with diverse backgrounds in both industry and academia (refer to Table 3.6). Following the receipt of feedback from the panel, the interview questions were refined and amended based on their valuable comments.

The iterative nature of this validation process aimed to enhance the clarity, relevance, and effectiveness of the questions. Subsequent to the amendments, the validated set of questions was then utilised for the timeline zero (refer to appendix 1). This thorough approach ensured that the interview questions were well-structured, comprehensive, and aligned with the research objectives before their implementation in the actual data collection process.

112

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Table 3.6: Expert Panel

Expert Panel		
1	Academic	Principal Supervisor
2	Academic	Second Supervisor
3	Academic	*Recommended from University of Hertfordshire*
4	Academic	*Recommended from Brunel University London*
5	Sellers	Senior manager
6	Sellers	Manager
7	Sellers	Shop floor assistant (18-30)
8	Sellers	Shop floor assistant (30-40)
9	Sellers	Shop floor assistant (40-50)
10	Sellers	Shop floor assistant (over 50)
11	Sellers	Admin
12	Sellers	Planner or designer
13	Sellers	Planner or designer
14	Researcher	PhD student
15	Researcher	PhD student

3.10 Sampling

As discussed earlier, the initial timeline of data collection in this study utilised three types of sampling: purposive, snowball and convenience sampling. The primary step in the data collection process involved selecting participants from the employees of Sellers using

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

purposive sampling. Consequently, an initial group of five Sellers' employees was chosen as participants for the interviews (refer to Table 3.7).

Table 3.7 Purposive Sampling

Elements for Purposive Sampling	Rationale	Reference
Diverse departments	Employees from different departments may show different behaviours towards the use of technology	Al-Zaabi et al., (2012)
Age, gender and educational level	Different personal factors such as age and education can impact the users' ability and willingness to adapt to and use technology	(Al-Ghaith et al., 2010)
Organisational level	Employees from different organisational levels may show different behaviour towards the use of the introduced ESN	(Choudrie and Zamani., 2016)

Following the initial interviews with five purposively selected employees, the study expanded its participant pool using snowball and convenient sampling. This approach not only enriched the diversity of perspectives but also facilitated the inclusion of participants who might not have been initially identified through purposive sampling. As the interviews progressed, participants were invited to recommend colleagues or contacts within the organisation who could provide valuable insights regarding the use of ESS.

In total, 15 participants were interviewed. However, the data collection process reached the theoretical saturation point after obtaining information from the first 12 participants. As mentioned earlier, this study involved the collection of longitudinal data, and unfortunately, three participants were unable to participate in further interviews due to job changes or retirement. Consequently, these three participants were excluded from the final sample, and their interview transcripts were appropriately discarded. As a result, the study ultimately gathered data from a group of 12 participants (refer to Table 3.8).

Table 3.8: Sampling

Type of sampling	Criteria	Number of interviews
Purposive sampling	Criteria considered: - Diverse departments: Shop floor, fitted furniture and customer support teams - Age group: Participants were selected from different age groups - Organisational level: Employees with different organisational positions were considered	5
Snowball sampling	These candidates were suggested by candidates from the purposive sample	7
Total		12

The total of 12 participants (Table 3.9) underwent three interview sessions each (timeline zero to two), resulting in a cumulative count of 36 interviews. Moreover, Table 3.9 categorises the candidates into three groups, based on their position within Sellers, as lower, medium, and higher-level employees. These three groups were determined by considering the employees' salary range and job descriptions. The lower-level range included shop floor assistants and installers; these two types of candidates had a lower salary grade and were front-line employees who mainly interacted with customers. They were normally responsible for selling only one specific product/service at a time and were not responsible for take parting in group planning and meetings. The mid-level group included the customer support team and planners, jobs that were at a higher grade than the lower-level employees, and these could be considered back-office workers. They met with customers only occasionally or by booking appointments. Employees at this level took part in team planning and activities. The top-level group included departmental and senior managers, employees who managed teams across regions or nationally, and who therefore needed to be in contact with employees from different locations/cities.

Moreover, Table 3.9 shows the demographic characteristics of the candidates at each different level.

115

Table 3.9: Participants and their Organisational level

Code	Job Title	Gender	Age Group	Educational Level	Organisational Level
01	Sales assistant	Male	51-60	High Diploma	Grassroot
02	Sales assistant	Female	41-50	High Diploma	
03	Sales assistant	Female	31-40	High School	
04	Installer	Male	60+	High School	
05	Customer support	Female	21-30	High Diploma	Middle level
06	Customer support	Female	31-40	High School	
07	Planner	Male	51-60	Bachelor's Degree	
08	Planner	Female	60+	High School	
09	Planner	Male	31-40	Bachelor's Degree	
10	Departmental manager	Male	41-50	Bachelor's Degree	Higher level
11	Departmental manager	Female	51-60	Bachelor's Degree	
12	Senior manager	Male	51-60	Postgraduate Degree	

Furthermore, the various timelines and corresponding durations of the interview process are summarised in Table 3.10.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Table 3.10: Longitudinal Interviews

Timeline	Date	Number of participants	Interview Duration (minutes)
Timeline Zero	From July to September 2020	12	47 - 162
Timeline One	From April to June 2021	12	30 - 50
Timeline Two	January- April 2023	12	22 - 46

The interview sessions commenced with the researcher clearly articulating the purpose of the interview. Participants were informed that the research had obtained ethical approval, with a guarantee of maintaining anonymity. To ensure transparency and understanding, the researcher concluded each interview by summarising key points, allowing interviewees to seek clarification, and providing an opportunity for participants to interrupt and offer additional insights if necessary. This approach aimed to foster open communication, uphold ethical standards, and ensure participants felt informed and comfortable throughout the interview process.

While existing longitudinal studies, such as Sun and Jeyaraj (2013), Batt-Rawden et al. (2017), and Gupta and Maurya (2022), have provided valuable insights into technology adoption and continuance, they exhibit notable differences in design and focus compared to this research. For instance, these studies often adopt relatively short time frames, such as Sun and Jeyaraj's (2013) 12 weeks, or Gupta and Maurya's (2022) 14 weeks, and focus on voluntary adoption contexts within education or healthcare sectors. By contrast, this research extends over a much longer period, encompassing three distinct timelines across three years, capturing pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic phases.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 lockdown during the initial timeline created a unique situation of forced compliance, enabling this study to evaluate the adoption and integration of ESS beyond voluntary use. This context allowed for the observation of behavioural shifts as forced compliance gradually evolved into discretionary and strategic usage over time, a perspective often absent in the aforementioned studies, which predominantly focus on voluntary or experimental contexts.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Another distinguishing aspect of this study is its qualitative methodology, involving longitudinal interviews to deeply explore the interplay between organisational culture, external pressures, and operational practices in shaping ESS adoption. Although some studies such as Batt-Rawden et al. (2017) and Zadvinskis et al. (2018) also employed qualitative methods, studies like Sun and Jeyaraj (2013) and Gupta and Maurya (2022) relied on surveys and quantitative analysis. This qualitative approach enables a richer, contextually grounded understanding of the factors influencing technology integration in the retail sector, contributing novel insights to the literature on digital transformation.

3.11 Data Analysis

Following the thoroughly conducted data collection phase, this study progresses to the critical layer of data analysis as outlined in Saunders et al.'s research onion model. This stage is instrumental in transforming the raw data into meaningful insights, directly informing the study's findings and conclusions. In accordance with Saunders et al. (2019), the analysis is approached with a systematic methodology, designed to rigorously interrogate the data, identify patterns, and extract themes that are crucial for answering the research questions. This section outlines the analytical techniques and processes employed, detailing how they are uniquely suited to dissecting the collected data and revealing the underlying narratives and relationships. The transition from data collection to data analysis is seamless yet distinct, ensuring a coherent flow of inquiry that remains closely tethered to the study's objectives and theoretical underpinnings.

This study considered several ways of analysing the findings, including content analysis, grounded analysis and thematic analysis (Bryman and Burgess, 2002). Content analysis considers predetermined categories in order to qualify content in a systematic and reliable manner (Bryman, 2008), and is therefore more suitable for deductive studies (Mayring, 2004). As this is an inductive research study, content analysis was not used. Moreover, grounded analysis is built on a comparison of concepts, where similar data are grouped, conceptually labelled and tagged with codes in order to construct theories (Scott, 2004). This study is not aiming to construct theories. It is instead concentrating on understanding and describing the data. Therefore, grounded theory is not used in this study. Thematic analysis "is defined as a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006; page 83). Thematic analysis in general "involves… searching across a data set to find repeated patterns of meaning" (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 91).

Thematic analysis is a qualitative method of identifying, reporting and analysing data to extract the meanings produced in and by individuals and situations (Aronson, 1994; Boyatzis, 1998; Patton, 2002; Riessman, 2008). In this approach, data are reviewed in order to find repeated themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 78) mention that "[o]ne of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility… Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data". As this is an inductive research study, the flexibility of thematic analysis can be helpful in generating themes, and thus an inductive thematic[3] approach was applied, Table 3.11.

Table 3.11: Analysis Methods

Analysis Method	Definition	Reference	Justification
Content Analysis	Qualify content in predetermined categories	Bryman, 2008; Mayring, 2004	Not used as the research is inductive.
Grounded Analysis	Comparison of concepts for theory construction	Scott, 2004; Mayring, 2004	Not used as it involves inductive reasoning, to create theoretical concepts
Thematic Analysis	Identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data	Clarke, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Riessman, 2008	Flexibility allows for inductive thematic approach to understand and describe data.

3.12 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the research methodology utilised in this study, defining the theoretical underpinnings and practical steps taken to explore the usage

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[3] Themes within data can be identified using one of two methods thematic analysis: an inductive or "bottom up" approach (Frith and Gleeson, 2004), or a theoretical or deductive or "top down" approach (Boyatzis, 1998; Hayes, 1997; Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

of ESN within a large retail organisation. By adopting an interpretivist epistemology and an inductive, qualitative research approach, the chapter has laid out the processes of data collection through longitudinal interviews and thematic analysis, aimed at understanding and explaining the digital transformation facilitated by ESNs.

In addition to outlining the methodological framework, this chapter has also detailed the selection of the research site, the rationale behind the choice of sampling methods, purposive, snowball, and convenience sampling and the data collection process. It has introduced the demographic characteristics and organisational levels of the participants, ensuring a rich and diversified foundation for analysis. The measures taken to ensure the credibility and validity of the research were discussed, establishing a solid base for a detailed examination of ESN usage.

The ensuing chapter will explore to 'Timeline Zero,' marking the initial phase of applying the methodologies discussed herein. This next stage focuses on the practical aspects of conducting the research, ensuring a uniform transition from theoretical preparation to empirical investigation. By applying the methodological insights established in this chapter, 'Timeline Zero' aims to lay the groundwork for an in-depth analysis and understanding of digital transformation practices within the selected retail organisation.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

CHAPTER 4

TIMELINE ZERO DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

Timeline Zero serves as a pilot study and is a crucial phase in the research process, determining the feasibility and refining the methodology before embarking on the main study (In, 2017). Contrary to a mere pre-test, it is an integral component aimed at assessing the viability of the research and identifying necessary adjustments (Yin, 2009). In this study, the initial timeline (timeline zero) of longitudinal interviews, constituting the pilot phase, is undertaken as a proactive measure. This approach ensures alignment with the unique contextual demands, enabling tailored adjustments in data collection plans for subsequent timelines.

The significance of the pilot study extends beyond a preliminary examination, encompassing key benefits such as improving the quality and efficiency of the main study, studying randomisation and blinding processes, augmenting researchers' familiarity with study methods and interventions, and facilitating estimates for the main sample size (Arnold et al., 2009; Thabane et al., 2010; In, 2017).

This chapter explores the procedural intricacies observed during the timeline zero, all conducted within the Sellers organisation. Additionally, it offers a comprehensive exploration of the outcomes and insights derived from the timeline zero case study. These insights not only contribute to refining the research conceptual framework but also shed light on the necessary adjustments that have been made based on these findings.

4.1 Timeline Zero Data Analysis

This section explores the systematic examination and interpretation of the timeline zero data collected during the initial phase of the research. The analysis of this data is crucial, as it serves

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

to bridge the gap between data collection and the emergence of meaningful insights, which are essential for the broader scope of the study.

The structure of the longitudinal data collection, as detailed in the previous chapter, involved three distinct timelines. The timeline zero, conducted from July to September 2020, functioned as the pilot phase. The focus of this chapter is the analysis of the data gathered during this initial period. This timeline was instrumental in testing and refining the research methodologies and tools, setting a solid foundation for the subsequent timelines of data collection.

The timeline one of data collection was carried out from April to June 2021, followed by the timeline two from January to April 2023 (refer to Figure 4.1). These subsequent timelines built upon the groundwork established by the timeline zero study, aiming to expand and deepen the understanding of the research subject. However, the analysis of data from these later timelines is not covered in this section and will be addressed in the following chapter.

Figure 4.1: Three timelines of longitudinal data collection
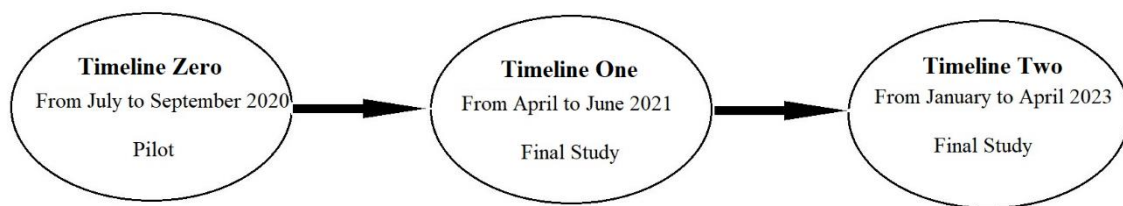
The following sections will focus on analysing the timeline zero data, exploring its various aspects, and extracting key themes that have significantly influenced the direction and outcomes of the research.

4.1.1 The Process for Data Analysis

The analysis of the timeline zero study data was conducted using an inductive approach, aligning with some of the principles of Grounded Theory coding methodology as proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This method was applied specifically for coding purposes and not as a basis for the entire research design, which is rooted in interpretivism. This approach was selected to enable the identification and analysis of emergent codes, facilitating an in-depth examination of participants' opinions, perceptions, and behaviours, while consciously avoiding the imposition of preconceived notions onto the coding scheme.

CHAPTER 4: TIMELINE ZERO DATA ANALYSIS

The main steps utilised in the data analysis process are outlined as follows:

(i) Initial Data Immersion and Highlighting:

The researcher carefully reviewed the 12 recorded, or handwritten interview transcripts, highlighting all text segments that connected with constructs from the theoretical framework, while also remaining open to the emergence of new codes such as partnership structure, lack of training, and the impact of Covid-19 Lockdown. This analysis required an in-depth engagement with the findings, which included multiple readings of the results and comprehensive note-taking for each transcript. For example, during the review of a particular transcript from an interview conducted in the early stages of the Covid-19 lockdown, notes were made on the respondent's emphasis on the sudden reliance on digital communication tools and the challenges that ensued due to lack of prior training. This level of immersion was not only about identifying themes but also understanding the details of each respondent's experience, thereby ensuring a profound familiarity with the collected data.

 (ii) Coding of Highlighted Information:

The next step involved coding portions of the highlighted text. This coding facilitated the efficient retrieval of varied data from the different transcripts, thereby structuring the analytical process.

(iii) Categorisation and Emergence of New Themes:

Codes were initially categorised under the factors previously identified from theoretical frameworks. In instances where a new code did not align with these pre-identified factors, a new category (or theme) was established. This process was pivotal in identifying new factors influencing the ESN usage.

(iv) Review and Alignment of Themes with Codes:

An exhaustive review of the themes was conducted, aligning them with their corresponding codes. This step was instrumental in developing a comprehensive understanding of the relationships and patterns within the coded data, allowing for a deeper interpretation of the findings.

Through these methodical steps, the analysis aimed to ensure a rigorous and objective examination of the timeline zero data, providing valuable insights to inform the broader research study.

4.2 Themes Emerging from the Timeline Zero

In the thematic analysis process, the emerged codes were systematically categorised, recognising their significance in both organisational culture and working practices. This categorisation was essential in understanding the intertwined nature of these codes within the organisational context.

In explaining themes, it became evident that the identified codes carried substantial implications for both organisational culture and working practices. The codes were not isolated elements; instead, they formed integral components influencing the intricate relationship between technology usage, evolving work practices, and the overarching organisational culture as discussed by Mariategui (2013) (refer to Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2: The relationship between Technology, Work Practices and Occupational Cultures
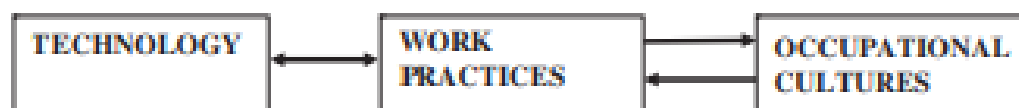
Choudrie et al. (2017) page (652)

The dual categorisation of codes within both organisational culture and working practices highlights their shared relevance and impact on the organisational dynamics. This approach acknowledges the bidirectional influence between technology and organisational aspects, emphasising the mutual relationship between changes in work practices and shifts in organisational culture. This integration of codes into both organisational culture and working practices provides a holistic perspective, recognising the interconnectedness of these elements (refer to Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3: The relationship between ESN Usage, Work Practices and Organisational Culture
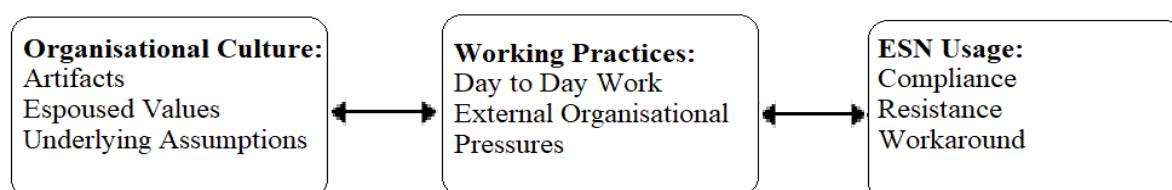
Adopted from Choudrie et al. (2017)

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

In the thematic analysis of timeline zero data, specific themes emerged that clarify the organisational culture within Sellers, offering examples of how ESN usage shapes and is shaped by internal dynamics. These themes, Partnership Structure, High-Quality Customer Service, Personalised Communication, and Proactiveness, surfaced through detailed examination and interpretation of interview transcripts, illustrating the detailed ways employees interact with digital tools and each other. These themes emerged through a careful analysis of employees' narratives, which provided tangible examples of how ESN usage is experienced at the ground level within Sellers. By linking these themes back to specific instances and stories shared during the interviews, the analysis reveals the complex interplay between organisational culture, and digital technology use, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of these dynamics in subsequent chapters.

For the organisational culture, Schein's model (Schein, 1985) was used, which was deemed particularly apt for application. This theory was employed alongside institutional theory. Schein's model focus on the deeper aspects of culture and complements institutional theory (Scott, 2014), which examines the broader societal and regulatory structures impacting organisational practices.

Integrating Schein's model of organisational culture with institutional theory provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the cultural dynamics within Sellers. Schein's model, known for its focus on the deeper, often unconscious aspects of culture, such as underlying assumptions, values, and artifacts, offers a thorough view through which to examine the intricacies of organisational culture at Sellers (Schein, 1985). For example, the Covid-19 lockdown serves as an appropriate illustration of external pressure impacting organisational practices, especially regarding the usage of ESN. During the lockdown, Sellers faced the abrupt necessity to shift to remote work, a change that stressed the importance of ESNs for maintaining communication, collaboration, and business continuity. This situation exemplified Schein's artifacts, as the organisation's digital tools and platforms became the primary means of interaction, reflecting and reinforcing the company's values around flexibility, partnership, and high-quality customer service in challenging times.

Furthermore, the lockdown highlighted the application of institutional theory through the adaptation to new societal norms and regulatory expectations regarding remote work. Sellers' response, by enhancing ESN usage, not only aligned with external pressures but also demonstrated the organisation's resilience and proactive adaptation to unprecedented

conditions. This adaptation can be seen as an intersection of institutional pressures (the societal shift towards remote work due to Covid-19) and the deeper aspects of organisational culture (Schein's model), where the existing cultural framework facilitated a swift and effective response to external challenges.

Together, Schein's model and institutional theory provide a dual framework that captures the dynamic interplay between Sellers' deeply rooted cultural values and the broader environmental pressures, such as those experienced during the Covid-19 lockdown. This comprehensive approach enables a detailed analysis of how organisational culture at Sellers both shapes and is shaped by external societal forces, offering insights into the organisation's digital transformation journey in the face of global challenges.

For an in-depth connection between the interview questions and the overall themes that emerged, Table 4.1 provides a comprehensive overview.

Table 4.1: Examples of Interview Questions, Timeline Zero

Overall Theme	Examples of questions used in the interviews	Inspiration from Literature
Organisational Culture	- Do you use Google apps at Sellers? - What are the purposes of using Google apps? - Are you part of any informal Sellers' group such as WhatsApp group outside of your workplace? - What are the communication tools that you are using most, least at Sellers?	Choudrie et al. (2017); Choudrie and Zamani (2016); Lapointe and Rivard (2006); Rivard and Lapointe (2012); Talwar et al. (2020)
Discretion to Couple	- Do you have enough facility (such as smart phone/iPad/laptop) available to use Google apps at work? - How flexible is your work routines?	Azad and King (2011); Choudrie and Zamani (2016)
ESN Use and Organisational Procedures	- How many hours a day are you spending using Google apps at work? - Do you always use Google apps?	Azad and King (2011); Choudrie and Zamani (2016)

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

	- Are you going to be rewarded if you use Hangouts?	
Formal Policies to use the ESN	- Do you have any policy/strategy/incentive/motivation for using Google apps?	Azad and King (2011); Choudrie and Zamani (2016)
Lack of formal training	- Have you ever been trained to use Hangouts? - What type of training would you consider is most applicable to your current position? - When you should have had that type of training? - Have you faced any problem or challenge when using Hangouts?	Ratten (2015); Orser et al. (2019); Ali et al. (2016); Laumer et al. (2016); Markus (1983); Choi, 2020); Nilsen et al. (2016)
Visibility of Information	- To what extent Google apps are/aren't useful at Sellers?	Lapointe and Rivard (2005); Ali et al. (2016); Li et al. (2016); Haddara and Moen (2017)
Policy directives and policy-based system	- Are there any rules, frameworks or policies around the use of Google apps? - Are you aware of what they are? - How are/could rules and policies affect your work and usage of Hangouts?	Azad and King (2011); Choudrie and Zamani (2016)
Impact of COVID-19	- How are you working during now (COVID-19 lockdown)? - Which tools are you using more/less during the time? - Considering the lockdown situation, are you working longer/less hours doing your tasks?	Martinko et al. (1996); Rivard and Lapointe, (2012); Nel and Boshoff, (2020)

In the analysis of the timeline zero data, specific themes emerged that are closely related to organisational culture, a concept integral to understanding the dynamics within Sellers.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

The theme identification was enriched by the semi-structured interviews, which were crucial for allowing interviewees to freely express their own thoughts and concerns. The open coding process, as detailed by Urquhart (2012), played a pivotal role in this timeline, involving the identification of a wide range of codes and leading to the creation of new categories for emergent concepts. For instance, during the initial coding, phrases mentioning 'no need for formal communication' and 'we are a friendly group' frequently appeared across different interviews. This meticulous process allowed for the aggregation of these phrases under the broader category of 'personalised communication.' Such detailed examination and categorisation were instrumental in scaling up the analysis to find core categories, such as work practices, organisational culture, and concepts derived from institutional theory, thereby highlighting the personalised communication theme as central to the organisational culture at Sellers.

Table 4.2 provides examples that illustrate the study's analytical framework and findings, which involves categorising 'first-order data' (interviewee's constructions), 'key ideas' (extraction of the essential meaning of quotations), and 'second-order concepts' (researcher's constructions based on analysis and extant literature, (Walsham, 1995).

Through this detailed analysis, this study thoroughly adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) methodological framework for thematic analysis, a process that emphasises the systematic identification, organisation, and interpretation of themes within data. Following their six-step procedure, starting with familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally, producing the report, allowed for a rigorous and comprehensive exploration of the collected data. This structured approach facilitated the identification and categorisation of themes in a manner that reflects the complex dynamics of cultural ethos, material constraints, discretionary practices, and external pressures at Sellers.

Building upon the foundation laid by Braun and Clarke, this study further refined the thematic analysis by utilising a framework inspired by Choudrie et al. (2017). This approach enabled the categorisation of themes in a way that provided a holistic understanding of the organisational dynamics at Sellers, illustrating how various factors collectively shape the workplace environment and influence employee experiences with the ESN. The integration of these methodologies highlighted the importance of a detailed analysis, revealing the intricate relationship between organisational culture, technology usage, and working practices.

As a result, the term 'findings' within this chapter denotes the thematic insights derived from this precise analysis, offering a grounded narrative of how ESN usage within Sellers shapes and is shaped by the organisation's internal dynamics. These findings, emergent from the themes identified through the combined guidance of Braun and Clarke's framework and the inspiration from Choudrie et al. (2017), provide a rich exploration of the impact of technology on organisational culture and working practices. They illuminate the critical factors mediating technology utilisation within a large retail organisation, paving the way for a deeper exploration of these dynamics in subsequent chapters.

This comprehensive approach to thematic analysis, incorporating both the methodological rigor of Braun and Clarke and the thematic categorisation framework inspired by Choudrie et al. (2017), ensures that the analysis is both systematic and deeply aligned with the study's objectives. It highlights the interplay between internal cultural dynamics and external institutional pressures, offering detailed insights into the complex ecosystem within which ESN operates in an organisational context.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

Table 4.2: Example of the Interpretation Process, Timeline Zero

	First order data	Key idea	Second order concepts
Cultural analysis	"Even if the organisation sets guidelines to use Hangouts, I will not use it because we are partners, and they cannot dictate how we should communicate with other partners." (Grassroot employee, code 02) "Why should we have a policy to use a specific app to contact other partners? We are working to make the business successful; why should it be important how we talk to each other?" (Middle level employees, code 06)	The employees believed that due to the partnership structure, they had the autonomy to select their preferred communication method.	The partnership structure within the organisation is prominently reflected through tangible elements such as employee uniforms, company logos, and branded vans. These artifacts play a significant role in shaping the daily work ethos of lower and middle level employees. In contrast, higher level employees, who are the primary users of the ESN, do not exhibit a strong influence of the partnership structure in their utilisation of the ESN.
	"Of course, recognition is important, but we will receive recognition if we receive good customer reviews." (Grassroot, code 01) "There is no reward for using Hangouts, but if you answer questions in the group chat, you can become well-known to managers, and they can get to know you better." (Middle level, code 07) "I would say the incentive is to increase your visibility. So, if you consistently engage by asking questions and participating, you become a more recognisable member of the broader community. Managers and all other partners can get to know you better." (Middle level, code 09)	Proactiveness is valued	Proactiveness is not only highly valued within the organisation but can also influence employees' pay increases. Recognition from managers is particularly esteemed by employees. This underlying assumption shapes the work ethos of lower and middle-level employees in their daily activities. However, when it comes to the impact on the use of the ESN, this is more pronounced among middle-level employees. In contrast, grassroot employees tend to have minimal interaction with the ESN.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Enterprise Social Systems in the UK Retail Sector: A Single Case Study

4.2.1 Organisational Culture and Work Ethos: Shaping Working Practices

For this analysis, Organisational culture was initially used. This is a concept fundamental to understanding and finding the dynamics of any workplace, is defined as a system of shared values, beliefs, and norms that influence the behaviours and practices of an organisation's members (Schein, 1985). Alongside, organisational culture, work ethos was used, which refers to the collective set of values, principles, and beliefs that guide the behaviours and attitudes of employees within an organisation (Kotter, 2008). These concepts are pivotal in shaping not only individual actions but also collaborative efforts and overall working practices.

From the interviews replies it became clearer that in the context of Sellers, the interplay between organisational culture and work ethos plays a significant role in shaping working practices. The work ethos at Sellers encompasses a dynamic combination of cultural elements that significantly impact the day-to-day working practices of its employees. For instance, Sellers' culture fosters a work ethos of delivering high quality customer service, directly influencing the approach to problem-solving within teams. Briefly, an example of this dynamic is observed in how teams prioritise customer feedback sessions to adapt and refine their service offerings, embodying the company's commitment to quality and responsiveness.

This section explores how the organisational culture at Sellers influences this work ethos, consequently shaping working practices.

4.2.1.1 Partnership Structure and Organisational Culture

The concept of a partnership structure in an organisational context refers to a collaborative framework where members, irrespective of their hierarchical positions, work together as equal contributors towards shared goals (Handy, 1993). In such a structure, the emphasis is on mutual respect, shared responsibility, and autonomy in decision-making processes (Heckscher and Adler, 2006). All employees, as partners, not only share in the business's profits but also participate in a bonus system, akin to receiving a share of the profit. This system fosters a sense of belonging and mutual investment in the company's success, setting Sellers apart from traditional business models. The partnership at Sellers, therefore, is not merely a financial arrangement but a foundational principle that shapes every aspect of the organisation's culture and work ethos, influencing working practices and employee attitudes at every level.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

This influence is distinctly reflected in the perceptions and attitudes of employees across various organisational levels. Recognising the partnership structure as both a visible artifact and a deeply held value provides insight into how it permeates the organisation, shaping behaviours and driving a collective commitment to the company's goals. Employees' sense of pride and shared ownership, stemming from this partnership ethos, highlights its profound impact on daily working practices and communication strategies, exemplifying the intertwined nature of culture and practice at Sellers.

For instance, a grassroot employee (code 02) highlighted this autonomy, stating, "*Even if the organisation sets guidelines to use Hangouts, I will not use it because we are partners, and they cannot dictate how we should communicate with other partners.*" Therefore, although the values and norms in Sellers emphasised sharing, an indirect reference to power and status (I will not use it because we are partners, and they cannot dictate how we should communicate with other partners) emerged from the replies. Similarly, a middle-level employee (code 06) questioned the necessity of a policy dictating communication methods, reflecting a sense of ownership and shared responsibility inherent in the partnership structure: "*Why should we have a policy to use a specific app to contact other partners? We are working to make the business successful; why should it be important how we talk to each other?*"

These quotations explain the belief among lower and middle level employees that the partnership structure grants them the autonomy to select their preferred communication methods rather than what is suggested by higher level employees. This is also pursued because there are no enforced policies in the organisation. This autonomy is a crucial aspect of their work ethos, influencing their day-to-day interactions and choice of communication tools.

Interestingly, the partnership structure within the organisation is not only an abstract concept but is also reflected in tangible elements like employee uniforms, company logos, and branded vans. These artifacts play a significant role in shaping the daily work ethos of lower and middle-level employees, serving as constant reminders of their collaborative and equal status within the organisational framework.

In contrast, higher-level employees, who are the primary users of the ESN, do not exhibit a strong influence of the partnership structure in their utilisation of the ESN. This divergence suggests that while the partnership structure significantly shapes the work ethos at the lower and middle levels, its impact may vary at different hierarchical levels, particularly in the context of technology use.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

4.2.1.2 High Quality Customer Service and Organisational Culture

High-quality customer service exceeds mere project management quality practices at Sellers; it is a fundamental ethos, deeply ingrained in the organisation's culture and explicitly articulated in its mission statement. This commitment, "*Every one of us is committed to inspiring and delighting our customers through quality products, great quality food, and outstanding service because for us, it's personal*," serves as an espoused value that characterises the organisation's dedication to customer satisfaction. According to Schein's model of organisational culture, such espoused values are integral to understanding an organisation's ethos, guiding behaviours, and decision-making. In Sellers' case, this value is not only apparent in official documents but is actively manifested in the daily interactions and service delivery to customers, reinforcing its role as a foundation of the organisational culture.

The significance of high-quality customer service is echoed in the statements of employees across various levels. A grassroot employee (code 01) emphasises direct customer interaction: "*We can see the customers, and we provide the best service to help them find and purchase the products they desire. We do not need to contact any other colleagues. Even if we need additional information about product specifications or availability, we check the Sellers' website.*" This statement highlights a proactive approach to customer service, emphasising independence and direct engagement with customers. A middle-level employee (code 05) reinforces this value, noting, "*My manager doesn't mind how I perform my job, as long as I deliver excellent service and meet the customers' needs.*" This perspective highlights a flexible approach to job performance, centred around the end goal of customer satisfaction. At the higher level, the focus remains consistent, as one employee (code 11) explains, "*If the job is completed and the customer is satisfied, the type of communication among employees becomes less critical. They achieve the desired results. It might be more efficient to use Hangouts for all communications, especially for lengthy projects, but we can't mandate it.*" This viewpoint reflects an understanding that while certain tools might be more efficient, the primary objective is customer satisfaction, which takes precedence over the specific means of communication.

The pursuit of high-quality customer service is a fundamental goal that rooted in the company's mission and culture. This espoused value fosters a goal-oriented mindset among employees at all organisational levels. It profoundly influences their day-to-day activities, embedding itself as a core component of the work ethos throughout the organisation. Employees are encouraged to prioritise customer satisfaction, and this objective guides their decision-making and interactions, both with customers and within the organisation. The emphasis on high-quality

133

customer service becomes a unifying factor, aligning the efforts of employees across all levels towards a common goal.

4.2.1.3 Proactiveness and Organisational Culture

At Sellers, prominence by attending to matters that raise their reputation within the organisation was at the forefront of certain individuals. This was due to the 24 hours, online application, Hangouts raising their profile much more than a static website, or a hard copy document identifying individual performance and productivity had led to some individuals drive to conduct more work than others. This is not just a preferred working style, but a value deeply ingrained in the organisational culture. This is reflected in the use of platforms like Hangouts for recognition and the significant emphasis placed on collaborative engagement. These practices serve as visible artifacts within the organisation, embodying values and practices related to acknowledging and rewarding employees for their active involvement. The underlying assumption is that recognition through the online, always on platform is a meaningful and influential factor in shaping individual performance evaluations. This assumption is a testament to the deep-seated value within the organisation.

Employees across different levels at Sellers expressed the importance of recognition and the role of collaboration in achieving it. A grassroot employee (code 01) highlights the link between customer satisfaction and recognition: "*Of course, recognition is important, but we will receive recognition if we receive good customer reviews.*" This statement reflects an understanding that collaboration and customer satisfaction are closely intertwined, with the latter being a key factor in gaining recognition. Middle-level employees (code 07) discuss the indirect rewards of using collaborative platforms like Hangouts: "*There is no reward for using Hangouts, but if you answer questions in the group chat, you can become well-known to managers, and they can get to know you better.*" Another middle-level employee (code 09) adds, "*I would say the incentive is to increase your visibility. So, if you consistently engage by asking questions and participating, you become a more recognisable among managers. Managers and all other partners can get to know you better.*" These statements underline the perceived value of active participation in collaborative platforms for enhancing visibility and recognition within the organisation.

Online posts are not only highly valued within the organisation but can also influence employees' career progression and pay increases. Recognition from managers, as a result of proactiveness, is particularly valued by employees. This underlying assumption shapes the

134

work ethos of lower and middle-level employees in their daily activities, influencing their approach to work and interaction with colleagues. However, this dynamic appears to shift at higher organisational levels. For senior employees, the emphasis on proactiveness and recognition as mechanisms for career advancement and salary adjustments is not pronounced.

However, when it comes to the impact of working with the ESN, it is more pronounced among middle-level employees. In contrast, grassroot employees tend to have minimal interaction with the ESN. This variation suggests that while proactiveness is a universal value within the organisation, its manifestation and influence on the use of technological tools like the ESN vary across different hierarchical levels.

4.2.1.4 Personalised Communication and Organisational Culture

This theme reflects an underlying assumption within the organisational culture, influencing the way employees prefer to communicate and interact. This assumption is subtly rooted in the everyday behaviours of employees, guiding their choices for more direct and personal forms of communication.

Grassroot employees (code 03) demonstrate this preference for direct communication: "*I don't typically use Hangouts to communicate with my close colleagues. Instead, we call each other directly if we have questions. We have a friendly group.*" This approach suggests a deeper belief in the value of personal connection and direct interaction over more formal or digital platforms. Middle-level employees (code 06) expressed similar tendencies: "*If I have a question that has already been asked before, I feel hesitant to ask it again or spend a lot of time searching through lengthy conversations. In such cases, especially with close colleagues, I prefer to call them directly and ask the question.*" This preference indicates a belief in the efficiency and personalisation of direct communication and also that Hangouts offers free of charge costs and there was no need to consider monetary costs. At the higher level (code 12), the trend towards personalised communication methods persists: "*I might contact other managers using my personal phone number if the need arises.*" This behaviour indicates a comfort with and preference for more intimate, direct communication, reinforcing the underlying assumption that such interactions are valued within the organisation.

The preference for direct communication, especially in interactions among close colleagues, suggests that at Sellers, personal and direct interactions are not just a matter of convenience but are rooted in deeper cultural beliefs. This underlying assumption reflects a cultural

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

inclination towards fostering relationships through personal, direct communication, and impacts how employees at different levels engage with each other and with communication tools like the ESN.

While ESN platforms like Hangouts are available and used within the organisation, the choice to opt for more personal forms of communication, especially among close colleagues, underscores the underlying assumption that personal, direct interactions are more effective or valued. This cultural inclination influences not just the communication style but also the overall work ethos at Sellers, demonstrating how deeply embedded assumptions can shape organisational behaviour and preferences.

4.2.2 Discretion to Decouple/Loosely Couple: Navigating Autonomy in ESN Usage

In the dynamic environment of Sellers, the theme of 'Discretion to Decouple/Loosely Couple' emerges as a key factor for understanding the interplay between technology, organisational policies, and employee work practices. This theme addresses how employees navigate and balance their use of technology in relation to the company's computer systems, official policies, and everyday procedures. It reflects the varying degrees of alignment or autonomy that employees exercise in their interaction with technological tools and organisational directives. Exploring this theme offers insights into how technology is utilised within Sellers, shedding light on the flexibility and discretion that employees have in integrating these tools into their work.

4.2.2.1 Coupling with Computer Systems

Coupling with computer system ensures that employees at all levels have continuous access to necessary technological tools, as exemplified by the integration of the ESNs like Hangouts with company-provided devices.

Grassroot employees (code 04) noted the direct integration of Hangouts into their work devices: "*Yes, I have seen it on the work iPhone. It was installed when they provided the mobile to me. Hangouts is pre-installed on all devices they provide to us.*" This accessibility reflects the company's intention to embed the ESN as a fundamental component of the technological infrastructure, making it a readily available tool for everyday communication. Middle-level employees (code 08) further emphasise the presents of the ESN: "*We all have Google accounts and devices with Hangouts pre-installed, accessible for everyone.*" The provision of devices

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

with pre-installed apps signifies the organisation's commitment to integrating these technologies into the fabric of daily operations. At the higher level, the approach remains consistent (code 10), highlighting the universal access to these tools: "*All employees have access to Google apps through their work devices received during their induction.*" This statement underscores the systematic integration of the ESN across all levels of the organisation, ensuring that every employee, regardless of their position, has access to the same technological resources from the outset of their employment.

The coupling of the ESN with the company's computer system at Sellers demonstrates a strategic approach to technology integration. By ensuring that Hangouts and Google Chat are a standard part of the work devices provided to employees, the company facilitates a uniform platform for communication and collaboration.

4.4.2.2 Coupling with Procedures/Policies

Despite the technological integration of Hangouts/Google Chat into the company's computer system, there was no official policy outlining its role in day-to-day tasks during this timeline. This absence of a predefined policy allows for a level of autonomy among employees in using the tool, enabling them to exercise discretion based on their specific needs and situations.

This discretion to decouple from formal policies is significantly influenced by the cultural elements within Sellers. The organisation's goal-oriented nature, which emphasises results and performance, particularly in delivering high-quality customer service, plays a crucial role. This orientation grants employee's autonomy in choosing how to use Hangouts/Google Chat, depending on their perception of what is most efficient for achieving goals. As one grassroot employee (code 01) puts it, "*As a salesman, I rarely need to make calls for serving customers. However, if I need to reach my colleagues regarding our rota or other work matters, I usually prefer to call them or leave a message on WhatsApp.*" Another grassroot employee (code 03) notes the difference in tool usage between lower and middle and higher-level employees: "*Shopfloor partners and those involved in direct sales tend not to use Hangouts, while office employees frequently utilise it due to their need for extensive communication with one another.*" This observation highlights how the nature of employees' roles influences their choice of communication tools. A middle-level employee (code 05) reflects on the flexibility in job performance: "*My manager is flexible about how I perform my job, as long as I consistently*

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

deliver excellent service and meet my customers' needs." This statement emphasises the priority of results over rigid adherence to specific communication tools.

Conversely, higher-level employees (code 11) find the ESN more integral to their work due to broader communication needs, as one employee states: "*I often need to contact a substantial number of people for business purposes. However, since I don't have their personal contact information, I find it more professional to call their company-issued device and use the company's app.*" This indicates that, for higher-level employees, the procedure becomes more closely coupled with ESN usage due to practical necessities.

Therefore, while the use of the ESN at Sellers is decoupled from formal policies and procedures for lower and middle-level employees, allowing them greater autonomy, it becomes more closely coupled for higher-level employees due to their specific communication requirements. This variation across levels illustrates how cultural themes and job roles shape the discretion in ESN usage within the organisation.

4.2.3 Material Constraint: Visibility and Communication Preferences

This theme explores the intricate dynamics of material constraints within Sellers, focusing on how practical considerations influence the utilisation of Hangouts/Google Chat. This examination is crucial for understanding the interplay between technological constraints, employee practices, and organisational culture, contributing valuable insights within the context of institutional theory.

4.2.3.1 Lack of Formal Training

At Sellers, the utilisation of Google apps has highlighted a clear distinction in training needs across organisational levels. Notably, the lack of formal training is predominantly affecting grassroot employees. This disparity in training accessibility has significant implications for the organisation. It can lead to inconsistencies in the use of digital tools, potentially hindering the efficiency and effectiveness of communication and collaboration within the company. For grassroot employees, this gap in formal training may result in challenges in fully leveraging the capabilities of Google apps, affecting their productivity, and possibly leading to feelings of marginalisation within the workplace. Addressing this training discrepancy is crucial for ensuring all employees, regardless of their organisational level, can contribute optimally to the company's digital transformation efforts.

This discrepancy highlights a material constraint that impacts the effective use of the ESN within the company. Contrary to the assumption that Google apps are intuitive and user-friendly for all, it becomes evident that varying skill levels across the workforce necessitate a more customised approach to training and support.

Some grassroot employees have explicitly expressed the need for formal training to navigate and effectively use the ESN. Concerns about accidentally causing disruptions during online meetings illustrate the anxiety and potential embarrassment faced without adequate knowledge of the platform. One grassroot partner (code 04) articulated this apprehension, stating, "*I often feel stressed during online meetings, as I worry that I might accidentally press a button and end up in an embarrassing situation.*" This response underscores a tangible barrier to confidence and competence in using the ESN, rooted in a lack of formal training.

In contrast, middle and higher-level employees do not exhibit the same need for training. They generally find Google apps to be straightforward and self-explanatory, indicating a level of digital fluency that allows them to engage with the ESN without additional instruction.

4.2.3.2 Information Visibility

Navigating the complexities of daily communication reveals significant challenges in information visibility, particularly through the lens of the material constraint theme. These challenges are most pronounced among grassroot employees, who encounter difficulties in finding relevance and ease in the flood of information available on the ESN.

Grassroot employees express a distinct sense of disconnection with the ESN, citing a lack of necessity for its use in their daily tasks. One grassroot employee (code 01) remarked, "*I'm familiar with Hangouts; my manager has introduced it to me. However, I don't actively use it because I haven't found a need for it.*" This sentiment highlights a gap between the availability of the platform and its perceived utility, where the relevance of information plays a crucial role in determining its use.

Middle-level employees face their own set of challenges with information visibility on the ESN. Concerns about redundancy in asking questions or the inefficiency of sifting through extensive conversations for specific information led some to bypass the ESN altogether for direct communication. "*When I have a question that I suspect someone else has asked before, I hesitate to ask it again or spend a lot of time searching through lengthy conversations. In such cases, I find it more efficient to call the person directly and ask the question,*" shared a

139

middle-level partner (code 09). This approach reflects a prioritisation strategy, where direct calls are seen as more effective in obtaining immediate, relevant answers.

Interestingly, higher-level employees do not report similar issues with information visibility within the ESN. This disparity suggests that different roles within the organisation experience and navigate the ESN's information landscape in varied ways.

4.2.4 Extra-Organisational Pressures

This section illustrates the interplay between institutional forces and ESN usage, highlighting the ways in which external pressures influence and intersect with internal dynamics. These pressures derive from governmental policies, the ESN policy-based systems, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, each influencing the employees' engagement with Hangouts/Google Chat.

4.2.4.1 Policy Directives

Policy directives, particularly in the context of social media guidelines, represent a significant external pressure influencing the use of the ESNs within organisations. These directives, as part of the regulative pillar of institutional theory, are shaped by governmental policies, like those enforced by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). They are operationalised through global compliance policies and a Code of Business Conduct, setting a standardised framework for behaviour on the OSNs.

Employees across various levels within the organisation have demonstrated an awareness of these policy directives. This awareness reflects the influence of regulatory frameworks on the perception and use of OSNs and ESNs. Despite the general recognition of these policies, the individual responses to them vary, illustrating the complexities of implementing regulatory frameworks in the digital environment.

A grassroot employee (code 03) acknowledged the importance of adhering to social media policies: "*I understand that people shouldn't misuse personal information shared on social media and adhere to such policies.*" This view represents a basic understanding of the necessity to comply with regulations designed to protect personal information on social media.

A middle-level employee (code 08) highlighted the role of personal responsibility alongside these policies: "*Yes, I'm aware of government policies regarding the use of social media. While it's beneficial, we should always exercise caution ourselves. We shouldn't solely rely on*

government enforced policies to address everything, but they are indeed helpful." This perspective emphasises the balance between following guidelines and exercising individual judgment in social media use.

Similarly, a higher-level respondent (code 11) recognised the need for such regulations: "*Yes, of course, I'm familiar with these general policies. We do need such policies to regulate user behaviour on social media.*" This acknowledgment points to an understanding of the role of policy directives in maintaining appropriate conduct within the digital space.

These policy directives significantly impact how the ESN is utilised within the organisation. Embedded in the terms and conditions set forth by apps like Google Hangouts, they directly influence the organisational practices and individual behaviours, aligning them with broader legal and ethical standards. Thus, policy directives serve as a crucial factor in shaping the use and governance of ESNs, ensuring compliance with established societal norms and regulatory expectations.

4.2.4.2 Policy-Based System

The Policy-Based System at Sellers, particularly concerning the use of Google Apps, is a critical aspect of the organisation's efforts to ensure a secure and compliant digital environment. Formal approval policies and terms and conditions govern the usage of these tools, representing a significant external pressure that shapes how this ESN is utilised. This structured approach to communication, as gleaned from the timeline zero interviews, highlights Sellers' dedication to maintaining a compliant and structured communication framework.

For instance, to access Google Apps, users, whether internal employees or external partners, must strictly adhere to these policies. A tangible example of this policy application is the requirement for all users to authenticate using a Google Account. External users wishing to engage in Google Chat conversations must have a Google Account, ensuring a level of security and compliance even in interactions extending beyond the organisational boundaries. Similarly, internal employees at Sellers are mandated to use their Sellers account for accessing Google Apps, which, in essence, is a Google Account specifically tied to the organisation's domain. This uniform requirement across both internal and external users exemplifies the organisation's comprehensive approach to policy enforcement, ensuring that the use of digital tools aligns with established security and compliance standards.

These policies, coupled with the detailed terms and conditions, contribute significantly to the maintenance of a structured and compliant environment for Google apps usage. Employees at different levels echo this sentiment. For example, a grassroot employee (code 02) noted, "*We are aware that there are rules for using Hangouts. It's more than just a chat tool; there are specific terms and conditions that we are required to adhere to.*" Moreover, a middle-level employee (code 09) acknowledged the ubiquity of such policies: "*Yes, it's common for all apps to have their own terms and conditions.*" A higher-level employee (code 12) highlighted the consequences of non-compliance: "*If you do not agree with the terms and conditions, you are not allowed to start using the app.*"

These statements illustrate a comprehensive understanding and acceptance of the policy-based system governing the use of Hangouts/Google Chat at Sellers. Accessing Google apps necessitates strict compliance with specific policies, applicable to both internal and external users. This policy-centric approach ensures a well-structured and compliant framework for the utilisation of Google apps, fostering a disciplined and regulated environment that supports effective and responsible use of these tools within the organisation.

4.2.4.3 Covid-19 Lockdown

The lockdown imposed as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic created a significant shift in the work environment at Sellers, particularly affecting the use of Hangouts/Google Chat. This period of restricted physical interaction necessitated a transition to digital communication platforms, impacting employees across various organisational levels.

During this time, a notable portion of grassroot employees were furloughed, affecting their interaction with the ESN. For those who remained, adapting to the new remote working conditions was a significant change. A grassroot employee (code 01) expressed this adjustment, saying, "*I generally prefer face-to-face conversations whenever possible. However, due to the current circumstances, we don't have the option for face-to-face interactions, so I have been using Hangouts instead.*"

Middle-level employees found Hangouts/Google Chat particularly advantageous for asynchronous communication, accommodating the varied schedules of their colleagues. One middle-level employee (code 06) noted, "*I'm not sure when my colleagues will be able to respond to my questions, as some of them may have children at home.*" This comment underscores the flexibility offered by Hangouts/Google Chat, allowing colleagues to respond

142

at their convenience, a feature less feasible with direct calls. Another middle-level employee (code08) remarked on the improved efficiency during the lockdown: "*I had experience using Hangouts before, but it used to take a long time to receive responses. However, during the lockdown, everyone is using it, and it has become very useful and a fast way of communication.*" This observation suggests that the enforced use of Hangouts/Google Chat during the lockdown enhanced its effectiveness as a communication tool.

For higher-level employees, Hangouts/Google Chat became an essential component of their virtual workspace. As one senior employee (code 12) put it, "*In the current situation, Hangouts serves as our virtual workplace.*" This reflects how the ESN transformed into a critical tool for maintaining business operations during the lockdown.

Overall, the lockdown phase led to a significant increase in the usage and wider penetration of Hangouts/Google Chat among all employees, except for those who were furloughed. This transition underlines the adaptability of Sellers' workforce and the crucial role of digital communication tools in facilitating effective collaboration and communication, especially in challenging times.

4.3 Refining the Conceptual Framework: Insights from the Timeline Zero Study

The conceptual framework depicted in Figure 4.3 has undergone refinement to incorporate insights gathered from a detailed examination of DT and IT-enabled Organisational Transformation. Drawing upon an empirically grounded conceptualisation developed through the integration of organisation science and information systems research, as well as longitudinal case studies highlighted by Wessels et al. (2021), this study explains the distinctions between these two transformative phenomena.

DT, as embarked upon by Sellers with the introduction of the ESN, is characterised by leveraging digital technology to (re)define the organisation's value proposition. This involves not just the utilisation of new digital tools but a fundamental shift in how the organisation conceives of and delivers value, marking a departure from traditional operational frameworks. This transformative journey is distinct in its capacity to forge a new organisational identity, reflecting a comprehensive integration of digital technologies into all facets of the business to achieve a digital-first operational ethos.

Conversely, IT-enabled Organisational Transformation focuses more narrowly on utilising digital technology to support and enhance the existing value proposition. Such activities are

143

aimed at improving operational efficiency, managing costs, or enhancing productivity within the pre-existing framework of the organisation. This form of transformation is characterised by the enhancement of an existing organisational identity, rather than the creation of a new one.

Through the insights provided by Wessels et al. (2021), it becomes evident that the DT journey initiated by Sellers represents a profound organisational shift towards a digitally integrated enterprise. This journey is marked by the development of a new organisational identity predicated on digital innovation and the redefinition of value propositions, setting it apart from more traditional IT-enabled enhancements. The complete embracement and integration of digital tools by employees, aligning with this newly envisioned digital operational model, signal the realisation of DT. This understanding, grounded in the distinctions articulated by Wessels et al. (2021), offers a clarified perspective on the nature and scope of DT in contrast to IT-enabled organisational transformation, thereby enriching the conceptual framework outlined in Figure 4.4.

Moreover, the conceptual framework recognises the significant impact of external pressures on internal dynamics. External pressures, such as regulatory frameworks and unforeseen events like the COVID-19 pandemic, exert influence on the internal pressures of the institution. These external forces create a dynamic environment that shapes the responses, adaptations, and evolution of both organisational culture and working practices. The integration of external pressures into the conceptual framework highlights the interconnectedness of the organisational ecosystem, emphasising the need for adaptability and responsiveness to external stimuli. This expanded framework provides a comprehensive lens through which the complex interactions between organisational culture, working practices, and external pressures can be examined in the context of ESN implementation within Sellers.

Figure 4.4: Conceptual Framework after Timeline Zero Study
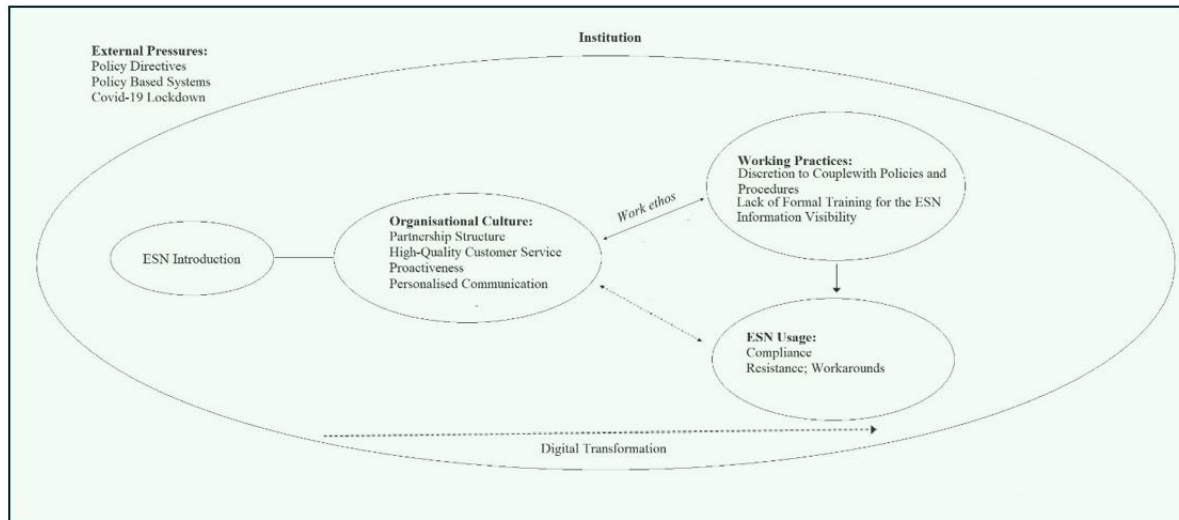
Source: Author's own illustration

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the outcomes of the timeline zero, which marked the initial phase of an in-depth investigation involving 12 participants at Sellers. The study adopted a semi-structured interview format, utilising purposive, snowball, and convenience sampling strategies to enrich the diversity of insights. The data analysis was methodically conducted through thematic analysis and open coding, firmly situated within the theoretical framework of institutional theory. This comprehensive approach has revealed a detailed understanding of the ESN usage within Sellers, particularly illustrating the complex interplay between organisational culture and working practices.

In the realm of organisational culture and work ethos, themes such as Partnership Structure, Value of High-Quality Customer Service, proactiveness, and personalised communication emerged. These themes collectively paint a picture of the established cultural values at Sellers, significantly influencing daily working practices and shaping the organisational ethos.

The study also identified material constraints, notably the lack of formal training and challenges in information visibility, which serve as tangible barriers to the effective use of ESNs. These constraints highlight the practical barriers employees face in optimising the utility of technological tools within their work environment.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

Furthermore, the theme of Discretion to Decouple/Loosely Couple underscored the varying degrees of alignment between employees and the organisational systems, policies, and procedures concerning technology use. This theme revealed the balance employees strike between following organisational directives and exercising autonomy in their work practices.

The analysis additionally brought to light the impact of external pressures, including policy directives and policy-based systems, as well as the significant influence of the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors collectively highlighted how external events and regulatory frameworks play a crucial role in shaping ESN usage patterns at Sellers.

Importantly, the integration of Schein's organisational culture model alongside institutional theory has enhanced the analysis, allowing for a dual perspective that captures both the internal cultural dynamics and the influence of broader societal and regulatory contexts. This dual lens approach, while grounded in the inductive findings from the interviews, was further structured through the theoretical categorisation suggested by Choudrie et al. (2017), offering a comprehensive and thorough understanding of ESN utilisation within Sellers' organisational framework.

CHAPTER 5

TIMELINE ONE AND TWO ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter explores the substantive findings derived from the comprehensive analysis of the timeline one and two of interviews, building upon the insights gained during the timeline zero study presented in the previous chapter. The repeated nature of this research design originating from the longitudinal data collection method, allowed for the refinement and enhancement of interview questions, ensuring a deeper exploration of the dynamics surrounding the use of ESN tools within Sellers. With the timeline zero study shedding light on bottom-up pressures, namely work ethos, discretion to decouple/loosely couple, and material constraints, the subsequent interview timelines explore these themes and unearthed additional layers of understanding.

During timeline zero and timeline two of this study, particular attention was paid to changes in the level of ESN usage and the emergence of new themes. Notably, a significant shift in ESN utilisation patterns was observed from timeline zero to timeline one, largely attributed to the impact of pandemic-related lockdowns. This critical theme highlighted the adaptive and resilient facets of Sellers' organisational culture in response to external pressures. Conversely, the transition from timeline one to timeline two did not demonstrate equally significant changes, suggesting a stabilisation of ESN usage patterns within the organisation. To avoid redundancy and provide a focused analysis, these two timelines are collectively examined in this single chapter.

The conceptual framework, rooted in institutional theory, has been continuously refined to capture the evolving nature of ESN usage within the organisational context. As the timeline one and two data analysis progresses, the complex interplay between organisational culture, external pressures, and working practices is revealed, contributing to an understanding of ESN

usage patterns at Sellers. This chapter also brings to light emergent themes, connections, and insights, presenting a holistic interpretation of the organisation's digital transformation journey and its implications on both culture and practices. The analysis here accounts for the dynamics of change and continuity observed throughout the study, providing a comprehensive overview of the digital landscape within Sellers.

5.1 Timeline One and Two Data Analysis

This section explores into the comprehensive dataset collected during the timeline one and two. As discussed previously, the study involved interviews with a total of 12 participants, conducted longitudinally across three timelines, resulting in a cumulative count of 36 interviews. The findings from the initial timeline (timeline zero) were extensively examined in the previous chapter as part of the pilot study. This chapter is about the subsequent timelines, which are the first and second timelines of data collection, where deeper layers of the relationship between organisational culture, external pressures, and evolving working practices are discovered.

5.1.1 Timeline One

After the completion of the timeline zero study and a thorough analysis of its data, the interview questions for the timeline one was revisited. While the core focus remained on understanding employees' utilisation of ESN, including types of resistance and workarounds, this timeline primarily repeated the questions from timeline zero. However, these questions were tailored based on the answers provided by participants during the initial timeline, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of their experiences, challenges, and perspectives related to ESN usage. This approach enabled the researchers to directly link the evolution of participants' thoughts and practices to the dynamics surrounding the implementation and utilisation of ESN tools at Sellers. The process of building upon earlier insights through revisiting the same questions, but informed by previous responses, facilitated a deeper understanding of the changing communication practices within the organisation.

5.1.2 Timeline Two

The second and final timeline of interviews continued the comprehensive data collection process, leveraging the insights gained from interviews took place in timeline zero and one. This timeline also repeated the questions from timeline zero and one, further refining them

based on the participants' previous responses to ensure continuity and depth in exploring their perspectives. This method of following up directly on earlier answers allowed for an in-depth understanding of evolving patterns, challenges, and utilisations in ESN usage over time. The questions were crafted to probe into changes and developments observed throughout the study, with open-ended questions encouraging participants to reflect on their entire journey with ESN.

Generally, the interview questions for timelines one and two were fundamentally rooted in the original set used in timeline zero, yet they were thoughtfully adapted to serve as follow-up queries. This adaptation was designed to probe the details of change and continuity in ESN usage and employee behaviours over time, ensuring a coherent and dynamic understanding of the digital transformation journey. The aim was to track the evolution of practices, perceptions, and challenges associated with ESN within Sellers, aligning with the qualitative research design principles that emphasise adaptiveness and responsiveness to the research context (Maxwell, 2012).

As each timeline unfolded, the questions were refined and expanded upon, based on the insights and responses garnered from the previous sessions. This iterative process allowed for a focused exploration of evolving themes and patterns, while maintaining a consistent thread for comparison across the different stages of the study. The modifications to the questions were informed by the participants' previous answers, aiming to capture the progression and shifts in their interactions with ESN, which is a hallmark of conducting longitudinal qualitative research (Saldaña, 2003).

This methodological approach highlights the study's commitment to capturing the longitudinal dynamics of ESN usage within Sellers. It highlights the adaptive nature of the inquiry, ensuring that the questions remained relevant and responsive to the developing narrative of change, as evidenced by the participants' experiences. Consequently, the evolved questions for timelines one and two facilitated a richer, more detailed exploration of the transformational aspects of ESN usage, shedding light on how organisational culture, technological utilisation, and external pressures merge to shape the path of digital transformation at Sellers (Maxwell, 2012; Saldaña, 2003). As the study reaches the final timeline of interviews, it aims to uncover the comprehensive narrative of the organisation's digital transformation (refer to Table 5.1).

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

Table 5.1 Examples of Interview Questions, Timeline One and Two

Overall Theme	Examples of questions used in the interviews	Inspiration from Literature
Organisational Culture	- Do you use Hangouts or other Google apps at Sellers? - How has your usage of Hangouts/Google apps at Sellers changed from before the pandemic to during the pandemic, and up to now? - For what purposes do you use Google apps? - Which communication tools do you use most and least at Sellers?	Choudrie et al. (2017); Choudrie and Zamani (2016); Lapointe and Rivard (2006); Rivard and Lapointe (2012); Talwar et al. (2020)
Discretion to Couple	- How has the flexibility of your work routines changed from before the pandemic to during the pandemic, and up to now? - Is there any policy or incentive for using Google apps at work? - Have the policies or incentives for using Google apps changed since the pandemic started? - How have these policies or incentives changed from last year to this year?	Azad and King (2011); Choudrie and Zamani (2016)
Lack of digital literacy	- Have you ever been trained to use Hangouts?	Ratten (2015); Orser et al. (2019); Ali et al. (2016); Laumer et al. (2016); Markus (1983); Choi, 2020); Nilsen et al. (2016)
Visibility of Information	- To what extent are Google apps useful at Sellers? - How has the usefulness of Hangouts/Google apps changed from before the pandemic to during the pandemic, and up to now?	Lapointe and Rivard (2005); Ali et al. (2016); Li et al. (2016); Haddara and Moen (2017)
Policy directives and policy-based system	- How do rules and policies of using OSNs generally and the Hangouts/Google apps specifically affect your work and the use of Hangouts?	Azad and King (2011); Choudrie and Zamani (2016)

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

Impact of COVID-19	- Did the tools of communication change after the pandemic lockdown? - How has the pandemic affected your current work routines? - Are any changes made during the pandemic lockdown still in place and part of your work routine?	Martinko et al. (1996); Rivard and Lapointe, (2012); Nel and Boshoff, (2020)

5.2 The process for Timeline One and Two Data Analysis

In this chapter, the data analysis process from the timeline one and two builds upon the established methodology detailed in the timeline zero. Adopting the deductive approach grounded in Grounded Theory coding, as per Glaser and Strauss (1967), this phase continues to emphasise the emergent nature of coding without being strictly confined to pre-existing theoretical constructs. This strategy ensures the fluid identification and integration of new themes, reflective of the evolving understanding of ESN usage within Sellers. The analytical steps, mirroring those of the timeline zero, involve deep data immersion, detailed coding, thematic categorisation, and the synthesis of findings into coherent themes. This process allows a deep understanding of the complex dynamics at play in the organisational usage of ESN tools.

Table 5.2 provides examples that illustrate the study's analytical framework, which involves categorising 'first-order data' (interviewee's constructions), 'key ideas' (extraction of the essential meaning of quotations), and 'second-order concepts' (researcher's constructions based on analysis and extant literature, (Walsham, 1995).

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

Table 5.2 Example of the Interpretation Process, Timeline One and Two

	First order data	Key idea	Second order concepts
Cultural analysis	"We are receiving important information quicker. As partners, we should be informed about the big changes and decisions," (Grassroot employee, code 01). "At the end of the day, we are partners, so if using Google Chat can reduce costs and increase profitability, why should I not use it? It's my profit too," (Middle-level employee, code 05). "This is not a normal retail, this is partnership, and the business profit is mine, even if it is small," (Middle-level employee, code 09).	Shift in perception towards ESN as a beneficial communication method, aligned with the partnership ethos.	The Partnership Structure's influence on ESN usage reflects an evolving organisational culture and work ethos, with a notable shift in employee attitudes towards the advantages of ESN for enhancing communication and sharing vital information. This shift highlights a growing recognition of the ESN's role in supporting organisational success and personal benefits, marking a departure from initial resistances.
	"If I want to contact one of my colleagues, I will probably call him and if I do not have his number, I will call his Hangouts." (Grassroot employee, timeline one, code 01) "I use my Hangouts for job-related contacts." (Middle-level employee, timeline one, code 07) "Most of our contacts are through Hangouts but sometimes if I am not in a rush to receive a response or I want to keep a record officially, I will use email as well." (Middle-level employee, timeline two, code 08)	Shift from personal communication tools to embracing ESN for professional interactions.	Initially, personal communication tools were preferred for their informality and sense of closeness among team members. However, as the study progressed, there was a clear transition towards recognising the benefits of professional digital tools for efficiency, record-keeping, and collective coordination. This shift not only indicates a change in communication preferences but also reflects the organisation's adaptability and the growing alignment between personal convenience and professional requirements. The increased reliance on ESN across all levels, especially noted in the later timelines of the study, highlights a cultural adaptation towards leveraging digital tools to enhance workplace connectivity and responsiveness, embedding these technologies into the fabric of daily working practices.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

5.3 Themes Emerging from the Timeline One and Two Data

Building upon the initial exploration from the timeline zero, this section further explores evolving themes within Sellers, enhancing comprehension of the organisational culture and working practices. The refined analysis, informed by subsequent interviews, confirms the importance of previously identified codes and introduces new dimensions to the understanding. Drawing on the framework by Choudrie et al. (2017) and grounded in institutional theory, the study navigates the complex interplay between bottom-up and top-down pressures, revealing their detailed impact on ESN utilisation and the organisational environment.

The analysis introduces two new themes: "Integration of Personal and Professional Digital Tools" under both Organisational Culture and Work Ethos; examining the blend of personal preferences with official systems. And "Digital Literacy and Empowerment" under Material Constraints, highlighting the critical role of skill development in optimising ESN use; These additions enrich the understanding of the dynamic relationship between technology, culture, and practice at Sellers, preparing for a comprehensive discussion on the ongoing digital transformation within the organisational context.

5.3.1 Organisational Culture and Work Ethos: Shaping Working Practices

This section explores the evolving landscape of organisational culture and its impact on work ethos at Sellers, specifically focusing on the integration and interaction of cultural values within the daily working practices of its employees. The timeline zero study identified four central cultural values: partnership structure, commitment to high-quality customer service, proactiveness, and personalised communication. While this analysis confirms the continuity of the first three themes, it reveals a significant evolution in the fourth theme. Originally framed as "Personalised Communication," the theme has transitioned to "Integration of Personal and Professional Digital Tools" in the subsequent timelines of interviews. This shift reflects a deep understanding of how employees at Sellers navigate the confluence of personal digital tools or platforms with professional ESN tools within their work environment.

5.3.1.1 Partnership Structure and Organisational Culture

In the completion of the investigation, the partnership ethos at Sellers continued to underline communication preferences and practices. This enduring principle, deeply rooted into the organisational culture fabric, manifested in evolving attitudes towards the ESN. Particularly

153

evident in the later stages of the study, employees' initial reluctance towards ESN usage began to decrease, reflecting a broader acceptance and recognition of its benefits for enhancing partnership-driven collaboration. This shift highlights a maturing perspective within the Sellers community, where the foundational value of partnership adapts to incorporate digital communication tools as essential enablers of shared success and connectivity across the organisation.

In the timeline one, a move away from the initial resistance was significantly revealed. Employees began to see the advantages of communication through ESN. A grassroot employee's (code 01) comment, "*We are receiving important information quicker. As partners, we should be informed about the big changes and decisions,*" marks a change from earlier hesitations. Moreover, a middle-level employee's (code 05) view, "*At the end of the day, we are partners, so if using Google Chat can reduce costs and increase profitability, why should I not use it? It's my profit too,*" suggests a shift towards seeing ESN as a collective benefit tool rather than an imposition. Thus, besides a salary that every worker in an organisation earns, Sellers' workers are shareholders in Sellers, so the high quality of service yields an extra income, which is the unique part of Sellers workforce.

This evolving viewpoint has also been seen in the second timeline. A grassroot employee's (code 03) remark, "*we all want the business to make more and more money, we are partners,*" along with a middle-level employee's (code 09) statement, "*This is not a normal retail, this is partnership, and the business profit is mine, even if it is small*," highlight a deeper assimilation of the partnership ethos. These comments reflect an understanding that personal benefits are in line with organisational success, facilitated by effective communication tool use.

However, it's observed that higher-level management comments remained absent, mirroring the pattern seen in the timeline zero, indicating a consistent stance across the organisational hierarchy regarding the partnership ethos. Despite this, the overall trend in the timeline one and two demonstrates a growing usage of ESN, powered by a collective focus on profitability and collaborative efforts, marking a significant evolution from the timeline zero.

5.3.1.2 High Quality Customer Service and Organisational Culture

In the ongoing exploration of Sellers' organisational culture and work ethos, the commitment to high-quality customer service, deeply embedded within the organisation's mission, resurfaced as a pivotal cultural element. This dedication to service excellence, going beyond

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

just declarations to become a practice embedded in daily working practices and communication, is exemplified through the utilisation of Hangouts/Google Chat. This tool highlights Sellers' commitment by enhancing real-time communication among employees, thereby elevating customer service quality.

The timeline one interviews shed light on Hangouts/Google Chat's value in promoting customer service excellence, with middle and higher-level employees recognising its role in delivering quick and effective solutions. For example, a middle-level employee (code 06) described utilising the platform for rapid inquiry resolution: "*If I receive a query from a customer that I am unsure about, I will just ask in the group, and someone will reply. It is much quicker than trying to call a colleague, especially if it is not their working hours.*" This efficiency and collaborative benefit of the platform are clear.

Furthermore, a higher-level employee (code 10) remarked, "*Yes, we are definitely using the app better to serve our customers. These kinds of apps are more useful when everyone uses it, and now it is showing its advantages.*" This observation suggests an organisational shift towards optimising the use of digital communication tools for customer service.

The second timeline repeated the importance of timely responses in a competitive market. A middle-level employee (code 08) noted, "*All businesses are using online platforms, we need to meet our customers with timely responses to ensure we remain competitive and retain our customers.*" This statement highlights the strategic necessity of digital platforms in maintaining customer satisfaction and competitiveness. Additionally, a higher-level employee (code 11) observed, "*We are receiving fewer complaints from our customers about delaying in responses than before Covid, and Hangouts has helped us massively.*" This feedback indicates a noticeable improvement in customer service responsiveness, attributed to the effective use of Hangouts/Google Chat.

Importantly, respondents did not report concerns regarding the accuracy of responses obtained via Hangouts/Google Chat, indicating a high level of trust in the collective knowledge and integrity of their colleagues. This trust suggests that the platform not only expedites the process of inquiry resolution but also maintains a standard of reliable information exchange, a testament to the strength of the collaborative environment at Sellers.

The absence of reported issues with incorrect information reinforces the belief in the effectiveness of Hangouts/Google Chat as a communication tool that aligns with the

partnership ethos of Sellers. It illustrates how the platform supports not just rapid communication but also trustworthy and accurate information sharing, critical for maintaining high standards of customer service.

The grassroots level employees, during both the first and second timelines, emphasised the importance of high-quality customer service to Sellers' culture. However, they noted that the nature of their job roles did not involve using ESNs like Hangouts/Google Chat directly for customer service. "*We all do our best to provide the best customer service we can but due to the nature of our job, we don't use the ESN to provide customer service*," code 03 explained. This distinction highlights the role-specific application of digital tools within the organisation, with the universal acknowledgment of the value of high-quality customer service transcending job functions.

The insights from these interviews offer a comprehensive picture of Sellers' commitment to high-quality customer service, underpinned by the strategic use of digital communication tools. Despite the variance in direct application of ESNs across different job levels, the unified emphasis on customer service excellence remains a cornerstone of the organisational culture at Sellers.

5.3.1.3 Proactiveness and Organisational Culture

In the timeline one and two of Sellers' organisational culture, the enduring theme of proactiveness highlights a distinctive feature of the organisation. This theme, rooted in the cultural fabric of Sellers, emphasises the importance of visibility and interaction, particularly through the use of digital platforms like Hangouts/Google Chat for achieving recognition and enhancing one's reputation within the organisation. The significance of this cultural element is consistently recognised across all interview timelines, linking proactive engagement to tangible outcomes such as performance assessments during annual reviews.

During the timeline one interviews, the cultural value placed on proactiveness was illustrated through participants' responses. For example, grassroots participant (code 01) revealed, "*Some colleagues just reply to every post to say, 'I am very active!*'" indicating how digital engagement is perceived as a measure of proactiveness and visibility within the company. Another account from a middle-level employee (code 09) shared a story that highlighted the preference for digital recognition over face-to-face commendation, "*I saw my colleague in the corridor and said, 'By the way, the photo you shared in the group from your design was really good.' He*

said, 'So why are you mentioning it here? Go and comment on it in the group.'" This incident reflects the organisational ethos that emphasises acknowledgment from colleagues in the digital spaces, and contributions, as well as comments and likes can be seen by a wider audience, including top management. Therefore, if someone was doing a good job at work, the top level individuals could see that. However, this action was restricted to promoting achievements and good practices amongst the workforce, but not any criticisms.

The interviews of the second timeline confirmed these observations, with participants echoing the cultural emphasis on digital recognition. A grassroot employee (code 02) remarked, "*Some people just like everything in the group to just say I am here*" pointing to the strategic use of digital interactions for signalling presence and engagement. In the physical world, this is like someone attending every meeting, every event to symbolise and confirm their presence and being proactive in the organisation. Some individuals of an organisation feel that attending every meeting, every leaving, birthday party or any event that involves colleagues should be attended to display collegiality and build their presence in the organisation.

A middle-level employee (code 07) expressed a clear preference for receiving compliments in the digital group over in-person interactions, stating, "*I like the compliments in the group more than in face to face. Because in the group everyone, including the top managers, can see that.*" This preference highlights the perceived value of digital platforms as spaces where recognition is not only public but also carries weight in performance evaluations and reputational standing within the organisation.

These narratives from the interviews of first and second timelines illustrate the deep-seated value Sellers places on proactiveness, recognition, and the strategic use of digital platforms for career advancement and reputation building. The acknowledgment through digital platforms like Hangouts/Google Chat serves as a visible artifact of the organisation's culture, reinforcing the belief that active participation and visibility are crucial for success within Sellers. The continuity of this theme from the timeline zero through subsequent interviews highlights its significance as a fundamental aspect of the organisational ethos, shaping interactions, performance evaluations, and the overall work environment at Sellers.

5.3.1.4 Integration of Personal and Professional Digital Tools and Organisational Culture

Originally this theme was framed as "Personalised Communication," in the timeline zero analysis; however, the theme has transitioned to "Integration of Personal and Professional Digital Tools" in the timeline one and two analysis. This shift reflects a deep understanding of how employees at Sellers navigate the convergence of personal digital tools or platforms with professional ESN tools within their work environment.

This transition is rooted in the observed changes in how employees use different tools to facilitate their communications at work. In the timeline zero, the use of personal tools for contacting colleagues was highlighted as a means to demonstrate closeness and trust among team members. This practice emphasised on the personalised aspect of communication within the organisation, where employees felt comfortable stepping beyond formal communication channels to foster relationships and collaboration. The evolution of communication practices at Sellers, particularly through the integration of the Hangouts/Google Chat, signifies a profound cultural shift within the organisation. This shift, as revealed in the timeline one and two, highlights the ways in which organisational culture influences work ethos and, consequently, daily working practices.

In the timeline zero of the study, the preference for personal communication methods was prominent, especially among grassroot employees who did not frequently mention the ESN as their preferred communication method. However, as the study progressed into timeline one and two, a clear transformation in communication preferences emerged. A grassroot employee's (code 03) comment from the timeline one, "*if I want to contact one of my colleagues, I will probably call him and if I do not have his number, I will call his Hangouts*," illustrates this shift towards embracing digital platforms for communications. Moreover, the integration of Hangouts by employees, notably by those at the middle level who initially perceived the ESN as overly formal, signifies a shift towards leveraging this platform for job-related communications. As one middle-level employee (code o5) explicitly mentioned, "*I use my Hangouts for job-related contacts,*" this reflects an evolving reliance on ESN for professional exchanges. The significance of this shift lies in the dual functionality that Hangouts offers, separating professional communications from personal interactions. Unlike personal devices, which employees prefer for non-work-related conversations with colleagues they are personally acquainted with, Hangouts provides a distinct, easily accessible contacts list

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

specifically for professional purposes. This separation not only enhances the efficiency of work communications by streamlining contact processes but also helps maintain clear boundaries between personal and professional spheres. Therefore, the utilisation of Hangouts/Google Chat for professional interactions saves time and simplifies communication efforts, especially when the need arises to repeatedly contact the same colleague for work-related matters, contrasting with the less structured, more time-consuming methods of reaching out for professional queries through personal devices.

This trend continued to evolve, with another middle-level employee (code 06) in the timeline two noting, "*Most of our contacts are through Hangouts but sometimes if I am not in a rush to receive a response or I want to keep a record officially, I will use email as well.*" Such statements reflect a strategic approach to communication, choosing platforms based on the specific needs of the interaction.

The integration of ESN into daily communication practices became more pronounced, with employees across different levels utilising Hangouts for a variety of purposes. For instance, in the timeline one interviews, a grassroot employee mentioned using the platform for group queries, such as shift swaps, indicating its utility for facilitating collective coordination and interaction (refer to Table 5.3). Moreover, the preference for Hangouts for quick questions or discussions, alongside traditional methods for more formal or non-urgent communication, highlights the flexibility of ESN as a tool that supports the diverse communication needs within Sellers. For instance, a middle-level employee (code 09) shared, "*Sometimes, while I'm drafting a plan in the presence of a customer and need a specific code, I simply post my query in the group chat. The response comes through almost immediately*".

This cultural shift towards the integrated use of personal and professional digital tools at Sellers is not merely about using the ESN but reflects deeper values related to flexibility, efficiency, and connectivity within the organisational culture. The evolution from personal devices to embracing ESN across all levels signifies a transformation in the work ethos, where digital communication becomes embedded in the fabric of daily working practices. It illustrates how organisational culture at Sellers has adapted to incorporate digital tools, not just as a means of enhancing communication efficiency but as a reflection of the organisation's commitment to fostering a connected and responsive work environment.

Table 5.3, consisting of two panels (Table 5.3a and Table 5.3b), provides examples of communication preferences among Sellers' employees, from timeline zero through timelines

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

one and two. Table 5.3a outlines the initial communication preferences observed during Timeline Zero, highlighting a strong inclination towards personal communication tools and methods among employees for both internal and customer interactions.

In contrast, Table 5.3b captures the shift in communication preferences during timelines one and Two, demonstrating a significant increase in the utilisation of Hangouts/Google Chat. This transition highlights a strategic move from predominantly personal communication methods to a more integrated approach, blending personal and professional digital tools. The progression depicted across these panels clarifies how employees at Sellers gradually embraced Hangouts/Google Chat, recognising its efficiency and convenience for professional communication, while still maintaining personal communication methods for non-work-related interaction.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

Table 5.3a: Different organisational level choice of communication- Timeline Zero

Organisational level	First choice of communication channel		Second choice of communication channel		
	Interpersonal	Group	Interpersonal	Group	
Grassroot	Face-to-face	Email	Phone	Notes	Grassroot employees primarily engaged with customers directly, necessitating minimal communication with colleagues. For shift changes, face-to-face communication or phone call were preferred. Email or notes were used for group communications or when reporting issues. Important documents were shared via email.
Middle level	WhatsApp Hangouts	WhatsApp Hangouts	Phone	Email	The choice between WhatsApp and Hangouts depended on the relationship with the recipient. Hangouts was the fallback option when responses were not received through WhatsApp, phone, or email. Planners, often away from the office, relied on Hangouts for immediate communication, reserving email for formal exchanges.
Higher level	Hangouts Email	Hangouts Email	Phone	Conference call	Managers primarily used Hangouts and email for internal communication across national branches. For external communications or when digital tools were unavailable, phones or conference calls were used.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

Table 5.3b- Different organisational level choice of communication- Timeline One and Timeline Two

Organisational level	First choice of communication channel		Second choice of communication channel		
	Interpersonal	Group	Interpersonal	Group	
Grassroot	Face-to-face/ Phone	Hangouts/Google Chat	Hangouts	Email	Grassroot employees, showing an increased use of Hangouts/Google Chat for group communications, indicate a shift towards integrating ESN into their communication practices, yet retaining a preference for face-to-face or over the phone interactions for individual communications
Middle level	Hangouts/Google Chat	Hangouts/Google Chat	Phone WhatsApp	Email	Middle-level employees demonstrate a significant shift towards Hangouts/Google Chat as the primary communication tool for both interpersonal and group interactions. The use of phone, WhatsApp, and email as secondary options illustrates an integrated approach to communication, considering the urgency and formality of the interaction.
Higher level	Hangouts/Google Chat	Hangouts/Google Chat	Phone/Email	Conference call/ Email	Higher-level employees consistently prioritise Hangouts/Google Chat, reflecting its central role in facilitating managerial communication. The secondary choices of phone/email and conference calls/email for interpersonal and group communications, respectively, emphasise the importance of flexibility and the need for formal communication channels in certain contexts.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

5.3.2 Discretion to Decouple/Loosely Couple: Navigating Autonomy in ESN Usage

This theme investigates the aspects of discretion exercised by employees in navigating the coupling with computer systems and organisational policies, with a specific focus on their engagement levels with the ESN. The exploration in the timelines one and two study continues to reveal the complexities surrounding autonomy in ESN usage and its implications for organisational dynamics.

5.3.2.1 Coupling with Computer Systems

In the current organisational landscape at Sellers, the integration of Google accounts and dedicated devices, ranging from iPhones and iPads to laptops, remains an indication of the company's commitment to facilitating communication. As stated in timeline zero, Hangouts/Google Chat is inherently part of these devices, being pre-installed and ensuring accessibility for all employees. Therefore, the ESN is coupled with the computer system, a consistent observation evident throughout all three timelines of the interviews.

5.3.2.2 Coupling with Procedures/Policies

In the analysis of timeline zero, the concept of "decoupling" refers to the separation of the ESN, specifically Hangouts/Google Chat, from formal organisational procedures and policies. This phenomenon was observed in the way Hangouts/Google Chat was integrated into the employees' computer systems without accompanying official guidelines or policies dictating its precise role in daily working practices. As a result, employees were afforded a level of autonomy over the tool's utilisation, allowing them to decide independently when and how best to use Hangouts/Google Chat to suit their individual work requirements and preferences.

This decoupling was seen in various instances where employees, in the absence of formal directives, adapted the use of Hangouts/Google Chat for diverse purposes ranging from quick queries to more complex collaborative projects. For example, employees often relied on their judgment to determine the most appropriate situations for Hangouts/Google Chat use, such as opting for immediate group communication for urgent assistance or using the platform for coordinating tasks among team members. This flexible approach enabled employees to integrate the tool into their workflow in a manner that complemented their working style and the dynamic needs of their tasks, rather than being constrained by rigid policy prescriptions.

Transitioning to the timeline one and two analysis, a noticeable shift emerges, indicating increased integration of Hangouts/Google Chat into some of the daily work processes. During the timeline one of interviews, participants demonstrated enhanced interaction with the ESN. For instance, a grassroot employee (code 02) noted, "*We are now checking our rota online. This is very good as we can check it as soon as it is out and request amendments if needed. We do not need to go to the store to be informed anymore.*" Similarly, a middle-level employee (code 07) shared, "*When we plan a kitchen, we upload it on Hangouts to get checked by someone else. This is for the second eye on the plan to make sure there is no problem with it.* A higher-level employee (code 12) mentioned, "*Of course, we are using Hangouts much more now compared to pre-Covid. It is still not enough, but I believe we are getting there.* "

In the timeline two of interviews, another middle-level employee (code 07) emphasised, "*Now we have to upload the plan on the system to be approved. This is not optional and could prevent a lot of potential issues.*" Additionally, a higher-level employee (code 11) highlighted improved efficiency in communication, stating, "*Communication is much more efficient now, not just within one branch but also with colleagues in other branches. This means that we are more efficient in using our resources. We use our advisor in Location A to respond to customer queries in Location B if we need to.*" This shift indicates a more integrated use of Hangouts/Google Chat, reflecting a growing alignment with organisational procedures and policies, marking a notable evolution from the timeline zero. Figure 5.1 illustrates the integration of the ESN within daily work, showcasing the progression from timeline zero to two.

The evolution observed in the integration of Hangouts/Google Chat into daily work processes in the timeline one and two signals a significant shift, suggesting a changing organisational culture. In the timeline zero study, the decoupling of the ESN from formal procedures and policies was emphasised, allowing employees a degree of autonomy. This discretion was influenced by the goal-oriented nature of the organisation, prioritising results and performance in delivering high-quality customer service.

As evidenced in the timelines one and two study, the increased integration of communication tools into daily tasks reflects a transformation in working practices. The emphasis on uploading plans for verification and utilising the ESN for efficient communication demonstrates a shift towards a more process-oriented approach. This change implies that the impact of working practices on organisational culture is not static; rather, it's dynamic and reciprocal.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

The causal relationship between culture and working practices becomes evident as the organisation transitions from being solely goal-oriented to one that pays attention to the processes as well. The evolving use of communication tools highlights how changes in working practices contribute to the ongoing transformation of organisational culture. This interplay emphasises the intricate and reciprocal nature of the relationship between culture and working practices within the organisational setting.

Furthermore, the influence of organisational levels and teamwork dynamics remains evident in employees' discretion to decouple from formal policies and procedures related to Hangouts/Google Chat. Despite the presence of some policies regarding the use of the ESN in daily work, the autonomy granted to employees varies based on their roles within the organisation. Grassroot employees, who may be less engaged in extensive collaboration, may exercise this autonomy differently compared to mid- and top-level employees actively involved in teamwork-oriented tasks. This observation suggests a shift from being decoupled with procedures and policies to a state of being loosely coupled.

Figures 5.1 and 5.2, serve as examples illustrating the integration of ESN into Sellers' procedures and policies, focusing on the role of ESNs among planners (middle-level employees). Figure 5.1, represents the initial process during the timeline zero, highlighting the workflow and steps involved in customer interaction and planning without additional peer review mechanisms. Figure 5.2, details the refined process after timeline one, incorporating new steps for quality control through peer review on Google Chat, ensuring plans are inspected for errors and validated by another planner before proceeding.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

Figure 5.1: Initial Customer Interaction and Planning Process (Timeline Zero)

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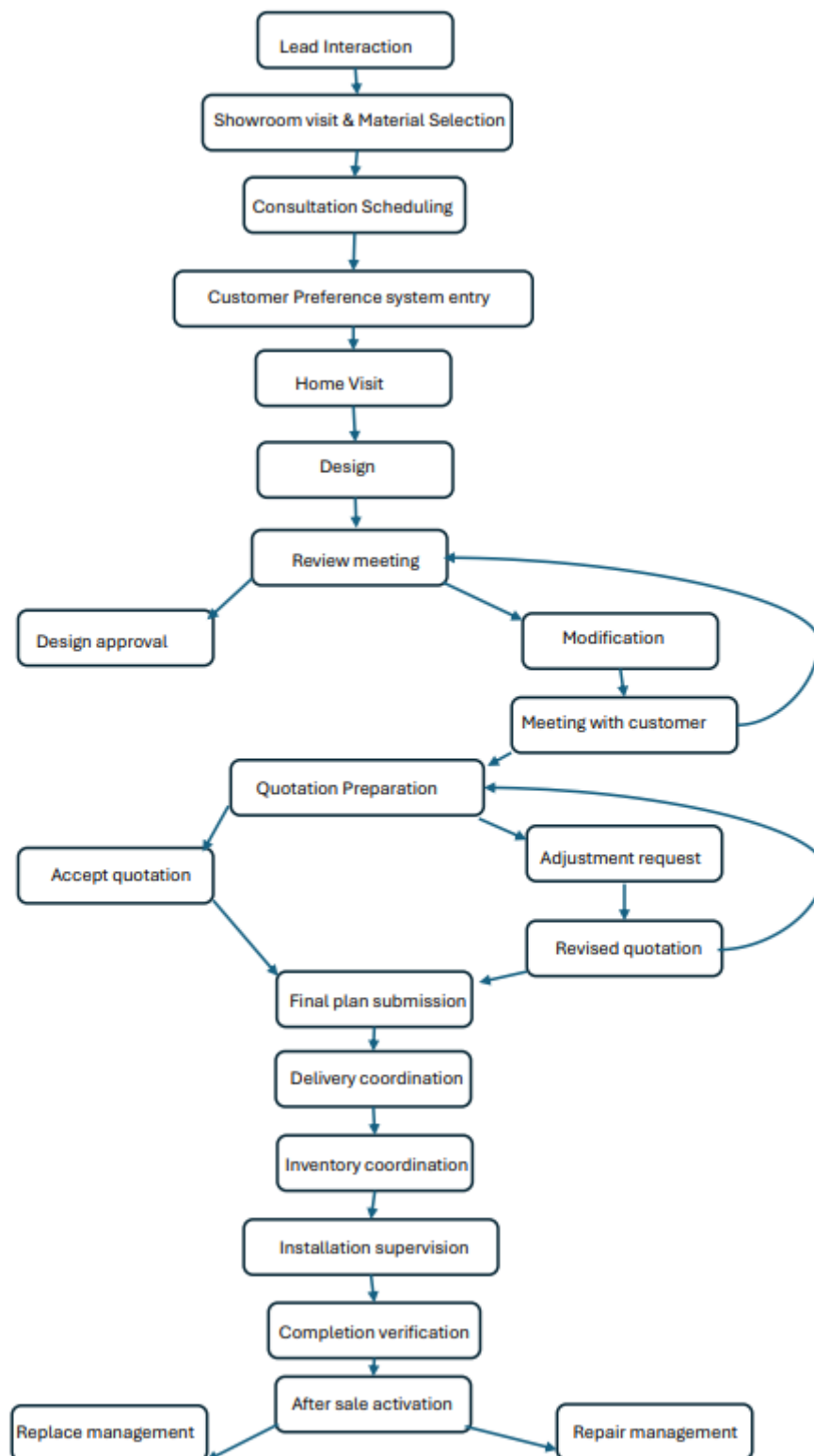
Figure 5.2: Enhanced Customer Interaction and Planning Process with Peer Review (Timeline One and Two)

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study
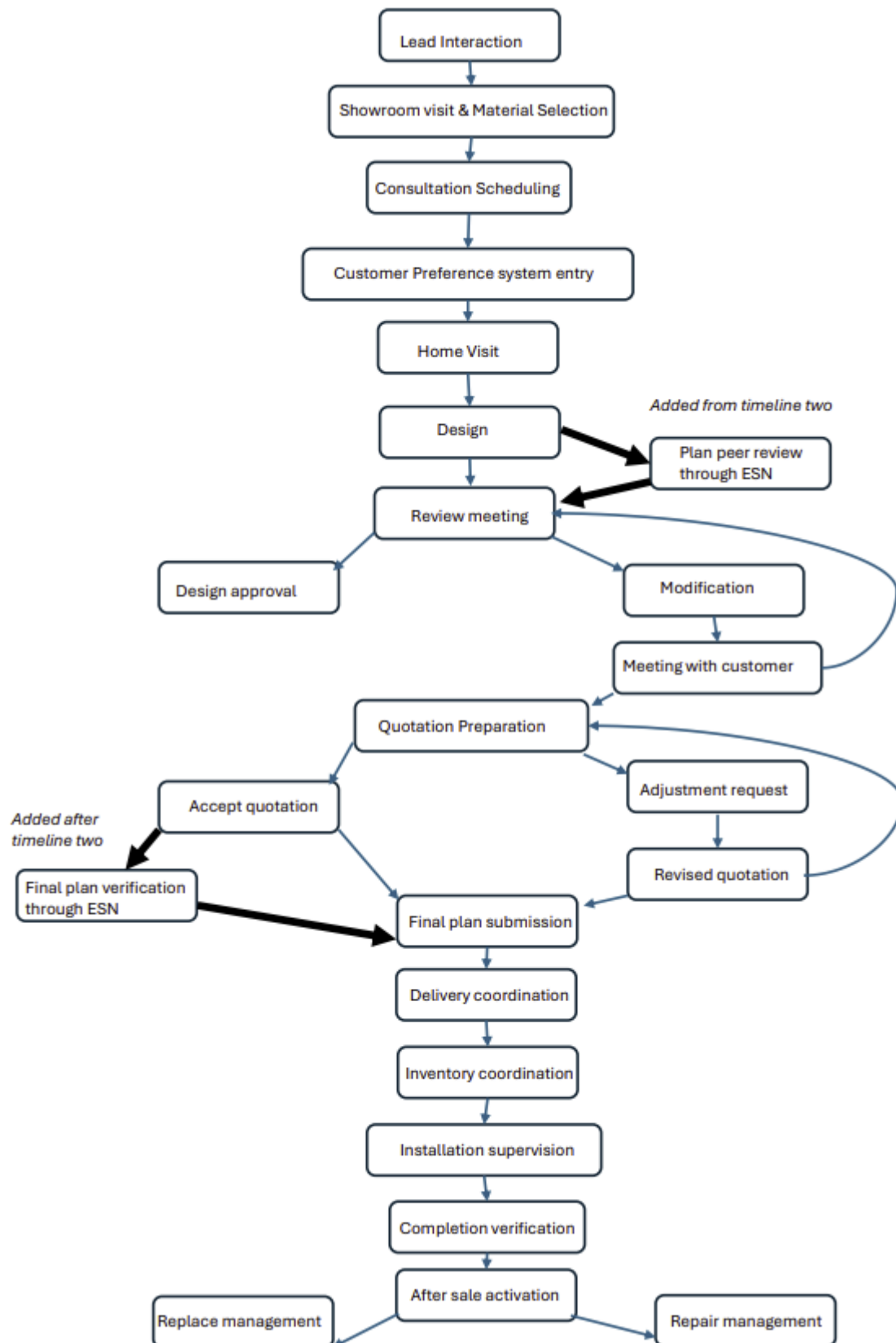
5.3.3 Material Constraint: Visibility and Communication Preferences

This theme, identified in the timeline zero, continues to be a focal point in the timeline one and two as the aim of this chapter is to explore the evolution of the themes over the three timelines. Exploring the intricate dynamics of material constraints within Sellers, the theme specifically investigates how practical considerations shape the utilisation of Hangouts/Google Chat. This examination is instrumental in revealing the complex interactions between technological constraints, employee practices, and organisational culture. Following the institutional theory, the explorations seek to provide insightful observations on the evolving landscape of workplace communication.

5.3.3.1 Digital Literacy Barriers

The theme of digital literacy emphasises on the significant evolution in recognising and addressing the challenges of using ESN within the organisation. Initially identified due to concerns over formal training deficiencies, this theme has since widened to capture the broader requirement for digital fluency among employees. This shift from identifying gaps in tool-specific training to acknowledging the overarching need for comprehensive digital literacy highlights a critical organisational development.

Grassroot employees have consistently expressed considerable anxiety about effectively engaging with Google apps, especially during online meetings. An employee's (code 04) concern, "*I often feel stressed during online meetings, as I worry that I might accidentally press a button and end up in an embarrassing situation,*" initially underlined as the lack of formal training. However, as the study progressed, it became evident that the issue was rooted in a broader challenge of digital literacy, extending beyond mere tool familiarity. Statements from grassroot employees in subsequent timelines, such as code 03 mentioned "*I have asked my colleague to show me different options in Hangouts. I have also learnt about my other apps as well,*" and code 04 stated that "*I generally do not like these online apps; they are too complicated, but I am managing to do what I should,*" explicitly articulate this underlying challenge.

During the timeline one and two, similar to the timeline zero, middle and higher-level employees did not exhibit a need for improved digital literacy, suggesting a disparity in digital fluency across organisational levels.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

5.3.3.2 Information Visibility

The theme of Information Visibility has evolved throughout the study at Sellers, particularly emphasising the challenges faced by employees in accessing and managing communication effectively within material constraints. This evolution is captured through insights from different timelines of the study, illustrating the varying approaches to utilising ESNs like Hangouts/Google Chat.

In the timeline zero, grassroot employees expressed a lack of necessity for group conversations on Hangouts/Google Chat, signalling initial challenges in information visibility. As the study advanced into the first and second timelines, the context of these challenges became clearer.

During the timeline one interviews, a grassroot employee (code 01) during the Christmas season articulated the practical difficulties of engaging with digital tools due to increased workload: *"during the Christmas time, we are so busy, we do not have time to spend a lot on devices. We will have a lot of customers and we will work longer hours to serve them."* This comment highlights the direct impact of busy retail periods on digital engagement.

Another grassroot employee (code 03) in the timeline two remarked on the rota publication method, "*it is fine that they publish the rota through Google Chat, but we need to know our rota once a month and there is no difference how they publish it.*" This perspective highlights a fundamental need for accessible and reliable information over the novelty of the digital platform used.

Furthermore, middle-level employees recognised the utility of Hangouts/Google Chat for direct communication but noted the time-consuming nature of group chats during peak periods. One middle-level employee (code 07) from the timeline one found calling via Hangouts particularly useful for quick communication with colleagues from other branches, stating, "*I found calling from Hangouts very useful... But to be honest, I found the group chats time-consuming.*"

These insights reflect an evolving approach to information visibility at Sellers. Grassroot employees prioritise direct, efficient channels for essential updates, while middle-level employees adapt their use of ESN to suit specific communication needs, navigating the balance between efficiency and the constraints of digital tools. Notably, higher-level managers did not express concerns regarding information visibility through the timelines of interviews. This absence suggests that their interaction with the ESN and digital tools might be influenced by

different factors, or that their roles naturally mitigate the material constraints felt by grassroot staff.

5.3.4 Extra Organisational Pressures

The extra organisational pressure in the timeline one and two explores the external factors that significantly impact the use of ESN within Sellers. As discussed in the timeline zero study, this section explores into three main themes: Policy Directives, Policy-Based System, and the COVID-19 Lockdown. Each theme illustrates how external regulations, organisational policies, and global events shape the digital communication practices of Sellers' employees.

5.3.4.1 Policy Directives

The existence of policy directives remains an important external pressure shaping ESN usage within the organisation. Throughout the study, employees' awareness and adherence to these directives illustrate how external regulations intersect with internal dynamics, from the timeline zero through timeline one and two.

During the timeline one, a grassroot employee (code 01) acknowledged the essence of these regulations, stating, "*Yes, these general policies are to control people's behaviour.*" This response was confirmed by a middle-level employee (code 08) who drew parallels with everyday life, "*I think they are required, such as the rules in our lives, such as the driving rules.*" A higher-level employee (code 10) reflected on the necessity and efficacy of such policies within corporate settings: "*Because of these rules, companies use social media; otherwise, that could be quite risky. Still not too safe. Like any other rules, some people obey and some not.*"

By the second timeline, a grassroot employee (code 02) affirmed their respect for governmental policies, "*I know the governmental policies, and I respect them.*" This respect for boundaries and the protective intent of policies was further underlined by middle and higher-level employees. "*I like them because we need to define boundaries,*" mentioned a middle-level employee (code 09), while a higher-level participant (code 11) emphasised the safeguarding aspect, "*These policies are to protect people from being misused.*"

The comments from the first and second timelines emphasise the continued significance of policy directives in guiding the organisation's engagement with ESNs. The consistency in employee perspectives across levels and study timelines underscores a collective recognition

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

of the importance of aligning digital practices with regulatory expectations. This alignment ensures that the organisation's use of digital tools like ESNs not only enhances internal communication and collaboration but also adheres to broader legal and ethical standards, reflecting a responsible digital citizenship within the organisational culture.

5.3.4.2 Policy Based System

For the timeline one and two, the theme of "Policy-Based Systems" remains a cornerstone in the structured and compliant use of Google apps at Sellers, reflecting a continuous commitment to regulated communication environments. Despite no new developments reported in the first and second timelines of interviews, the foundational importance of these systems is repeated.

The requirement for strict adherence to formal approval policies and terms and conditions governing the use of Google apps ensures that Sellers maintains a disciplined approach to digital communication. This adherence is not just a procedural formality but a critical aspect of the organisational culture that emphasises responsible and compliant usage of digital tools.

5.3.4.3 COVID-19 Lockdown: Accelerating Digitalisation at Sellers

The COVID-19 lockdown marked a significant turning point for Sellers, compelling an accelerated transition to digital communication platforms like Hangouts/Google Chat. This period show up the adaptability and resilience of the organisation's workforce across various levels.

During the timeline one interviews, which was post-lockdown, employees observed a profound shift in operational dynamics. A grassroot employee (code 03), returning from furlough, noted, "*When I came back to work, I saw a significant change. Everything was going online.*" This comment illustrates the rapid yet effective digital shift within the workplace. Middle-level feedback further highlighted this transformation, with one (code 09) stating, "*Covid boosted the speed of being digitalised; we will never go back to the way we used to work.*" A higher-level employee (code 12) reflected on the expedited digital adoption, "*It would have taken time to reach this point, but lockdown accelerated it. During the lockdown, we've tried various online platforms to run the business and survive. While some didn't work well and were discontinued, others proved effective, and we've continued using them.*" They added, "*For example, some meetings should take place online. I can be in one location but, if needed, request an online meeting in another branch.*"

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

During the timeline two of interviews, the lasting impact of COVID-19 on workplace practices became even more apparent. "*Definitely, Covid brought more online aspects to our lives, including online shopping and working,*" remarked a grassroot employee (code 04), indicating the pervasive influence of the pandemic. A middle-level employee (code 06) observed, "*Massive changes after Covid in our lives, not just work. I think our use of digital tools can be categorised into pre- and post-Covid eras*." Echoing this response, a higher-level employee (code 11) expressed satisfaction with the accelerated changes, "*I am happy with the changes. For some of these, we had been working for so long to make them happen, but the lockdown just expedited it.*"

These comments from across the organisational levels emphasise the important and lasting impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on Sellers' operational and communication strategies. The pandemic not only necessitated an immediate shift to digital platforms but also catalysed a deeper, organisation-wide embrace of digitalisation, marking a clear separation between pre- and post-Covid work and life practices. This transition highlights Sellers' commitment to leveraging digital tools for ensuring business continuity, enhancing efficiency, and fostering a more flexible and resilient work environment.

5.4 Evolving Themes in Digital Transformation: A Comparative Analysis Across Three Timelines of Longitudinal Study at Sellers

The journey from timeline zero to timeline two at Sellers reveals a significant evolution of organisational culture, work ethos, and the impact of external pressures on the use of ESN. This comparative analysis highlights how themes identified initially have not only persisted but also evolved, reflecting the organisation's adaptive strategies and responses to internal and external pressures.

Key themes such as partnership structure and organisational culture, high-quality customer service and organisational culture, proactiveness and organisational culture, and integration of personal and professional digital tools, evolving from the initial theme of personalised communication, highlight the dynamic interplay between cultural values and working practices at Sellers. These themes not only illustrate how established cultural practices continue to influence daily operations but also show a two-way influence where evolving working practices shape the organisational culture. This mutual shaping highlights the progress in the

digital transformation journey, showcasing Sellers' ongoing development and adaptation in the digital landscape.

Addressing the theme of Discretion to Decouple/Loosely Couple, the evolution from the timeline zero to timeline one and two at Sellers indicates a significant progression in the organisation's digital transformation journey. Initially, there was no formal policy mandating the use of ESNs in daily operations. However, by the first and second timelines, evidence of digital transformation emerges more distinctly. Specifically, certain roles, such as planners among middle-level employees, now incorporate the use of ESNs into their formal procedures and policies. This shift from a decoupled state in the timeline zero to a loosely coupled state in subsequent timelines exemplifies the company's advancing digital transformation, highlighting a move towards integrating digital tools more deeply into organisational practices and policies.

In the progression from the timeline zero to timeline two of the study at Sellers, the material constraint themes of digital literacy and information visibility have shown significant evolution. Initially identified as a lack of formal training, further investigation revealed that grassroot employees' challenges with using ESNs stem from a broader issue of digital literacy. This group finds technology use challenging beyond just ESNs, indicating a deeper problem than initially understood. While information visibility issues persisted across all timelines, there was an alleviation from the timeline zero to timeline two, suggesting improvements in how information is accessed and managed.

The evolution of external pressures at Sellers, particularly through the themes of policy directives, policy-based systems, and the impact of COVID-19 lockdown, illustrates the path of digital transformation. While policy directives and policy-based systems have remained relatively stable from the timeline zero to timeline two, the COVID-19 lockdown has catalysed a significant evolution. Initially, during the lockdown in the timeline zero, employees, especially at middle and higher levels, reported an increased reliance on ESN due to the absence of a physical workspace. Grassroot employees, not furloughed, also began using ESN extensively. Reflections from the timeline one and two (post-lockdown), highlight a fundamental shift in workplace dynamics, with digitalisation becoming established in daily practices as employees across all levels continuing to integrate ESN into their work practices. This enduring shift underscores lock-down's pivotal role in accelerating Sellers' digital transformation journey, marking a significant evolution in technological utilisation within the organisation.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

Table 5.4 summarises this thematic evolution from the timeline zero to the timeline one and two.

Table 5.4: outlines the thematic evolution from the Timeline Zero to the Timeline One and Two at Sellers.

Theme	Timeline Zero Insights	Timeline One and Two Insights	Change and Evolution
Partnership Structure and Organisational Culture	Initially highlighted the collaborative framework's role in shaping work ethos, emphasising mutual respect and shared responsibility. Resistance to mandated communication methods was noted among lower and middle-level employees, underlining their value for autonomy within the partnership structure.	Showed a notable shift towards recognising the benefits of ESN for enhancing communication and contributing to organisational success. Lower and middle-level employees expressed an understanding of ESN as beneficial for the collective, indicating a deeper assimilation of the partnership ethos.	Evolved from initial resistance to a more accepting and integrative approach towards ESN, reflecting a significant shift in how the partnership structure influences the choice of communication methods. This marks a progression in aligning individual autonomy with organisational digital transformation efforts.
High-Quality Customer Service and Organisational Culture	Emphasised as a core value, with a focus on direct customer interaction and the autonomy of employees in choosing communication methods to deliver excellent service.	Highlighted the increasing reliance on digital communication tools like Hangouts/Google Chat for efficient customer service, showing a shift towards collaborative digital platforms for quick solutions and improved responsiveness.	Evolved from a focus on autonomy in service delivery methods to a strategic adoption of digital tools to enhance customer service efficiency and responsiveness, reflecting an organisational shift towards digitalisation in service practices.
Proactiveness and Organisational Culture	Highlighted the value of recognition and collaboration, with a focus on digital engagement for visibility and reputation within the organisation. Preferences for digital over face-to-face acknowledgment were noted, emphasising the role of digital platforms in performance recognition.	The theme continued to emphasise digital engagement for visibility and reputation, with increased acknowledgment of digital platforms' role in career advancement and performance evaluations.	Evolved to underscore the strategic use of digital platforms for recognition, with a deeper integration into the organisational culture and a clearer link to tangible outcomes like performance assessments.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

Personalised Communication to Integration of Personal and Professional Digital Tools	Focused on the preference for direct and personal communication, reflecting a value for personal connection and interaction.	Demonstrated a shift towards embracing digital platforms like Hangouts for more efficient communication, integrating personal and professional tools.	Evolved from a preference for direct personal interaction to a strategic adoption of digital tools, reflecting a cultural shift towards utilising ESNs for enhancing connectivity and efficiency, embodying the organisation's adaptability in the digital landscape.
Discretion to Decouple/Loosely Couple	Highlighted autonomy in technology use with a lack of formal ESN policies, indicating a decoupled state.	Observed a more structured integration of ESNs into daily work processes, reflecting a shift towards a loosely coupled state with organisational procedures and policies.	Transitioned from a decoupled state, where formal policies were absent and flexibility was emphasised, to a loosely coupled state, where ESN usage began aligning more closely with specific organisational procedures and policies.
Lack of Formal Training to Digital Literacy Barriers	Initially identified the need for formal training to use Google apps, especially among grassroot employees, indicating a material constraint.	Broadened to recognise broader digital literacy challenges beyond tool familiarity, affecting effective engagement with ESNs across the organisation.	Transitioned from a specific focus on the lack of formal training to a wider acknowledgment of digital literacy barriers, highlighting an evolving understanding of the challenges in adopting ESNs effectively.
Information Visibility	Highlighted challenges in accessing relevant information on the ESN, with grassroot employees feeling disconnected and middle-level employees finding group chats inefficient.	Revealed evolving challenges, particularly during peak periods, with employees prioritising direct channels for essential information. Grassroot employees noted practical difficulties with digital engagement due to workload, while middle-level employees found utility in direct communication via ESN for specific needs.	Shifted from initial concerns about the relevance and efficiency of information access on ESNs to a more nuanced understanding of practical digital engagement challenges during peak periods. This evolution reflects an adaptive approach to information visibility, balancing efficiency with the constraints of digital tools.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

| External Pressures: Policy Directives and Policy-Based System | Highlighted the importance of adherence to social media guidelines and regulatory frameworks, with an emphasis on the role of policy directives in shaping ESN usage. | Continued awareness and adherence to policy directives, with reflections on the importance of regulations in shaping responsible digital practices within the organisation. | While the foundational importance of policy directives and systems remains consistent, there's an enhanced recognition of their role in ensuring responsible digital engagement and compliance with broader legal and ethical standards. |
| External Pressures: COVID-19 Lockdown | Initially highlighted the forced shift to digital platforms like Hangouts/Google Chat due to physical distancing requirements, affecting all levels of employees differently. | Post-lockdown, employees across all levels observed a profound digital shift, with a consensus that the operational dynamics have permanently changed towards increased digitalisation. | The lockdown served as a catalyst for accelerated digital adoption, marking a permanent operational and cultural shift towards embracing digital communication tools and platforms across the organisation. |

5.5 Refining the Conceptual Framework: Insights from Timeline One and Two

The refinement of the conceptual framework after the timeline one and two highlights the evolution within Sellers' digital transformation journey. Initially, the framework outlined the dynamic interplay between organisational culture and working practices, influenced by the adoption of ESNs. The journey towards digital transformation was seen as a reciprocal process, where organisational culture and working practices continuously shape each other, with compliance, resistance, or workaround strategies emerging in response to ESN implementation.

The timeline one and two reveals that while the overarching framework remains consistent, detailing the interaction between organisational culture, working practices, and external pressures, the specifics within each category have evolved. Particularly, the direct line from organisational culture to compliance reveals the behaviour of higher-level employees, who tend to adopt new technologies more readily, possibly due to their influential roles within the organisation. This insight highlights a more complex picture of compliance, where it may not only result from the digital transformation journey's success but also from immediate acceptance by certain employee segments.

Moreover, the refined framework continues to recognise the impact of external pressures, such as regulatory changes and the COVID-19 pandemic, on the organisation's internal dynamics.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

These pressures necessitate adaptability and responsiveness, further complicating the digital transformation process (refer to Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3: Conceptual Framework of Timeline One and Two.
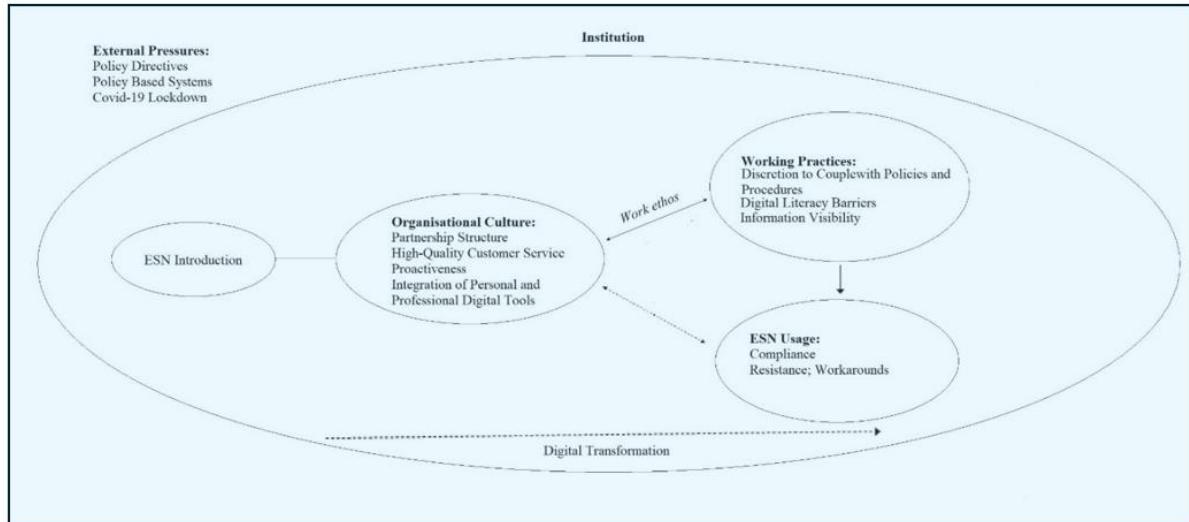
Source: Author's own illustration

Significantly, the themes under organisational culture, working practices, and external pressures have all undergone transformation, reflecting Sellers' deeper integration of digital tools and the progression towards a digitally mature organisation. However, this journey is ongoing, with the organisation moving closer to its digital transformation goals but not yet fully realising them.

5.6 Conclusion

The timeline one and two analysis chapter highlights a significant evolution in Sellers' organisational culture, working practices, and response to external pressures, particularly in light of digital transformation. Through a detailed analysis across three timelines, this chapter illustrates the adaptive strategies Sellers employed to integrate digital tools within its operational framework. From the initial reliance on personalised communication to the strategic integration of personal and professional digital tools, and from the autonomy in technology use to a more structured engagement with digital platforms, Sellers demonstrates a dynamic shift towards digitalisation. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic emerges as a pivotal external force, accelerating the organisation's digital transformation journey and permanently altering operational dynamics. This chapter not only highlights the progression in Sellers' approach to digital communication and collaboration but also reflects a broader organisational

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

shift towards enhancing digital literacy, information visibility, and compliance with policy directives, ensuring a resilient and efficient digital work environment.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

6.0 Introduction

This chapter explores the impact of organisational culture and working practices on the usage of the ESN within Sellers, a company navigating through a period of digital transformation. It aims to discuss how these cultural and practical frameworks within the organisation influence ESN utilisation, focusing on the manifestations of compliance, resistance, and the formulation of workarounds.

This chapter also discusses the implications of the findings, their contributions to the existing body of knowledge, and reflections on the research process. It elaborates on the practical implications for organisations undergoing digital transformation, offering insights into fostering a conducive organisational culture and working practices that enhance ESN utilisation. Contributions to academia include expanding the understanding of how organisational culture and working practices intersect with technology usage, particularly in the context of ESNs, and introducing perspectives on resistance and workaround strategies. Reflections on the research journey, guided by Kolb's experiential learning cycle, provide a personal account of the challenges and learning experiences encountered during the study, illustrating the iterative process of knowledge acquisition and application.

6.1 Organisational Culture at Sellers and Its Impact on ESN Usage: Dynamics of Resistance, Workaround, and Compliance

In this section, the details of organisational culture within Sellers and its impact on the usage of the ESN are examined. Organisational culture significantly influences the technology usage, shaping employee responses in terms of resistance and the formulation of workarounds (Alter, 2014). This exploration covers the range of resistance types as well as the array of workarounds. The progression of each theme from the timeline zero to the timeline two

provides a deep understanding of how evolving cultural perceptions and practices shape, and are shaped by, ESN utilisation. This analysis not only highlights the challenges encountered but also reveals the strategies employed by individuals and groups to navigate these challenges, thereby offering insights into the broader implications of organisational culture on ESN usage.

6.1.1 Partnership Structure and Organisational Culture

The exploration of the partnership structure within Sellers' organisational culture highlights its impact on the usage of the ESN, demonstrating the interplay between cultural values and technology engagement strategies. This relationship, rooted in theories by Handy (1993) and Heckscher and Adler (2006), emphasises mutual respect, shared responsibility, and decision-making autonomy. At Sellers, this structure encourages employees to utilise the ESN as it aligns with their values of ownership and collaborative work. For instance, employees utilise the ESN more effectively when they view it as enhancing their autonomy or organisation profitability.

This strategic alignment between the partnership culture and technology use not only facilitates smoother utilisation of new technologies but also boosts operational efficiency. Thus, by ensuring technology supports core organisational values, Sellers enhances its competitive advantage and adaptability in a dynamic market.

In timeline zero, the partnership structure at Sellers empowered grassroots and middle-level employees with a significant sense of autonomy. This autonomy allowed them to continue preferring established personal communication methods over using the ESN, a choice deeply rooted in the organisational culture that values partnership and autonomy. This preference was not simply a habit but a reflection of the organisational ethos where employees, seen as partners, had the discretion to select communication methods that best suited their and the business's needs. However, this autonomy also contributed to a form of passive resistance to the ESN, characterised by a cautious approach toward its usage. As Kaur et al. (2020) define, passive resistance involves resisting new innovations before they are thoroughly evaluated, a behaviour that Heidenreich and Handrich (2015) describe as latent and unconscious. This cautious resistance exemplifies how the values of mutual respect and shared responsibility are manifested within the organisation, as employees feel empowered to make decisions that align with their personal and collective understandings of effective communication, reflecting their integral role in decision-making processes.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

Due to the lockdown during timeline zero, employees found themselves in a position where they had to use the ESN for specific tasks, such as attending meetings and checking store news. This requirement introduced a complex form of engagement with the ESN, where its use was not entirely voluntary but necessitated by circumstances. Despite this forced usage, the underlying passive resistance to fully embracing the ESN remained evident. Their limited engagement, dictated by necessity rather than choice, reflects a tendency towards traditional communication methods, reinforced by the organisational culture.

The resistance encountered was inherently negative, with employees expressing hesitation to transition from traditional to digital communication modes. This apprehension was rooted in fears that such a shift might disrupt established norms and personal autonomy, closely echoing findings from Iyamu (2020) and Aithal et al. (2023). These studies highlight workflow disruption as a significant source of employee resistance to technology utilisation in the retail sector, defining it as the fear that new technologies could disrupt established ways of working. This disruption leads to resistance, fuelled by uncertainty about changes to daily operations and job roles (Bala and Venkatesh, 2016), thus confirming that the concerns at Sellers about moving towards digital platforms were not isolated instances but part of a broader pattern observed across the sector.

However, a distinctive difference emerged between the findings of this study and those of Aithal et al. (2023) and Bala and Venkatesh (2016). While these studies have identified that employees perceive these changes as disruptive to their daily tasks or inefficient compared to traditional communication methods, this study reveals that the resistance at Sellers was not solely about the effectiveness of the communication methods. Instead, it was deeply rooted in the organisational culture and work ethos of the employees. The established daily practice in communication at Sellers, underpinned by a partnership structure leading to strong commitment to maintaining personal autonomy and a high standard of personal interaction, suggests that the resistance to using the ESN was influenced by more than just concerns over efficiency. It was about preserving a work culture that values direct, personal connections, highlighting a thorough perspective on technology resistance that is shaped by organisational culture rather than mere task efficiency.

In response to this resistance, employees developed workarounds that were consistent with the organisational culture of partnership. During the timeline zero, by opting for direct calls or personal messaging, grassroot and middle-level employees engaged in harmless workarounds.

181

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

These workarounds were considered harmless because they did not undermine the organisation's operational efficiency or its core values (Ferneley and Sobreperez, 2006; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016). Instead, they allowed employees to preserve their sense of autonomy and commitment to maintaining personal connections and collaboration, which are fundamental to the partnership structure at Sellers.

As this study progressed to timeline one and two, a significant cultural evolution was observed, influenced by employees' direct experiences with the ESN. Middle-level employees began to see the usefulness of the ESN, recognising its potential to enhance communication and support collective goals. This realisation led to a shift in their perception of the ESN, which was that they were viewing it not as a threat to their autonomy but as a tool that aligns with the partnership structure's core values. Employees started to believe that using the ESN was a reflection of their role as partners, with the understanding that improving business operations through efficient communication directly contributed to the business's profitability, and by extension, their own. This shift from passive resistance to a more strategic and selective engagement with the ESN highlights a deeper alignment between the organisational culture of partnership and the usage of digital tools.

This adaptive approach at Sellers, particularly in connecting the established value of partnership to facilitate the strategic use of the ESN, confirms and diverges from themes in existing literature on digital transformation and organisational culture. Studies such as those by Berghaus and Back (2017) and Bolton et al. (2017) have highlighted the necessity of cultural shifts towards innovation and adaptability to successfully navigate digital transformations. Similarly, leadership's pivotal role in guiding these shifts, as outlined by Li et al. (2016) and Liere-Netheler et al. (2018), resonates with the observed evolution at Sellers. What sets this case apart is not the creation of new cultural constructs to support digital tool utilisation but rather the reorientation of existing cultural values like partnership from autonomy towards a more collaborative and interactive model. This subtle yet impactful shift highlights a distinctive strategy where the intrinsic organisational culture, deeply rooted in partnership and mutual respect, is leveraged to align with the digital imperatives of the modern business landscape. This strategy highlights both the challenges and opportunities in reinterpreting traditional values to meet contemporary digital demands, offering a unique perspective on the ongoing dialogue about the interplay between organisational culture and technology utilisation.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

Throughout all the timelines of the study, the higher-level employees exhibited a pattern of engagement with the ESN that might suggest baseline compliance, which reflected their role in its implementation and a possibly different valuation of its benefits compared to grassroot and middle-level employees. This variance in engagement across organisational levels underlines the impact of the partnership structure on ESN usage, highlighting how experiences with and perceptions of technology evolve within an organisational culture that prizes partnership and autonomy.

The findings on organisational culture at Sellers reveal a detailed interplay between the partnership structure and the adoption of the ESN, shedding light on the dynamics of resistance, compliance, and workarounds. In academia, this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating how deeply ingrained cultural values, such as partnership and autonomy, shape employee attitudes towards technology adoption, extending existing theories on organisational culture and digital transformation. The gradual shift from passive resistance to strategic engagement with the ESN illustrates the role of cultural evolution in aligning traditional values with modern digital demands. For industry, the study offers insights into leveraging existing organisational values to facilitate digital transformation. By integrating tools like ESNs into a culture of collaboration and mutual respect, companies can foster a sense of ownership among employees, leading to more meaningful engagement with digital platforms. Furthermore, understanding the variance in ESN usage across organisational levels provides actionable knowledge for tailoring training and communication strategies. For policymakers, the findings underline the importance of creating frameworks that encourage cultural alignment in technology implementation. Policies should support organisations in navigating resistance by fostering environments where traditional values are adapted to meet digital imperatives, ensuring both operational efficiency and employee buy-in.

6.1.2 High-Quality Customer Service

The theme of high-quality customer service, pivotal to Sellers' organisational ethos, emerged as a significant influence on the utilisation of the ESN across various organisational levels and throughout the different phases of the study. This commitment to exceptional service, a core aspect articulated in the organisation's mission statement, was consistently observed influencing the utilisation and application of communication tools. The identification of this theme was grounded in systematic observations and analysis of employee interactions and feedback during the study, which repeatedly highlighted the alignment between organisational

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

culture and technology usage. This ongoing influence aligns with theoretical perspectives on organisational culture's impact on technology engagement, as discussed by Handy (1993) and Heckscher and Adler (2006), and was clearly traced through the data, reinforcing its emergence as a critical theme in understanding technology utilisation at Sellers.

During timeline zero, when the lockdown led to grassroot employees being furloughed or transferred to work in Sellers' supermarkets, a subtle form of passive resistance to the ESN usage emerged. This resistance was not a straightforward rejection of technology but rather a preference for direct interaction, perceived as essential for delivering the high level of customer service that defines Sellers. This stance reflects a passive resistance to using ESNs for customer queries, grounded in the belief that such tools could potentially hinder the direct service ethos that employees valued. Moreover, the observed resistance can be characterised as negative resistance. This classification originates from the employees' reluctance to fully embrace the ESN due to concerns that it might compromise their established methods of delivering high-quality customer service. This echoes the findings of Iyamu (2020), Klumpp and Loske (2021), and Aithal et al. (2023). These studies have illuminated how technological changes can unsettle established workflows and routines, engendering resistance among employees who view such shifts as detrimental to their daily tasks or less effective than traditional communication methods. However, the distinctive aspect of this study lies in the origin of the established routines. At Sellers, the resistance to using the ESN was deeply intertwined with the organisational ethos of providing high-quality customer service, a core value explicitly stated in the organisation's mission statement. Unlike the generic disruptions to workflow highlighted by Iyamu (2020), Klumpp and Loske (2021), and Aithal et al. (2023), the resistance at Sellers was not merely a reaction to the inefficiency or disruption of tasks. Instead, it originated from a profound commitment to maintaining a direct and personal interaction model, seen as vital to upholding the organisation's service standards. This distinction underlines that the established routines at Sellers are not just operational habits but are integral to the organisational culture and values, demonstrating a unique interplay between technology utilisation and the preservation of core organisational principles.

Middle-level employees at Sellers demonstrated a flexible approach to job performance, with a pronounced focus on customer satisfaction over the medium of communication used. This perspective finds confirms in the literature, where Wolf and Brennan (2014), Ogbeibu et al. (2018), and Winasis et al. (2021) discuss how organisational culture influences technology

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

acceptance and resistance, emphasising the prioritisation of core organisational values over technology utilisation.

The context of Sellers, however, extends the conversation brought forward by Vial (2021) and Markus and Robey (1988). Vial (2021) introduces a cycle of adopting digital technologies, such as OSNs, which highlights the necessity for strategic responses that align with an organisation's unique context and needs. This view is complementary to Markus and Robey's (1988) assertion that effectively utilising technology involves significant organisational change, reinforcing the idea that the mere implementation of new tools does not automatically translate into value for the organisation. It necessitates thoughtful integration into the organisational fabric.

At Sellers, the resistance to ESN and the preference for direct interaction over digital platforms, particularly for maintaining high-quality customer service, is indicative of this broader dialogue. It highlights that the strategic employment of ESNs at Sellers, shaped by the values of partnership and an unwavering commitment to customer service, is a reflection of a larger trend where digital tools must be carefully contextualised within an organisation's ethos to genuinely augment service delivery. This scenario at Sellers, where resistance to ESN is intertwined with the organisational culture and values, differs from the general discussions by presenting a detailed narrative of digital transformation. It showcases that resistance observed is part of a complex interplay between technology utilisation, organisational culture, and the imperatives of maintaining high service standards, rather than mere opposition to technological change.

In response to this resistance, grassroot and middle level employees developed workarounds that allowed them to continue prioritising high-quality customer service while gradually accommodating the ESN. These workarounds characterised as a harmless s they did not detract from the organisation's core mission of exceptional service delivery. Instead, by opting for direct calls or personal messaging over the ESN, employees managed to preserve their autonomy and sustain their proven practices of personal connection and collaboration, thus embodying the organisation's customer service ethos.

As the study progressed to timeline one and two, there was a notable shift in the narrative surrounding the use of ESNs such as Hangouts/Google Chat. While an increase in ESN usage among grassroot and middle-level employees was observed, it did not signify complete compliance. Grassroot employees such as sale assistants began to use the ESN modestly,

185

primarily for receiving information rather than for proactive communication to enhance customer service quality, employing harmless workarounds by selectively engaging with the ESN without fully integrating it into their daily operations. In contrast, middle-level employees leveraged the ESN more extensively for communication with colleagues, directly contributing to the improvement of customer service, thus moving towards essential workarounds where the ESN became a crucial part of their workflow to achieve higher service quality. Higher-level employees, on the other hand, were consistently using the ESN for a wide range of communications during all three timelines, demonstrating a baseline compliance and an established pattern of integrating the ESN effectively into their operational and strategic activities.

The journey from initial resistance through selective engagement with the ESN highlights a complex usage process within Sellers. It reflects a dynamic interplay between organisational culture, technology resistance, and strategic utilisation, showcasing the organisation's capacity to reconcile its commitment to high-quality customer service with the gradual usage of new digital tools. This progression highlights the complexity of technology utilisation within an organisational culture dedicated to maintaining its foundational values while navigating the challenges and opportunities presented by digital transformation.

Thus, while the broader themes of technology resistance and the impact of organisational culture on digital transformation are well-explored in existing literature, Sellers offers a unique case study. Here, the organisation's culture and the intrinsic value placed on partnership and customer service excellence fundamentally shape the approach to digital technology utilisation, distinguishing Sellers' experience from the contexts examined by Wolf and Brennan (2014), Ogbeibu et al. (2018), and Winasis et al. (2021). This unique interplay at Sellers highlights the criticality of aligning digital tool utilisation with deeply held organisational values and service commitments, highlighting a distinctive path in the journey towards digital transformation.

The findings highlight the intricate relationship between organisational culture and the adoption of digital tools such as ESNs. The study reveals that resistance to ESN usage was not merely a rejection of technology but deeply rooted in the organisation's commitment to delivering exceptional customer service, a value central to its ethos. This aligns with academic discussions on the interplay between organisational culture and technology adoption, as noted in contributions to academia, providing a tailored understanding of how cultural values influence digital transformation efforts. Furthermore, the strategic use of harmless and essential

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

workarounds by employees to balance traditional practices with emerging digital tools demonstrates the organisation's adaptive strategies to uphold service standards while integrating ESNs. For industry leaders, this emphasises the importance of aligning technology implementation with core organisational values, offering a roadmap for fostering gradual yet effective adoption of digital tools in service-centric environments. Policymakers are also guided to develop frameworks that encourage organisations to integrate ESNs without compromising foundational cultural elements, ensuring that digital strategies support rather than disrupt essential practices like high-quality customer service . This theme underscores the broader implications of aligning organisational values with digital transformation, illustrating a pathway to successfully navigating the cultural challenges of technology adoption.

6.1.3 Proactiveness and Organisational Culture

The theme of proactiveness at Sellers encompasses employees' strategic engagement with digital platforms, such as Hangouts/Google Chat, to actively enhance their visibility, interaction, and recognition within the organisation. This proactive behaviour is a cultural value rooted within Sellers' ethos, which underlines the importance of employees taking initiative and being visible in their roles as crucial factors influencing their performance evaluations and career progression. Specifically, proactiveness in this context refers to employees' deliberate use of digital tools to participate in discussions, share insights, and respond to queries, thereby not just fulfilling their roles but actively shaping the perception of their engagement and contribution. In this study, such proactive engagements were observed to increase with employees progressively recognising the value added by digital platforms in enhancing their work processes and professional visibility. This shift illustrates a growing alignment between individual initiatives and organisational goals, where digital tools serve as enablers for career development and organisational involvement. Proactiveness, particularly through digital means, has become an essential aspect of how employees at Sellers navigate their work environment and seek recognition.

Compliance with the ESN across various organisational levels at Sellers reveals a multifaceted landscape of resistance, akin to observations made by Choudrie and Zamani (2016). Their research on ESN usage in large organisations demonstrated that the existence and nature of workarounds in daily activities are significantly influenced by organisational level, echoing the variances in ESN compliance observed at Sellers. Grassroot employees exhibited passive resistance, showing a preference for established, direct communication methods that they

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

believed more effectively maintained the quality of personal interaction, a basis of Sellers' customer service ethos. This resistance was primarily negative, driven by concerns about the ESN undermining traditional, valued forms of communication. Middle-level employees, while somewhat more open to ESN use, navigated this new tool with caution, balancing between its potential for enhancing visibility and the risk of depersonalising interactions. For these employees, the ESN became a platform to showcase their proactiveness and commitment to the organisation's goals. By actively participating in digital platforms like Hangouts/Google Chat, middle-level employees aimed to increase their visibility within the organisation, a strategy they believed could lead to recognition by managers and potentially influence their performance evaluations positively. This belief that digital visibility could translate into career advancement opportunities, including the possibility of receiving a better pay rise during annual reviews, motivated their engagement with the ESN. This perception highlights a key facet of the organisational leadership's approach, emphasising how leadership at Sellers plays an instrumental role in driving digital transformation initiatives by recognising and rewarding proactive digital engagement (Horlacher et al., 2016; Li et al., 2017; Li et al., 2016; Liere-Netheler et al., 2018).

This dynamic illustrates the motivations behind ESN use at different organisational levels. Middle-level employees' strategic use of the ESN to enhance their visibility and recognition within the company underlines the importance of digital platforms in facilitating not just operational efficiency but also personal career development within the organisational framework.

The workarounds developed in response to these resistances were initially harmless, especially among grassroot and middle-level employees. These strategies allowed employees to maintain their preferred methods of communication while gradually exploring the ESN's functionalities. Grassroot employees, in particular, adhered to direct calls or personal messaging, avoiding the ESN without entirely rejecting it. Middle-level employees, recognising the ESN's potential for increasing visibility within the organisation, began to engage with it selectively for specific tasks that aligned with their professional goals.

As the study progressed from zero to the second timeline, a significant evolution in the approach to the ESN was observed. While full compliance was never achieved across all levels, there was a shift towards more strategic and essential workarounds, particularly among middle-level employees. This shift was marked by a growing recognition of the ESN's utility in

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

facilitating communication and collaboration, essential for maintaining proactiveness within the organisational culture. The transition from harmless to essential workarounds by the second timeline indicates a deeper integration of the ESN into daily work practices, reflecting an organisational maturation in digital tool utilisation.

This incremental utilisation of the ESN, especially as managerial recognition of employee proactiveness began influencing performance appraisals, subtly champions the broader narrative of digital transformation. This managerial strategy aligns with insights from Winasis et al. (2021), who posited that leadership's cultivation of a supportive and innovative culture is pivotal in motivating employees to embrace technological changes, a cornerstone of successful digital transformation. Moreover, Benlian and Haffke (2016) and Hansen et al. (2011) have explained the necessity for leadership to encourage a digital-first mindset across the organisation to navigate digital disruptions. While the conventional wisdom might advocate for the introduction of specialised roles such as a Chief Digital Officer to harmonise digital initiatives with organisational goals (Horlacher et al., 2016; Singh and Hess, 2017), this study presents an alternative avenue: the integration of ESN proactiveness into employee evaluations. This approach not only demonstrates a tangible method for embedding digital transformation aspirations within organisational practices but also offers a novel perspective on how leadership can facilitate and reward digital adaptability among the workforce.

However, grassroots employees, despite showing an increased engagement with the ESN, maintained a preference for traditional communication methods. This behaviour highlights the enduring nature of passive resistance, albeit coupled with a newfound openness to the benefits offered by the ESN. This dynamic is consistent with observations made by Davison et al. (2019), who noted the complexity of implementing new technologies within retail organisations due to the diversity of roles. According to Davison et al. (2019), for technology to be effectively embraced, it must accommodate the varied processes and activities across all employee roles. Yet, the attempt to apply a uniform technology solution often proves inadequate, failing to provide the specific functionalities required by some employees for their tasks. This gap between the technological offerings and the actual needs of employees can lead to the creation of workarounds.

Notably, higher-level employees did not discuss proactiveness and recognition during all three timelines. This absence might originate from their role as the recognisers of grassroot and middle-level employees' efforts rather than seeking recognition for proactiveness themselves.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

This dynamic highlights a distinct perspective on digital tool utilisation and engagement with the ESN, underscoring the differentiated roles and expectations across organisational levels within Sellers.

The theme of proactiveness within Sellers highlights the interaction between organisational culture, leadership strategies, and the use of digital tools like the ESN. Middle-level employees strategically used the ESN to enhance their visibility, aligning their engagement with the organisational culture that values initiative and recognises proactiveness in performance evaluations. This dynamic demonstrates how leadership at Sellers effectively leveraged recognition and appraisal systems to motivate employees to adopt digital tools, illustrating a contribution to academia by showing how cultural and hierarchical factors influence technology acceptance and usage within organisations. For industry, this study underscores the importance of embedding digital transformation objectives within core organisational practices, such as performance reviews, offering a practical model for aligning employee incentives with technological goals. The emphasis on leadership's role in fostering a digital-first mindset, without requiring specialised roles like a Chief Digital Officer, provides an efficient alternative for industry practitioners. For policymakers, the findings highlight the need for policies that accommodate diverse employee roles and promote customised, role-specific technology integration strategies to address passive resistance and encourage broader acceptance. By addressing the distinct needs and expectations across organisational levels, this theme contributes valuable insights into the effective management of digital transformation initiatives.

6.1.4 Integration of Personal and Professional Digital Tools

The integration of personal and professional digital tools at Sellers signifies a pivotal shift in the organisational culture, moving from a strong emphasis on personalised, direct communication to using digital platforms, such as Hangouts/Google Chat, into daily work practices. This evolution mirrors the organisation's broader adaptation to digital transformation, balancing the inherent value of personal connections with the efficiency and connectivity offered by professional ESN tools.

During timeline zero, the choice between personal devices and the ESN was not merely a matter of convenience but also reflected the organisational culture of being a "friendly group." Employees at all levels expressed a strong preference for personal, direct methods of

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

communication, underscoring the importance of maintaining personal connections within the workplace. This preference was so embedded that even the introduction of a new digital tool like the ESN could not immediately shift these established communication habits. Therefore, the resistance to use the ESN was primarily passive across all organisational levels, rooted in a cultural preference for direct communication methods that foster personal connections. This resistance, characterised as negative, was particularly evident among grassroot employees who continued to prioritise direct calls or face-to-face meetings over using the ESN, aiming to preserve established norms of communication. Middle-level employees also displayed hesitancy towards fully integrating the ESN into their workflows, adopting a cautious stance that bordered on a mix of passive and active resistance due to concerns about the impact on work relationships and efficiency. Interestingly, higher-level employees also mentioned relying on direct calls for personal communication, indicating a widespread initial preference for maintaining traditional communication methods across the organisation.

To navigate this resistance, employees developed various workarounds that allowed them to balance traditional communication preferences with the emerging digital practices. Initially, these workarounds were predominantly harmless, enabling employees to gradually explore the ESN's functionalities while adhering to their preferred communication methods. Grassroot employees, for instance, used the ESN selectively, mainly for logistical coordination or when direct communication was impractical. Middle-level employees began to cautiously incorporate the ESN into their communication strategies, recognising its potential for enhancing visibility and connectivity, yet often reverted to personal devices for communication with close colleagues. Higher-level managers predominantly used the ESN for their communications but acknowledged occasional use of personal devices for direct contact with each other, illustrating a strategic approach to digital integration.

This gradual utilisation process can be explained through the lens of Institutional Theory, as described by Mola et al. (2023), which offers insights into the mechanisms of resistance and workaround strategies employees deploy against the backdrop of new technology implementation. The theory suggests that the introduction of novel working practices, such as the ESN, might cause uncertainty and resistance from employees, a phenomenon further explored by Cachon-Rodríguez et al. (2021). This resistance, according to Mola et al. (2023), is often rooted in the established institutional norms and practices within an organisation, leading some employees to either shy away from these new technologies or seek methods to avoid their use entirely. Moreover, the utilisation of ESNs and similar digital tools presents a

191

challenge to the pre-existing institutional norms and routines (Bag et al., 2021), potentially unsettling, embedded practices. As Kabengele and Hahn (2021) articulate, this digital transformation journey can stir conflicts between established and emerging working methodologies, fostering a tension between the preservation of socially endorsed behaviours and the utilisation of innovations deemed vital for organisational progress.

In contrast to the broader digital transformation narrative, this study reveals that the journey at the organisation under review is ongoing, with not all employees fully embracing the ESN. Consequently, a coexistence of traditional and new communication methods is observed, embodying a transitional phase where both conventional practices and digital innovations find relevance. This distinctive situation emphasises on the complexity of navigating digital transformation within entrenched organisational cultures, highlighting a unique interplay between adherence to familiar practices and the gradual acceptance of digital tools as part of the organisation's evolving communication landscape.

Therefore, during the first and second timelines, the nature of workarounds and engagement with the ESN witnessed significant evolution. The transition from personalised communication to integrating personal and professional digital tools became more pronounced, moving towards essential workarounds. This shift was particularly marked among middle-level employees, who increasingly relied on the ESN for professional communication, demonstrating a strategic embrace of digital platforms. However, grassroot employees still viewed the ESN as a formal communication method, indicating persistent resistance to fully use the digital tools. The progression from zero to second timelines highlights a cultural shift within Sellers, highlighting an increasing integration of digital communication tools into daily working practices. This evolution not only reflects a change in communication methods but also signifies a deeper transformation in the organisational work ethos, where digital tools are progressively embedded in maintaining efficiency alongside the valued tradition of personal connection.

This progression reflects an alignment with academia's understanding of how organisational culture shapes technology adoption, advancing the discourse on how entrenched practices evolve during digital transformation. From an industry perspective, these findings underscore the importance of designing ESNs that respect and integrate organisational values, ensuring gradual adoption without disrupting core cultural practices. For policymakers, this case study demonstrates the need for frameworks that address the coexistence of traditional and digital

tools, ensuring inclusivity and practical integration while promoting adaptability in organisations navigating technological change.

6.2 Discretion to Couple/Loosely Couple with Procedures and Policies

The theme "Discretion to Decouple/Loosely Couple" at Sellers reflects employees' capacity to navigate the use of ESN with varying degrees of adherence to organisational policies and technological integration. This theme illuminates the autonomy employees exercise in choosing how to engage with ESNs like Hangouts/Google Chat, balancing between organisational expectations and personal or role-specific work practices.

During the timeline zero, different resistance was observed across organisational levels. Grassroot employees displayed passive resistance to ESN usage, favouring direct and personal communication methods that they felt were more aligned with their roles and the organisational culture of fostering personal connections. This resistance was largely negative, originating from concerns over the potential loss of personal touch in communications. Middle-level employees, while having access to and understanding the utility of ESNs, also exercised discretion in their use, reflecting a blend of passive and active resistance based on the perceived impact on efficiency and personal interaction. Higher-level employees understood the utility of ESNs and utilised them for broader organisational communication without explicit resistance. However, there was no formal policy mandating ESN use at this level, indicating a baseline compliance with the ESN for necessary communications.

Workarounds emerged as employees pursued to navigate their resistance to ESN usage and the prescribed technological integration. Initially, these workarounds were predominantly harmless, allowing employees to maintain their preferred communication practices while slowly integrating the ESN into their workflow as needed. Grassroot employees, for instance, might use ESNs for specific, task-oriented communication but relied on personal calls or messages for most interactions. Middle and higher-level employees adopted a more strategic approach, utilising ESNs for broader, organisational communication while maintaining personal communication methods for direct team interactions.

In the first and second timelines, the approach to ESN utilisation at Sellers demonstrated a clear evolution, particularly distinguishing the types of workarounds employed by different organisational levels. Grassroot employees continued to engage in harmless workarounds, selectively using ESNs for specific, non-disruptive tasks while maintaining their preference for

193

direct communication methods. This approach aligns with their ongoing passive resistance to fully integrating ESNs into their daily communication practices, reflecting a sustained commitment to personal and direct interactions. In contrast, both middle and higher-level employees transitioned to employing essential workarounds, integrating ESNs more deeply into their professional activities. For middle-level employees, this shift was particularly notable in parts of their roles that became officially coupled with ESN use, marking a strategic acknowledgment of the ESN's value for enhancing operational efficiency and communication within the organisation. A standout example of this integration is the newly implemented practice within the planning department. As part of their workflow, planners are required to upload their completed plans onto Google Chat for peer review before proceeding to subsequent steps. This procedural coupling with the ESN represents a deliberate choice to leverage digital platforms for enhancing operational processes, illustrating a move from harmless to essential workarounds. This practice not only streamlines the planning process but also fosters a co-creation of value within the organisation, aligning with the findings of Vial (2021), who highlights the transformation of value networks through digital technologies. By facilitating direct exchanges among participants, digital tools like the ESN enable a more collaborative and efficient workflow (Klötzer and Pflaum, 2017). In the context of Sellers, this has translated into a reduction in errors and associated costs, evidencing the ESN's role in operational efficiency and the internal co-creation of value (Saldanha et al., 2017; Yeow et al., 2018).

A key distinction between this study and the studies referenced, such as those by Vial (2021), Klötzer and Pflaum (2017), Saldanha et al. (2017), and Yeow et al. (2018), lies in the focus of co-creation of value. While the mentioned research explores co-creation primarily as an outcome of interactions between organisations and their customers, this study shifts the lens internally, examining how co-creation of value unfolds within the business among employees. This internal perspective highlights the transformative potential of digital tools like ESNs to foster collaboration and efficiency directly among staff, showcasing a different pathway to achieving and enhancing organisational value through digital transformation.

On the other hand, higher-level employees, while not governed by new formal policies regarding ESN use, also recognised the essential nature of these digital platforms for maintaining connectivity and ensuring the smooth execution of organisational functions. This shift to essential workarounds indicates a broader organisational maturation in digital tool

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

utilisation, with middle and higher-level employees leveraging ESNs to fulfil core operational needs and support the organisation's digital transformation agenda.

The findings provide critical insights into digital transformation within organisational contexts. From an academic perspective, this theme highlights the ways in which employees across organisational levels interact with ESNs, contributing to a deeper understanding of how resistance and workaround strategies evolve over time. The progression from harmless to essential workaround, expands existing theoretical frameworks on technology adoption and digital transformation, such as those by Vial (2021) and Yeow et al. (2018), by demonstrating how internal co-creation of value among employees can emerge as a pivotal outcome of digital tool integration. This study's internal focus on value co-creation adds a fresh dimension to the discourse, moving beyond the traditional focus on external customer interactions.

For industry practitioners, these findings emphasise the strategic importance of designing policies and workflows that encourage gradual adoption and integration of ESNs without imposing rigid mandates. The example of the planning department at Sellers demonstrates how procedural coupling of ESNs with critical tasks, such as peer reviews, can streamline operations, reduce errors, and enhance collaborative efforts among employees. This insight underscores the value of aligning digital tools with operational processes to foster engagement and efficiency.

For policymakers, this study highlights the necessity of creating flexible digital transformation policies that accommodate the varying levels of discretion employees exercise in using digital tools. Encouraging organisations to implement adaptive policies that support gradual integration of technologies like ESNs can promote inclusivity and minimise resistance. Furthermore, policies should support frameworks that incentivise co-creation of value internally, as demonstrated in Sellers' case, where digital tools enhanced collaboration and efficiency at multiple levels.

This synthesis underscores the complexity of digital transformation in organisations, illustrating how policies, practices, and culture must collectively evolve to support the effective integration of digital tools like ESNs.

6.3 Material Constraint: Digital Literacy and Visibility

Material constraints within Sellers encompass critical challenges that impact employees' ability to effectively utilise the ESN and other digital tools, divided into two main themes: Digital

195

Literacy Barriers and Information Visibility. These constraints highlight the practical limitations faced by the workforce in navigating digital platforms and accessing necessary information.

6.3.1 Digital Literacy Barriers

Digital literacy barriers at Sellers initially identified a critical issue: the varied levels of digital fluency across its workforce, particularly affecting grassroot employees. Digital fluency, in this context, refers to the varying levels of comfort and ability with which employees can navigate digital tools and platforms, skills that are crucial for effectively engaging with technologies like the ESN. For some employees, particularly those in grassroot positions, what might appear as intuitive interfaces and straightforward functionalities for their more digitally skilled colleagues turned out to be significant barriers. This discrepancy highlighted a material constraint, revealing that what might seem intuitive digital tools for some were, in fact, obstacles to effective engagement for others. This challenge goes beyond mere tool familiarity, falling into the broader necessity for comprehensive digital literacy.

Throughout the timeline zero, some grassroot employees at Sellers were compelled to use the ESN, particularly for attending meetings, despite experiencing significant anxiety. This necessity to engage with the ESN, despite a lack of digital fluency, did not allow for the development of specific workarounds. Instead, their use of the ESN under these circumstances can be viewed as a forced compliance. The anxiety and discomfort experienced by these employees did not translate into active resistance or the creation of workarounds but rather a reluctant acceptance due to the circumstances imposed by the pandemic. Unlike their counterparts, middle and higher-level employees did not exhibit significant reluctance to use the ESN, likely due to a pre-existing level of digital fluency that negated the need for formal instruction.

During the first and second timelines at Sellers, grassroot employees exhibited a strategic form of resistance to the continued use of the ESN, characterised by a combination of passive and active elements. This resistance was primarily negative, as it originated from ongoing concerns about digital literacy and the adequacy of informal learning mechanisms to fully mitigate these challenges. Despite becoming more familiar with the ESN through peer support, grassroot employees continued to experience uncertainties about their ability to use these digital tools

196

effectively and without error, reflecting an enduring anxiety towards full-scale digital integration.

This scenario aligns with the findings in the literature that emphasise the need for organisations to reevaluate and adapt employee roles and skills to meet the demands of the digital era (Demirkan et al., 2016; Dery et al., 2017; Weill and Woerner, 2018). These studies argue that upskilling and reskilling employees to equip them with essential competencies such as digital literacy and data analytics is imperative as digital technologies become integral to various organisational functions. Moreover, employees must be empowered and encouraged to embrace new technologies and ways of working to facilitate a smoother transition into digitalised operations.

The difference in this study lies in the detailed exploration of the forms of resistance that occur when employees are transitioning. While the literature suggests a broad need for skills development, this study provides a comprehensive view of how grassroot employees' experiences and anxieties directly influence their engagement with new technologies. It highlights the critical importance of not just providing training but also ensuring that training methods are effective and address the specific fears and challenges faced by employees at different organisational levels. This focus on the individual employee experience within the broader context of digital transformation offers a unique perspective on the challenges and necessities of fostering a digitally literate workforce.

The workaround strategy employed by these employees in the first and second timelines involved seeking informal advice and support from colleagues through different channels such as face to face and over the phone. This approach represents a harmless workaround, as it did not disrupt the organisational workflow or directly challenge the prescribed use of the ESN. Instead, it allowed grassroot employees to gradually improve their digital fluency while adhering to the organisation's digital communication framework. This method of addressing digital literacy barriers through peer learning and support enabled these employees to partially overcome their resistance to the ESN, facilitating a more engaged yet cautious use of digital platforms.

This evolution in resistance and workaround strategies from the zero to second timeline illustrates a shift in how grassroot employees at Sellers approached the challenge of digital literacy. While formal training interventions were not implemented, the informal support network within the organisation played a critical role in enabling employees to navigate their

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

digital literacy barriers more effectively. This shift highlights the organisation's adaptive response to digital literacy challenges, emphasising the value of peer support and informal learning as key components in fostering a digitally competent workforce.

The findings on digital literacy barriers at Sellers reveal the critical challenges faced by grassroot employees in adapting to digital platforms like the ESN. Unlike middle and higher-level employees who possessed greater digital fluency, grassroot employees encountered significant anxiety and uncertainty due to their limited familiarity with these tools. This disparity aligns with existing literature emphasising the necessity for upskilling and reskilling employees to meet the demands of digital transformation (Demirkan et al., 2016; Dery et al., 2017; Weill and Woerner, 2018). However, this study offers a more detailed exploration by examining how individual employee experiences shape resistance to technology.

From the lens of academia, this highlights the importance of addressing not just skills gaps but also the psychological barriers that influence digital engagement. The grassroots employees' reliance on informal support networks to navigate these challenges underscores the role of peer learning in fostering digital fluency, an area often overlooked in broader training discussions. For industry, this finding suggests the need for tailored training programs that not only equip employees with technical skills but also build confidence in using digital tools. Managers should recognise that formal training alone may be insufficient and should complement it with mechanisms for ongoing informal support to facilitate smoother transitions.

From a policymaking perspective, these insights advocate for policies that prioritise digital inclusion and workforce empowerment. Policymakers should encourage the development of comprehensive frameworks for digital literacy training, particularly for frontline workers, ensuring that training is accessible, contextually relevant, and addresses the psychological dimensions of resistance. By fostering an environment that supports gradual digital integration, organisations can better align operational goals with workforce capabilities, creating a pathway toward effective and inclusive digital transformation.

6.3.2 Information Visibility

The information visibility theme at Sellers highlights the challenges faced by employees in navigating and making effective use of the information provided through the ESN. This theme highlights the difficulties particularly experienced by grassroot and middle-level employees in finding relevant information during the vast quantities available on the platform, affecting their

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

engagement and productivity. This observation is in line with the insights from Davison et al. (2019), who emphasise that the diversity of roles within retail organisations complicates the implementation of new technologies. According to Davison et al., for technology to be effectively utilised, it must support the specific processes and activities of all employees. However, a one-size-fits-all approach often falls short, not providing the necessary functionality for some employees to satisfactorily complete their tasks. Additionally, Meyer et al. (2020) discuss the perceived irrelevance of technologies, noting that if employees believe the ESN does not directly benefit their specific job tasks, it reduces their motivation to use these technologies, viewing them as unnecessary additions rather than tools for efficiency.

Throughout timeline zero, resistance to using the ESN for information gathering and sharing was observed across grassroot and middle organisational levels. Grassroot employees exhibited passive resistance, primarily due to a perceived lack of relevance of the ESN to their immediate work needs. This resistance was negatively framed, as the ESN was seen more as an additional burden than a beneficial tool. Middle-level employees, while not entirely resistant, showed a preference for direct communication methods over the ESN, indicating a form of active resistance to adopting the platform for everyday tasks. This resistance originated from concerns over the efficiency of sifting through information on the ESN and the desire to avoid redundancy in communications.

In response to these challenges, workarounds emerged as employees sought to navigate the information visibility barriers. Initially, these workarounds were largely harmless, with employees finding alternative ways to access the information they needed without fully engaging with the ESN. For grassroot employees, this often meant relying on direct communication with colleagues or supervisors to get immediate answers. Middle-level employees, recognising the potential for information overload on the ESN, also opted for direct calls or emails as a more efficient way to obtain specific information.

As the study advanced from zero to second timeline, the approach to overcoming information visibility issues pictured little evolution in terms of developing new strategies for information categorisation or filtering within the ESN. The persistence of initial workarounds indicates a continued reliance on alternative communication methods outside the ESN to address information relevance and accessibility concerns.

The lack of evolution in addressing the information visibility challenges for grassroot and middle level employees points to a material constraint that remained largely unmitigated

199

throughout the study. The continued reliance on workarounds, primarily harmless in nature, highlights an ongoing need for organisational strategies to enhance the ESN's utility by making information more accessible and relevant to all employees.

However, higher-level employees did not express concerns regarding information visibility, suggesting their interactions with the ESN and digital tools might be influenced by different factors, or their roles naturally mitigate the material constraints experienced by grassroot staff.

The findings on information visibility at Sellers underline a persistent material constraint that significantly affected grassroot and middle-level employees' engagement with the ESN. These employees struggled to navigate the vast quantities of information on the platform, often perceiving it as irrelevant to their specific tasks. This aligns with the literature by Davison et al. (2019) and Meyer et al. (2020), which highlights how diverse roles and perceived irrelevance of technology can hinder its effective utilisation. However, this study uniquely underscores the prolonged reliance on harmless workarounds, such as direct communication, as employees sought to bypass the inefficiencies of the ESN.

From an academic perspective, this theme contributes to understanding the challenges of technology adoption, particularly in organisations with diverse roles and hierarchical structures. The persistent reliance on workarounds despite prolonged exposure to the ESN suggests the need to revisit technology design and integration to ensure it meets the specific needs of all organisational levels. For industry leaders, these findings emphasise the importance of refining digital tools to enhance information categorisation, accessibility, and relevance. Tailored solutions, such as improved search functions or customised information feeds, could alleviate employees' struggles, fostering greater engagement with the ESN.

For policymakers, the persistence of this challenge highlights the need for policy frameworks that prioritise inclusive technology design and implementation. Policies should mandate the evaluation of digital tools' functionality and relevance across all organisational levels, ensuring they address diverse job roles and information needs. By integrating mechanisms for ongoing feedback and iterative improvements, organisations can enhance the utility of digital tools like ESNs, fostering a more productive and inclusive digital workplace.

6.4 Extra Organisational Pressures

External pressures played a pivotal role in shaping the usage of the ESN within organisations, thereby, acting as significant drivers or barriers to digital transformation efforts (Choudrie et

al., 2017). At Sellers, these external pressures are expressed through policy directives, policy-based systems, and the impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown. Each of these themes influenced employee behaviour and organisational strategies differently, which affected how technology is integrated into daily operations and how employees interact with these digital tools. Understanding the interplay between these external pressures and organisational responses is crucial for navigating the complexities of digital adaptation in a large retail organisation like Sellers.

6.4.1 Policy Directives

Within Sellers, policy directives concerning the use of the ESN play a pivotal role in shaping digital behaviour in accordance with both organisational goals and legal standards. These guidelines are designed to ensure that digital interactions within the organisation remain professional, secure, and compliant with broader regulatory requirements. For instance, one such directive mandates that all communications through the ESN should avoid sensitive personal data unless encrypted and must be conducted in a manner that upholds the company's code of conduct.

From timeline zero to timeline two, there was an increase in employees' awareness of and compliance with these directives. This shift was particularly evident as employees began to more frequently reference these policies during training sessions or in digital communications, indicating their growing importance in the organisation's digital ecosystem. The adherence to these policy directives reflects a maturing digital culture within Sellers, where the boundaries and responsibilities of digital interactions are clearly understood and respected across various levels of the organisation.

Employees across the board showed a general compliance with policy directives, recognising the necessity of such guidelines for maintaining proper conduct on digital platforms. This compliance was rooted in an understanding of the protective intent behind these policies, aiming to safeguard personal information and regulate user behaviour on the OSNs and ESNs. Given the comprehensive adherence to the policy directives within Sellers, it is evident that employees perceived these directives as integral and manageable within their operational framework. Consequently, there was no inclination or necessity among employees to seek alternative methods that circumvent these established guidelines. This lack of necessity for

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

workarounds highlights the efficiency of the policy implementation process, ensuring compliance without imposing unnecessary burden on the employees.

Throughout the study, from timeline zero to two, employees at Sellers demonstrated a consistent awareness of policy directives related to the use of OSNs and ESNs. This awareness spanned across different organisational levels, from grassroot employees to middle and higher-level managers, indicating an organisation-wide recognition of the importance of these guidelines. Employees acknowledged the role of policy directives in regulating behaviour on the OSN platforms, emphasising the necessity of such guidelines for maintaining professional and secure digital environments.

The theme of extra-organisational pressures, particularly through policy directives, highlights their integral role in shaping employee behaviour and organisational strategies regarding ESN usage at Sellers. The study revealed a consistent and organisation-wide compliance with these directives, reflecting a maturing digital culture where employees across all levels embraced the necessity of adhering to professional, secure, and regulatory standards. Unlike other aspects of digital tool utilisation, no significant workarounds emerged in response to policy directives, indicating that their implementation was both effective and non-intrusive, seamlessly integrating into employees' workflows.

From an academic standpoint, this finding contributes to the discourse on digital transformation by illustrating how well-crafted policy directives can act as facilitators rather than barriers in organisational contexts. This research builds upon existing studies by showing how clear, protective, and practical policies can foster compliance and enhance the secure adoption of ESNs. For industry leaders, these insights underscore the importance of designing policy frameworks that balance organisational needs with employee capabilities, ensuring that directives are not only comprehensive but also easily actionable across all levels of the organisation.

For policymakers, the study highlights the value of embedding robust policy directives into digital transformation initiatives. By setting clear guidelines that align with regulatory requirements and organisational objectives, policymakers can ensure secure and effective digital tool utilisation. Additionally, the success observed at Sellers points to the importance of regular training and communication to reinforce policy awareness, fostering a compliant and digitally literate workforce. This approach enhances operational security and supports the broader goals of organisational resilience and adaptability in an increasingly digital landscape.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

6.4.2 Policy Based System

The Policy-Based System theme within Sellers highlights the structured approach to utilising ESN, emphasising the significance of formal approval policies and terms and conditions. This framework establishes a compliant communication environment, critical for the disciplined and responsible use of ESNs such as Google Hangouts/Chat. From the timeline zero to timeline two, employees across all levels demonstrated an awareness and acknowledgment of these policy-based systems, reflecting their integral role in the organisation's digital communication strategy.

Employees' adherence to these policies indicates a widespread compliance, with an understanding that the use of Google Apps is contingent upon agreeing to specific terms and conditions. This compliance suggests that the policy-based systems were effectively communicated and deemed relevant by employees, facilitating a smooth integration into their daily digital practices. There was no significant mention of resistance to these policies, which implies that the policies were aligned with employees' expectations and the organisational culture, thereby minimising potential pushback.

In light of the uniform compliance with policy-based systems at Sellers, employees demonstrated no requirement to bypass or sidestep these policies. This indicates that the policies were well-aligned with employees' daily operations, making adherence straightforward and unproblematic. The absence of workarounds highlights the policies' practicality and the organisation's success in embedding these standards into workplace practices.

Over the course of the study, from the timeline zero to two, there was no significant change reported in the perception or implementation of the policy-based systems. The consistent acknowledgment of the necessity and importance of these policies indicates a stable approach to managing digital communication tools within Sellers. This stability points to a successful integration of policy-based systems into the organisational framework, ensuring that the use of ESNs remained within the bounds of established legal and ethical standards without necessitating significant adaptations or evolutions in employee behaviour or organisational policy.

The Policy-Based System theme at Sellers underscores the effective integration of structured guidelines into the organisation's digital communication framework, ensuring the responsible use of ESNs. Employees across all levels exhibited consistent compliance with these policies, demonstrating an understanding of their necessity for maintaining legal, ethical, and

203

operational standards. This absence of resistance or workarounds reflects the practical alignment of the policies with employees' expectations and daily operations, showcasing the organisation's success in embedding these systems seamlessly into its digital practices.

Academically, this finding contributes to the literature by illustrating how well-designed policy-based systems can facilitate compliance without imposing unnecessary complexity or resistance. It highlights the critical role of aligning policy frameworks with organisational culture and employee workflows to ensure successful digital transformation. For industry practitioners, Sellers' experience offers a blueprint for implementing policy-based systems that are both effective and easily adoptable. By fostering clarity and relevance in digital communication policies, organisations can enhance operational efficiency and reduce the risks associated with non-compliance.

For policymakers, the results emphasise the importance of developing clear, practical, and employee-friendly policies that integrate seamlessly into organisational frameworks. These policies should not only promote compliance but also enhance the usability and relevance of digital tools, supporting broader goals of organisational efficiency and security in digital transformations. This theme reinforces the value of simplicity and alignment in policy development, ensuring that guidelines empower rather than hinder digital adoption across diverse organisational contexts.

6.4.3 COVID-19 Lockdown

The COVID-19 lockdown emerged as a pivotal external pressure at Sellers, catalysing a profound shift towards digital communication platforms such as Hangouts/Google Chat. This period of enforced remote work and restricted physical interaction highlighted the necessity of adapting to digital tools for maintaining operational continuity across all organisational levels. Initially, the sudden transition challenged employees, especially those less familiar with digital platforms, but over time, it led to an accelerated digitalisation within Sellers, showcasing the organisation's adaptability and resilience.

This rapid pivot to digital tools at Sellers aligns with broader retail sector trends as documented in the literature. The COVID-19 pandemic has been identified as a significant catalyst for accelerating digital transformation across the retail sector, pushing boundaries and redefining norms at an unprecedented pace. According to Fortuna et al. (2021), businesses have urgently needed to adapt to new consumer behaviours and restrictions on physical operations. Similarly,

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Dutta and Sandhane (2022) note how retailers, faced with lockdowns and social distancing measures, were compelled to embrace digital technologies not merely as a strategic advantage but as a necessity for survival.

Unlike these broader observations which predominantly focus on the external impacts such as consumer behaviour and market dynamics, this study explores the catalyst effect of COVID-19 from an internal viewpoint at Sellers. It examines how the enforced digital shift influenced not just the utilisation of technology, but also how it integrated into daily operational practices, affected employee interactions, and shifted organisational culture. This internal focus provides a thorough understanding of how the crisis caused a transformation within, highlighting the organisational efforts and challenges that are often overshadowed when considering the wider industry perspective.

During the lockdown (timeline zero), compliance with the shift to digital platforms was essentially mandated by external circumstances rather than internal policy directives, leading to an organic increase in the use of Hangouts/Google Chat among employees. Resistance was minimal, primarily passive, and decreased from a preference for face-to-face communication or the adjustment period to remote work dynamics rather than opposition to the digital tools themselves. Active resistance was virtually non-existent, as the situation left little room for alternative methods of communication.

Workarounds during this period were not aimed at avoiding the use of digital platforms but rather at optimising their use under the new working conditions. Employees developed harmless workarounds to accommodate the asynchronous communication needs and varied schedules of their colleagues, enhancing the flexibility and efficiency of remote interactions. This adaptation reflects a strategic embrace of digital tools to maintain productivity and collaboration in the face of unprecedented challenges.

The evolution from initial adaptation to a more integrated and strategic use of digital platforms was evident from the timeline zero to two. The lockdown not only forced a temporary shift to digital communication but also accelerated Sellers' long-term digitalisation process, leading to lasting changes in operational and communication strategies. This period highlighted the critical role of digital tools in ensuring business continuity, with employees across levels recognising the benefits of digital platforms for enhancing efficiency and fostering a flexible work environment. The transition to digital practices, initially encouraged by necessity, has become embedded in the organisational culture, marking a clear distinction between pre- and

205

post-COVID work practices and underscoring Sellers' commitment to leveraging digital tools for future resilience.

Table 6.1 presents a comprehensive summary of the observed resistance types and workarounds among grassroot, middle, and higher-level employees during the timeline zero study and the timeline one and two. This table categorises the responses to the ESN based on the nature of resistance, active or passive as defined by Kaur et al. (2020) and Heidenreich and Handrich (2015), along with negative or positive as defined by Ferneley and Sobreperez, (2006) and Choudrie and Zamani (2016). Furthermore Table 6.1 identifies the specific workarounds employees adopted to navigate these challenges. By systematically comparing these dynamics across different organisational levels and timeframe.

Under the pressures of the COVID-19 lockdown, Sellers underwent a rapid shift to digital communication platforms, marking a significant moment of accelerated digitalisation. This transition, initially driven by necessity, facilitated the adoption of Hangouts/Google Chat across all organisational levels, highlighting the organisation's adaptability and resilience in response to unprecedented external circumstances. The lockdown catalysed a fundamental change in communication practices, reflecting a broader transformation within Sellers rather than mere compliance with external demands.

This theme contributes to academic discussions by extending the literature on COVID-19 as a catalyst for digital transformation. Unlike studies that focus predominantly on external consumer trends and market dynamics, this study offers an internal perspective, highlighting how enforced digital adoption influenced organisational culture, employee interactions, and operational practices. It underscores the importance of examining organisational-level responses to external crises to understand the mechanisms that facilitate enduring digital transformation.

For industry practitioners, Sellers' experience demonstrates the necessity of leveraging crises as opportunities for long-term digital adaptation. By fostering a supportive culture that encourages digital tool utilisation, organisations can not only maintain continuity during disruptions but also establish a foundation for enhanced efficiency and flexibility in the future. The harmless workarounds developed during the lockdown further highlight the value of empowering employees to innovate within digital frameworks to optimise their use.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

Policymakers can draw from this theme the critical importance of creating policies that facilitate rapid organisational adaptation during crises. Encouraging investments in digital infrastructure and promoting digital literacy across sectors can enable businesses to remain resilient and operationally effective amidst disruptions. Furthermore, policies aimed at supporting organisations in embedding these digital advancements into their culture post-crisis can help sustain the benefits of digital transformation beyond the immediate challenges.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

Table 6.1: Summary of Resistance Types and Workarounds by Employee Level Across Timelines

	Theme		Timeline Zero			Timeline One and Two		
			Grassroot	Middle-Level	Higher-Level	Grassroot	Middle-Level	Higher-Level
Organisational Culture	Partnership Structure	Resistance	Passive, Negative	Passive, Negative	Compliance	Selective Engagement	Selective Engagement	Compliance
		Workaround	Harmless	Harmless	Essential	Harmless	Essential	Essential
	High-Quality Customer Service	Resistance	Passive, Negative	Passive, Negative	Compliance	Passive, Negative	Compliance	Compliance
		Workaround	Harmless	Harmless	Essential	Harmless	Essential	Essential
	Proactiveness	Resistance	Passive, Negative	Selective Engagement	Not Applicable	Passive, Negative	Compliance	Not Applicable
		Workaround	Harmless	Harmless	Not Applicable	Harmless	Essential	Not Applicable
	Integration of Personal and Professional Digital Tools	Resistance	Passive, Negative	Active and Passive, Negative	Active and Passive, Negative	Selective Engagement	Selective Engagement	Selective Engagement
		Workaround	Harmless	Harmless	Harmless	Harmless	Essential	Harmless
Working Practices	Discretion to Couple/Decouple	Resistance	Passive, Negative	Active and Passive, Negative	Compliance	Passive, Negative	Compliance	Compliance
		Workaround	Harmless	Harmless	Essential	Harmless	Essential	Essential
	Material constraint: Digital literacy	Resistance	Forced Compliance	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Active and Passive Negative	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
		Workaround	Essential	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Harmless	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
	Material Constraint: Information Visibility	Resistance	Passive, Negative	Active, Negative	Not Applicable	Passive, Negative	Active, Negative	Not Applicable
		Workaround	Harmless	Harmless	Not Applicable	Harmless	Harmless	Not Applicable
External Pressures	Policy Directives	Resistance	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
		Workaround	Essential	Essential	Essential	Essential	Essential	Essential
	Policy Based Systems	Resistance	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
		Workaround	Essential	Essential	Essential	Essential	Essential	Essential
	Covid-19 Lock-down	Resistance	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
		Workaround	Essential	Essential	Essential	Essential	Essential	Essential

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

6.5 Evolution of Resistance and Workarounds from Timeline Zero to Timeline Two

The utilisation of the ESN across different organisational levels reveals a clear pattern: the extent of ESN usage increases with organisational level. This indicates that higher-level employees engage with the ESN most frequently, while grassroot employees show the least usage. This trend highlights the varying degrees of digital engagement, and the diverse challenges and opportunities ESN presents across the hierarchy of an organisation.

A comprehensive review of the discussions related to each theme and the data presented in Table 6.1 illustrates that middle-level employees have experienced the most significant evolution in their approach and reaction to the ESN from timeline zero to timeline two. This evolution is captured in Figures 6.1 to 6.3, which detail the themes influencing ESN usage at each organisational level. These figures serve as a navigational map, highlighting the progression of workarounds and their evolution, with a focus solely on internal pressures.

The analysis deliberately sidelines external pressures, which include policy directives, policy-based systems, and the Covid-19 lockdown, despite their acknowledged role in encouraging ESN usage and discouraging reliance on workarounds. Notably, the Covid-19 pandemic has been identified as a pivotal factor that significantly increased ESN adoption from timeline zero to the subsequent timelines. This shift was driven by the need for digital communication platforms during the lockdown, underscoring the external environment's influence on organisational behaviour and technology usage.

Figure 6.1 specifically examines the progression of resistance and workarounds among grassroot employees, influenced by organisational culture, the discretion to couple, and material constraints themes. These factors collectively impact grassroot employees' usage of the ESN. During the timeline zero, all themes, except for a lack of digital literacy, led grassroot employees to adopt harmless workarounds. Despite the evolution of resistance levels from timeline zero through timelines one and two, the nature of the workarounds for all themes remained harmless. This continuity suggests that while there may have been shifts in attitudes and engagement levels, the strategies employed by grassroot employees to navigate the ESN environment have maintained a consistent, non-disruptive character.

Figure 6.2 explores deeper into the resistance and workaround strategies employed by middle-level employees, highlighting the substantial evolution in their approach to the ESN from timeline zero to timeline two. This progression highlights the significant impact of organisational culture themes, the discretion to couple, and material constraints on the use of ESN within this group.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

During the timeline zero, middle-level employees, much like their grassroot counterparts, predominantly resorted to harmless workarounds in response to these themes. This approach was largely driven by the existing organisational culture and the perceived limitations of integrating the ESN into their daily work practices. However, a marked evolution in resistance patterns emerged as the organisation transitioned to timelines one and two. The resistance that originated from organisational culture themes, discretion to couple, and material constraints experienced a transformation, prompting middle-level employees to shift from employing harmless workarounds to adopting strategies that were believed essential for their work. Notably, the theme of information visibility stands as an exception, not experiencing significant evolution in the same period. This suggests that while middle-level employees have broadly moved towards more substantive engagement with the ESN, certain aspects, like information visibility, have not seen a parallel level of development or reconsideration.

Figure 6.3 provides insight into the resistance and workarounds among higher-level employees, revealing a relatively stable pattern of engagement with the ESN. This stability is attributed to the consistent and extensive use of the ESN by this group across all timelines, emphasising their key role in the organisational usage of digital tools. Higher-level employees have been identified as the most frequent users of the ESN, a trend that aligns with their job requirements and roles within the organisation.

The analysis and discussions indicate that two specific organisational culture themes and the discretion to couple have influenced ESN usage among higher-level employees. However, the overall compliance level within this group remains high, largely due to the nature of their job responsibilities that necessitate frequent use of the ESN. Additionally, higher-level employees play a crucial role in fostering ESN usage among middle and grassroot employees, acting as champions for the platform and its utilisation.

Despite the general trend towards compliance and proactive use of the ESN, Figure 6.3 highlights that the integration of personal and professional digital tools posed some resistance among higher-level employees. This resistance, although evolving from timeline zero through timelines one and two, prompted the application of workarounds. Interestingly, the workarounds associated with this theme remained harmless across all timelines, indicating a minimal impact on the overall effectiveness and efficiency of ESN usage within this group.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

Figure 6.1: Evolution of Resistance and Workarounds Among Grassroot Employees

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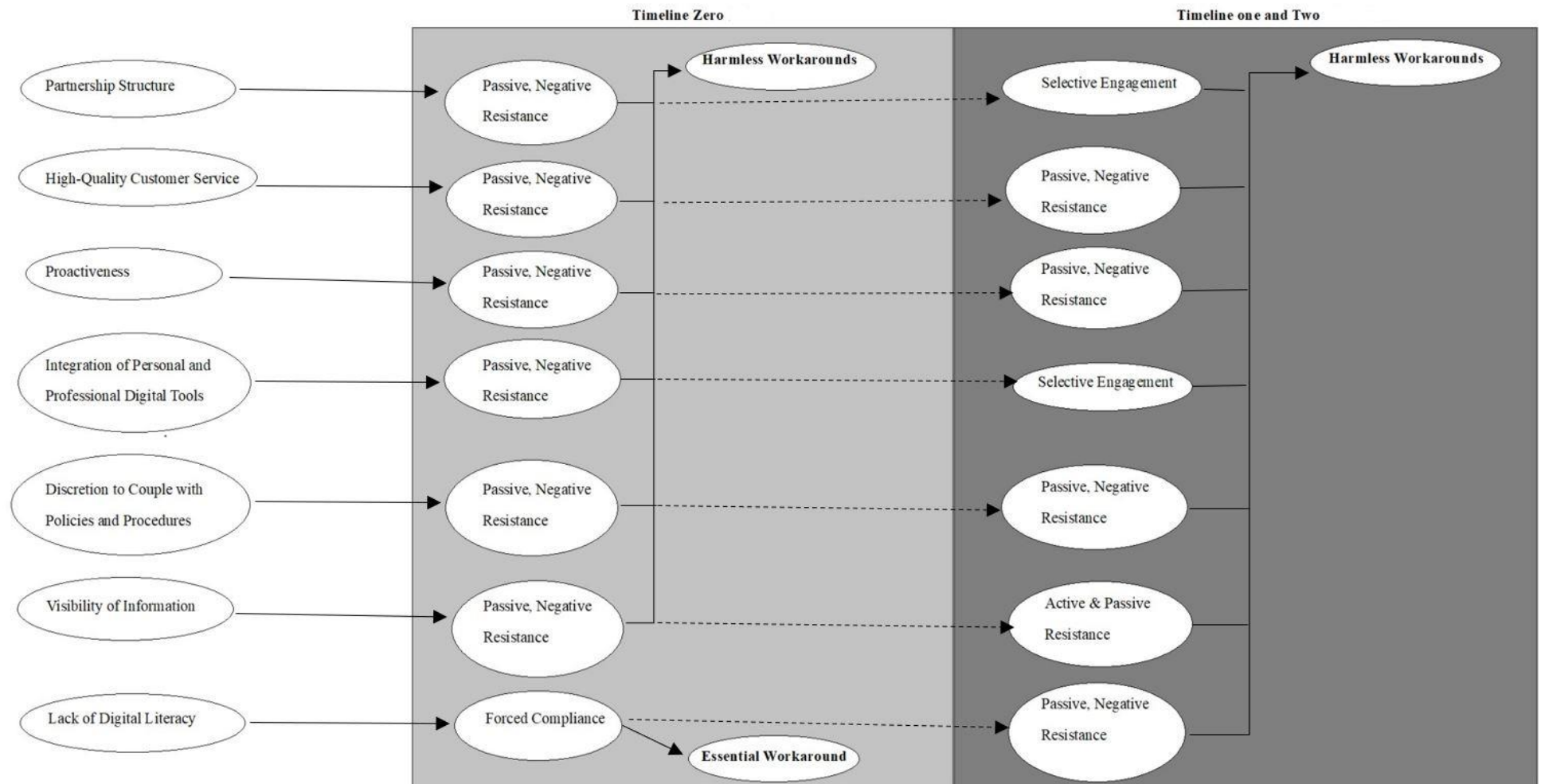
Figure 6.2: Transformation in Middle-Level Employees' Engagement with the ESN

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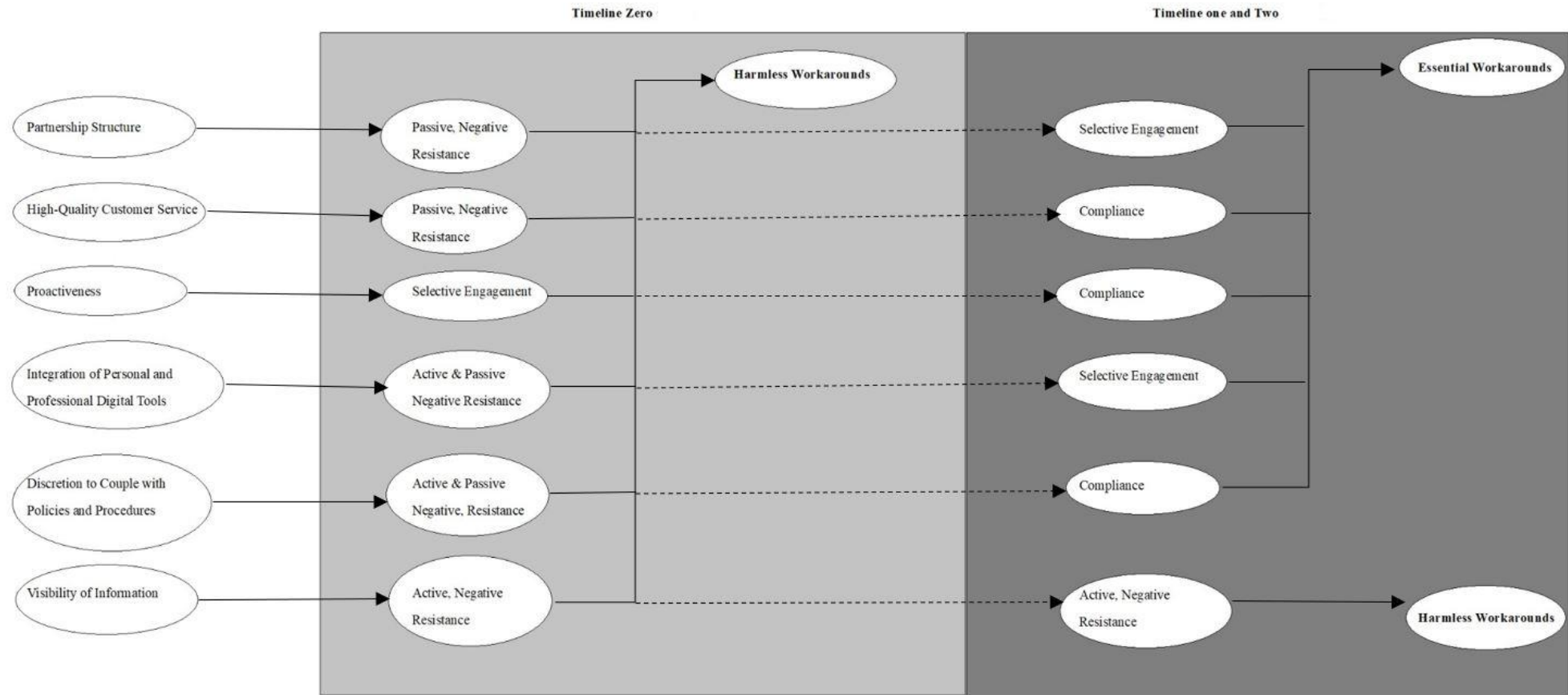
Figure 6.3: Stability and Compliance in Higher-Level Employees' ESN Usage

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study
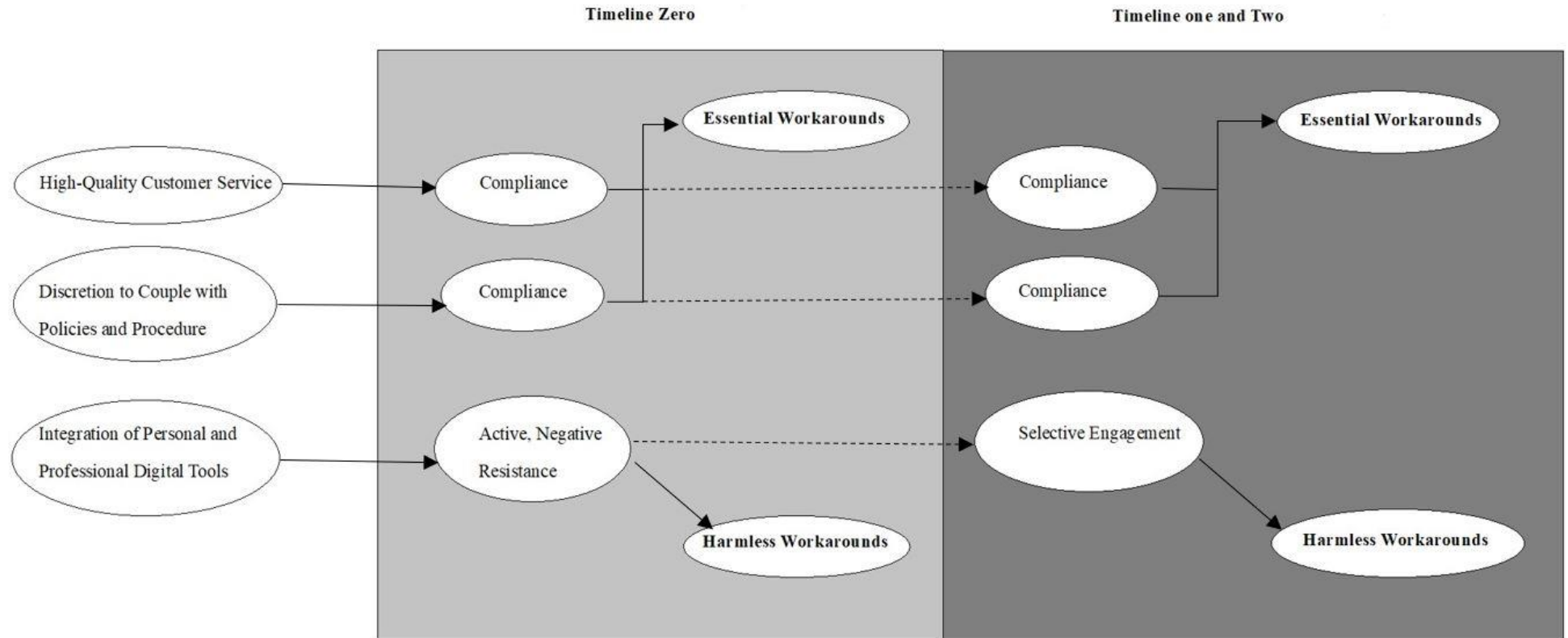
6.6 Evolution of the Conceptual Framework: From Literature Review to Empirical Insights and Discussion

The conceptual framework established after the literature review (Figure 2.1), depicted in below in Figure 6.4 for this discussion, marks a critical foundation in understanding the dynamics of ESN implementation within an organisational context. Drawing from institutional theory, this framework situates Sellers, within the realm of IS, acknowledging the dual impact of external and internal institutional pressures (Azad and King, 2011; Choudrie and Zamani, 2016) on the utilisation of ESNs. This perspective is instrumental in identifying the organisational culture as a pivotal factor influencing working practices, particularly in the utilisation of ESNs within Sellers. Moreover, the framework highlights the significant role of trust in facilitating effective online communication, a factor that is critical for the development and success of ESNs (Baabdullah et al., 2014; Laumer et al., 2018; Choudrie et al., 2018).

The journey towards digital transformation, as captured in figure 6.4, indicates a theoretical progression from resistance and workarounds to eventual conformity with the ESN. Theoretical because it was based on the literature review. This progression reflects the typical path organisations like Sellers might follow as they navigate through the challenges and opportunities presented by digital transformation initiatives. This initial framework sets the stage for further exploration and revision based on empirical data collected during the timeline zero and subsequent analysis during the timeline one and two, highlighting the evolving understanding of ESN integration within institutional contexts.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

Figure 6.4: Initial Conceptual Framework Post-Literature Review
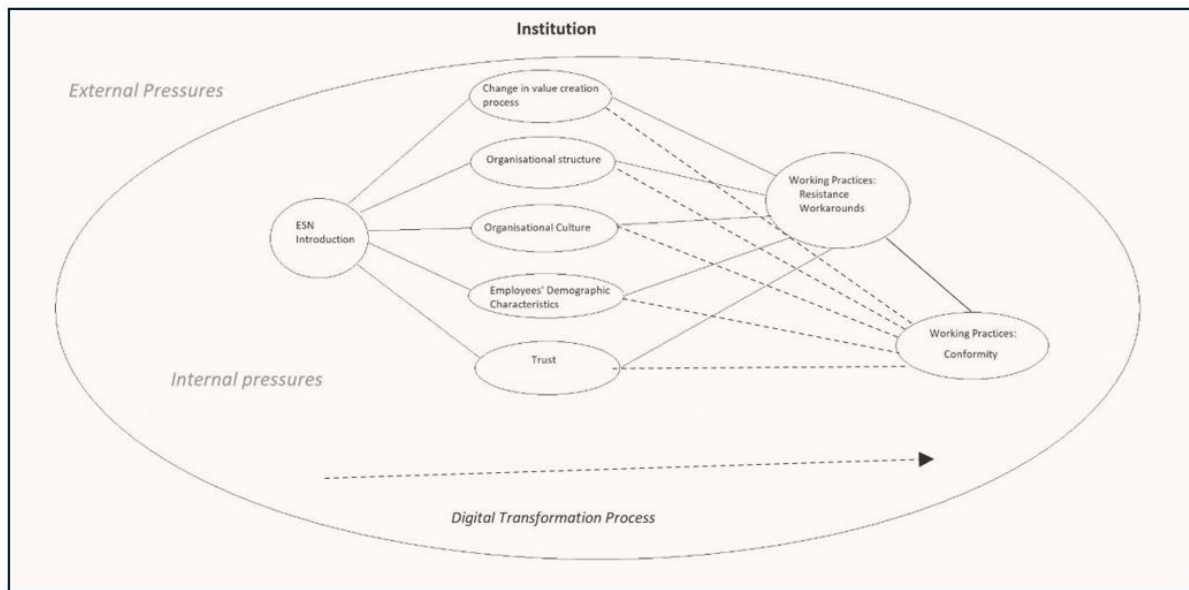
Source: Author's own illustration

The analysis of timeline zero data prompted a significant revision of the initial conceptual framework, leading to the development of Figure 6.5, which is Figure 4.4 shown earlier. During this timeline, the anticipated theme of trust did not emerge as a significant factor. Instead, the influence of organisational culture on working practices took centre stage, confirming its importance but with a complex perspective on its impact. The revised framework illustrates how organisational culture shapes working practices by influencing the work ethos within the organisation. This adjustment highlights the significant effect of organisational ethos on the integration and utilisation of ESNs.

Additionally, timeline zero study showed specific themes under the umbrella of organisational culture that directly affect working practices. These themes include partnership structure, high-quality customer service, proactiveness, and personal communication, each playing a critical role in defining the organisational ethos and, subsequently, the engagement with ESN. Alongside these, the established themes of working practices, such as work ethos (originating from organisational culture), discretion to couple with policies and procedures, and material constraints, were further defined. Particularly, material constraints identified during the timeline zero included the lack of formal training for ESN usage and the invisibility of information, highlighting practical barriers to effective ESN integration.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

An interesting insight from the timeline zero study was the observation that some employees might comply with ESN usage without exhibiting any resistance, a behaviour attributed to their work ethos and, by extension, the overarching organisational culture. This finding indicates a direct link between organisational culture and the individual and collective acceptance and utilisation of ESNs, suggesting that compliance and conformity might arise naturally from the cultural alignment and internalisation of organisational values.

These revisions and insights from the timeline zero study data analysis significantly enriched the conceptual framework, setting the stage for further evolution based on the analysis of data from subsequent timelines.

Figure 6.5: Revised Conceptual Framework After Timeline Zero Study Analysis
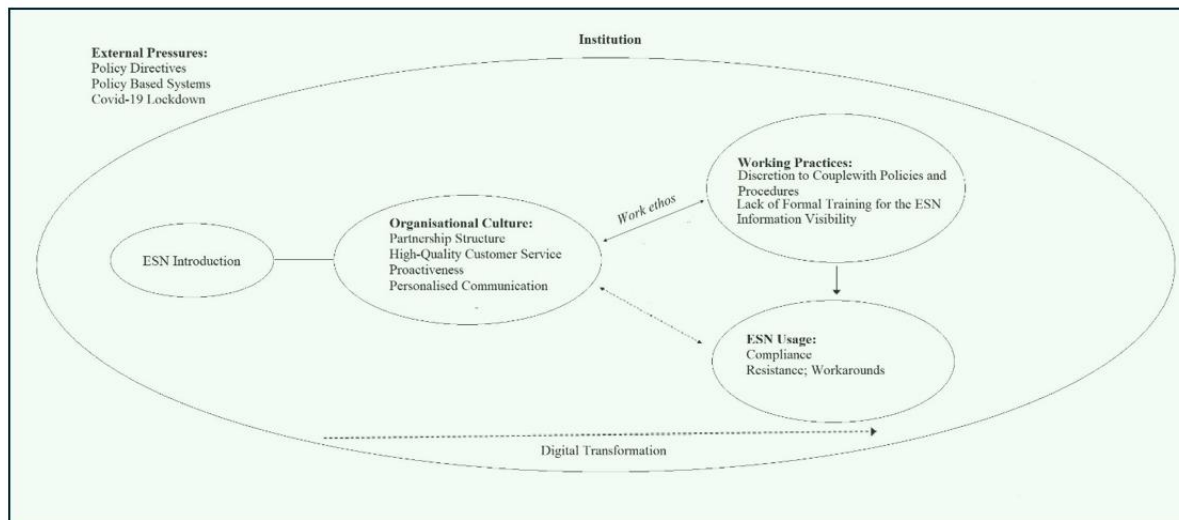
Source: Author's own illustration

As the study progressed into its final timeline, covering timeline one and two, the initial themes identified during the timeline zero were largely validated, with deeper probing leading to their refinement. The theme initially named "personal communication" in the timeline zero evolved to "integration of personal and professional digital tools" in the timeline one and two. This change reflects the ongoing digital transformation within the organisation, indicating a shift towards a more sophisticated understanding of how employees choose between the ESN and personal communication tools for their professional interactions.

Moreover, the theme of material constraints, initially identified as a lack of formal training for the ESN, was discovered to have deeper roots. Further probing revealed that the challenge was not limited to training on a specific ESN but extended to a broader issue of digital literacy

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

among employees. This insight led to the redefinition of the material constraint's theme to emphasise the important issue of digital literacy, recognising that the barrier to ESN integration and effective use exceeds simple training and encompasses a fundamental need for enhancing digital skills across the organisation.

These insights and refinements were incorporated into the revised conceptual framework depicted in Figure 6.6, which is the earlier Figure 5.3. This framework reflect a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing ESN implementation and usage. The framework now highlights the critical role of digital literacy and the integration of personal and professional digital tools as key factors shaping the digital transformation journey within the organisation. This evolution of the conceptual framework highlights the dynamic nature of organisational change, emphasising the importance of continually reassessing and adapting the understanding of key themes as the organisation progresses through its digital transformation.

This progression from the initial conceptual framework through the timeline zero study to the final analysis illustrates the iterative nature of theory development, where empirical findings refine and expand theoretical constructs. The evolving conceptual framework captures the complexities and subtleties of ESN integration within an organisational context, offering valuable insights into the interplay between organisational culture, digital literacy, and communication practices in the era of digital transformation.

Figure 6.6: Further Revised Conceptual Framework Incorporating Timeline One and Two Findings

Source: Author's own illustration

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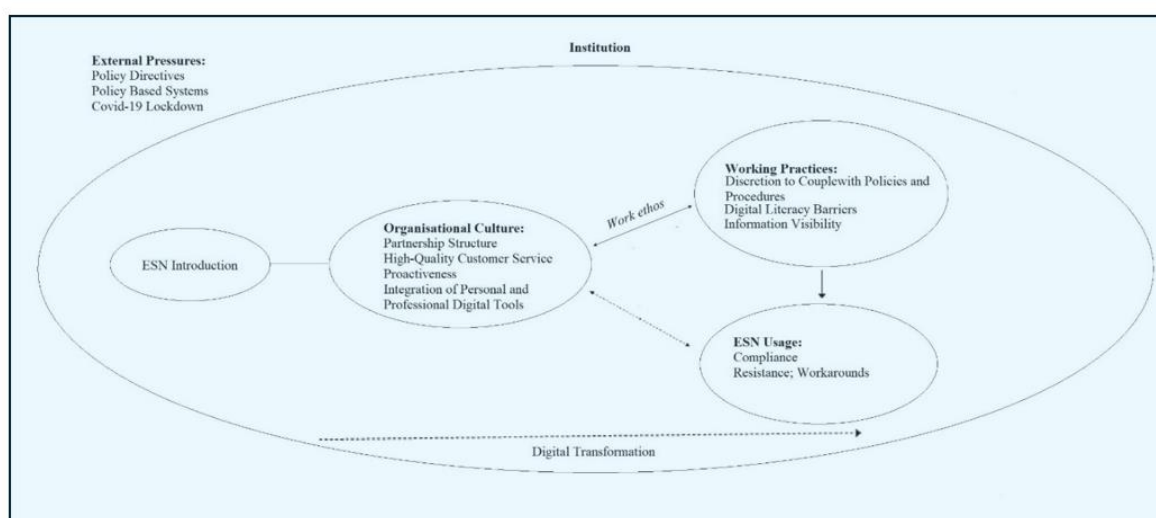
The final revision of the conceptual framework, as depicted in Figure 6.7, incorporates a detailed understanding of the interplay between compliance, resistance, and the employment of workarounds in the context of ESN usage within an organisation. This revision is a conclusion of discussions that explored the impact of various themes on ESN usage, as well as an examination of how these dynamics evolve across the three distinct timelines of the study.

Key findings from these discussions reveal that employee reactions to ESN implementation and integration are significantly influenced by their organisational level. Specifically, it was observed that higher-level employees exhibit a greater degree of compliance with ESN usage compared to their counterparts at middle and grassroot organisational levels. This higher compliance rate among senior employees is attributed to their role in encouraging and facilitating ESN usage among middle and grassroot employees, thus setting a precedent for its use within the organisation.

Moreover, the discussion shed light on the nature of ESN usage, where employees might fluctuate between periods of compliance and resistance. This phenomenon, described as "forced compliance," occurs when employees align with ESN usage policies and procedures temporarily, often in response to external pressures. Such compliance is not indicative of a genuine acceptance or integration of the ESN into their daily work practices but rather a temporary measure to meet specific external demands or expectations.

The finalised conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 6.7 reflects these insights, emphasising the two-way influence between ESN usage and working practices. It highlights that ESN integration into organisational workflows is not a linear process but is characterised by ongoing negotiations between compliance, resistance, and the creation of workarounds. This dynamic interplay highlights the complex factors at play, including organisational culture, digital literacy, and the personal and professional integration of digital tools, which collectively shape the path of digital transformation within an organisation.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

Figure 6.7: Final Conceptual Framework Reflecting Compliance, Resistance, and Workarounds Evolution
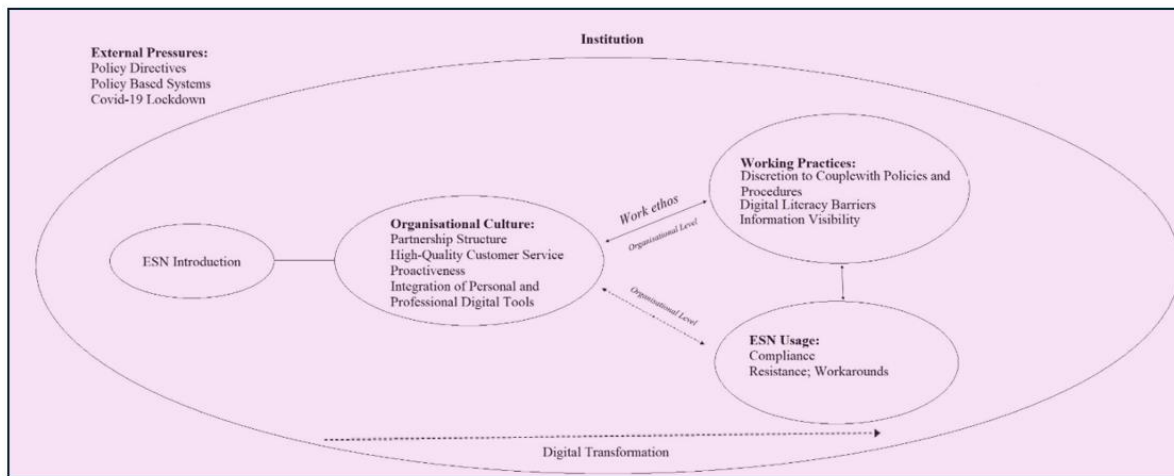
Source: Author's own illustration

This evolved conceptual framework not only captures the details of ESN implementation and usage but also serves as a valuable tool for understanding the conditions under which employees choose to comply with, resist, or find workarounds to ESN usage mandates. It offers a comprehensive lens through which the impact of organisational factors on digital transformation efforts can be examined, providing a basis for developing strategies that foster a more effective and inclusive integration of technology into organisational practices.

6.7 Implications

The implications of this study aims to bridge the gap between theoretical insights and practical applications, drawing on the comprehensive analysis of organisational culture, digital literacy, and the usage of ESNs. It is structured to provide targeted insights for academics, practitioners, and future research endeavours, emphasising the multifaceted impact of digital transformation within organisational settings. This section interprets how the study's findings impact the existing knowledge, offer actionable strategies for organisations, and outline directions for future research in the dynamic field of digital technology usage.

6.7.1 Theoretical and Academic Implications

This study significantly contributes to the academic discourse on digital transformation within organisations, particularly through its exploration of the integration and utilisation of ESNs. It reveals a deep understanding of how organisational culture and technological usage intersect,

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

challenging and expanding existing theoretical frameworks in the field of organisational studies and information systems.

Firstly, the research highlights the dynamic interplay between organisational culture and technology, revealing how cultural values, resistance, compliance, and workaround strategies evolve in response to the introduction and integration of ESNs. This aspect of the study enriches theoretical discussions on the resistance to change and the adaptability of organisations in the digital era, offering insights into the mechanisms through which organisational culture can both facilitate and hinder technological usage.

Secondly, the study highlights the critical role of digital literacy within the process of digital transformation, pointing to the disparities in digital fluency across different levels of the organisation. This finding suggests a need for theoretical models to more explicitly incorporate the role of digital literacy in predicting and explaining the success of technological initiatives within organisations.

Finally, the research's focus on the involved work culture and its impact on ESN usage provides a valuable theoretical contribution to the understanding of how digital tools can foster an environment of collaboration, engagement, and empowerment. It suggests a model where digital transformation efforts are most effective when they align with the organisation's broader cultural and strategic objectives, thereby extending the conversation on the strategic alignment between organisational culture and technological initiatives.

6.7.2 Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer valuable insights for practitioners involved in the management and implementation of digital transformation initiatives, particularly those leveraging ESNs. The practical implications emphasise on the importance of fostering a supportive organisational culture that is conducive to the effective use of digital tools.

The first key aspect to be considered is cultural adaptation for digital transformation. In this matter, organisations should actively work towards developing a culture that embraces digital transformation, characterised by openness to change, collaboration, and continuous learning. This involves not only promoting digital literacy across all levels of the organisation but also ensuring that digital tools like ESNs are aligned with the organisation's strategic objectives and core values.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

The second important aspect is enhancing digital literacy. This aspect is to maximise the benefits of ESNs, it is necessary for organisations to invest in comprehensive training programmes that enhance digital fluency across the workforce. These programmes should go beyond basic technical training to include strategies for integrating digital tools into daily work practices, thereby ensuring that all employees are equipped to leverage these platforms effectively.

The third main aspect is strategic alignment of technological initiatives. This aspect emphases that the successful usage of ESNs requires a strategic approach that aligns these technologies with the organisation's broader missions, such as improving customer service or facilitating innovation. Organisations need to ensure that their technological initiatives are not only aimed at achieving operational efficiencies but also at fostering an environment that supports personal and professional growth.

The fourth practical aspect highlighted by this study is feedback mechanisms and continuous dialogue. The dynamic nature of digital tool usage within organisations highlights the need for continuous dialogue and feedback mechanisms. Organisations should establish channels that allow for the ongoing evaluation of digital tools' effectiveness and the identification of emerging challenges, thereby enabling timely adjustments to both technology and strategy.

By addressing these practical implications, organisations can enhance their digital transformation efforts, ensuring that the usage of ESNs and other digital tools leads to meaningful improvements in organisational performance and employee engagement.

6.7.3 Research Implications

The study's findings have profound implications for future research, particularly in the fields of organisational behaviour, information systems, and technology management. It highlights the necessity for further exploration into the complex relationships between organisational culture, digital literacy, and technology utilisation.

Future studies should develop the examination of the role of organisational culture and investigate how different aspects of organisational culture influence the effective use of digital tools, particularly in diverse organisational settings and industries.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

Moreover, the future studies can explore deeper into the impact of digital literacy on the success of digital transformation initiatives, exploring strategies to mitigate disparities across organisational levels.

In addition, future researchers could conduct longitudinal studies to observe the evolving use of digital tools like ESNs over time, offering insights into the long-term effects of these technologies on organisational practices and employee engagement.

And finally future studies should explore how the implications of digital transformation vary across different industries, providing a broader understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented by digital tools in various contexts.

By addressing these research implications, scholars can contribute to a more comprehensive and deep understanding of digital transformation processes, enhancing the theoretical and practical knowledge base in this vital area.

6.8 Contributions

This section explains the contributions of this study by emphasising on the multifaceted impact of ESNs within the retail sector, particularly post-COVID-19, bridging critical gaps in existing literature. It offers insights into the symbiotic relationship between organisational culture, digital literacy, and technology usage, highlighting implications for academia, industry, and policymakers.

6.8.1 Contribution to Academia

This study significantly develops the academic understanding of ESS within the retail sector, particularly in a post-COVID-19 context where much of the existing research has predominantly focused on online retail sales. By exploring the utilisation of ESS through the lens of organisational culture and working practices, it reveals the complex interplay between technological tools and organisational dynamics during digital transformation efforts. It extends theoretical frameworks on technology acceptance and usage by clarifying how elements of organisational culture such as partnership structure, high-quality customer service, proactiveness, and the integration of personal and professional digital tools crucially influence employees' engagement with ESS.

The research builds upon and advances the conversation on the influence of working practices on technology, providing distinct evidence of the two-way relationship between organisational

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

culture and working practices in shifting ESN usage. This study deepens theoretical distinctions in technology utilisation, emphasising the cooperative relationship between organisational culture and technology. Moreover, it sheds light on the differentiated impact of organisational level on technology usage, illustrating how individual positions within the organisational hierarchy influence attitudes towards technology, leading to varied levels of resistance or compliance.

By acknowledging the informative value of resistance alongside compliance in shaping technology strategies, this study offers a balanced perspective on organisational change processes. It underlines the importance of designing technology implementation strategies that are sensitive to the hierarchical and cultural distinctions of different organisational levels, contributing to a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play in technology usage within organisations.

Additionally, this study integrates the influence of external pressures, such as policy directives, policy-based systems, and the COVID-19 lockdown, into the examination of ESN utilisation. These external factors are shown to act as catalysts or barriers for digital transformation, offering a detailed understanding of how external environments shape organisational responses to technology adoption and adaptation.

The study further expands academic discourse by introducing the concept of internal co-creation of value through digital tools, such as ESNs. Unlike prior studies that focus predominantly on external co-creation of value (e.g., customer interactions), this research highlights how ESNs facilitate collaboration among employees. For example, the procedural coupling in the planning department demonstrates how internal co-creation of value enhances operational efficiency and strengthens team collaboration, providing new insights into the transformative potential of ESS within organisations.

6.8.2 Contribution to Industry

This research provides actionable insights for industry leaders and managers navigating the complexities of digital transformation within the retail sector. By highlighting the integral role of organisational culture and working practices in the effective utilisation of ESS, it offers a proposal for aligning technological initiatives with organisational values and goals. The study emphasises the necessity of fostering a supportive environment that encourages digital literacy and accommodates the diversity of employees' digital fluency levels.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

For organisations, particularly in the dynamic and competitive retail landscape, this study highlights the importance of developing comprehensive training programmes tailored to enhance digital literacy and the strategic integration of ESS. It also points to the need for agility and adaptability in response to external pressures, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, showcasing how crises can serve as catalysts for accelerated digital usage and transformation. This perspective underscores the importance of viewing crises not merely as disruptions but as opportunities for long-term organisational adaptation, with strategic investments in digital tools and infrastructure.

Moreover, the findings emphasise the role of leadership in fostering a digital-first mindset by recognising and rewarding proactive engagement with digital tools, such as ESNs. Industry practitioners are encouraged to embed digital practices into organisational performance metrics and appraisals, ensuring that employees view technology adoption as directly contributing to their career development and the organisation's operational success. This approach helps bridge the gap between technology implementation and cultural integration, leading to more sustained and effective usage.

By highlighting the significance of harmless and essential workarounds, the study provides practical strategies for organisations to empower employees in optimising their use of digital tools. For example, middle-level employees at Sellers strategically used the ESN to increase visibility and improve operational processes, showcasing how aligning technology with organisational culture can enhance collaboration and productivity.

Finally, the study stresses the need for organisations to address material constraints, such as digital literacy barriers and information visibility challenges, to ensure inclusive and equitable digital transformation. Industry leaders are encouraged to prioritise informal support networks and peer learning as key components of fostering digital competency across diverse employee groups. These strategies enable a gradual and sustainable integration of ESS, ensuring that the tools become intrinsic to organisational workflows and contribute to long-term resilience.

By leveraging these insights, industry practitioners can ensure more effective and resilient digital strategies that align with both their immediate operational needs and long-term strategic objectives, positioning their organisations for sustained success in an increasingly digital business landscape.

6.8.3 Contribution to Policymakers

This study significantly informs policymakers on developing digital transformation strategies that carefully consider the complex aspects of organisational culture and working practices. Policy directives should guide responsible ESNs usage while addressing the broader challenges of digital transformation, such as digital literacy, organisational culture management, and technology's strategic alignment with organisational goals. Highlighting the COVID-19 pandemic's role highlights the need for policies enabling organisations to adapt swiftly to global disruptions, ensuring resilience and operational continuity.

Moreover, the research advocates for policy frameworks that recognise the varied levels of digital fluency across the workforce, suggesting the importance of creating a participatory work culture through supportive strategies. These frameworks should emphasise the value of peer learning and informal support mechanisms in fostering digital fluency, especially for grassroots employees who face significant barriers to engaging with digital tools. By promoting targeted interventions and comprehensive training programmes, policymakers can assist organisations in overcoming digital tool utilisation barriers, leading to a more digitally inclusive workforce. This approach aligns with broader societal objectives of digital inclusivity and workforce empowerment amidst rapid technological changes.

The study also highlights the importance of recognising how external pressures, such as crises or policy directives, can act as catalysts for organisational change. Policymakers should support the development of adaptive policy measures that encourage organisations to leverage such disruptions as opportunities for long-term digital transformation. This includes incentivising investments in digital infrastructure and fostering an organisational culture that aligns with digital-first strategies to support operational resilience.

And finally, it's crucial for policymakers to develop digital transformation strategies that are deeply embedded in the fabric of organisational culture and daily operations. Policies should not only promote responsible use of ESNs but also ensure that these digital tools are integral to daily work practices and supported by organisational procedures. For instance, policies should advocate for the integration of ESNs into performance evaluations and organisational metrics to enhance their perceived value and encourage engagement across all levels of the workforce.

Recognising the importance of discretion in coupling technology with work processes, policies should mandate the incorporation of ESNs within the procedural framework of organisations,

225

thereby fostering an environment where digital tools are not exterior but central to organisational activities. This approach highlights the need for a strategic alignment that exceeds mere utilisation, advocating for a holistic integration that supports operational continuity, resilience, and the achievement of broader organisational goals among rapid technological changes. By focusing on the interplay between digital literacy, organisational culture, and adaptive policy measures, this study offers policymakers actionable insights to drive inclusive and effective digital transformation across sectors.

6.9 Conclusion

This chapter discusses the intricate dynamics between organisational culture, working practices, and the use of ESN within the context of Sellers' digital transformation journey. Through a detailed discussion, it reveals how various elements of organisational culture, such as partnership structure, commitment to high-quality customer service, proactiveness, and the integration of personal and professional digital tools, along with discretion to couple and material constraint and external pressures, interplay to shape the working practices and thus influence ESN usage. The exploration extends to understanding the complexities of compliance, resistance, and workarounds, offering a comprehensive view on the strategic implementation of ESN within Sellers.

The implications section provides actionable insights for academics and practitioners, emphasising the need for tailored strategies that acknowledge the diverse impacts of organisational culture and working practices on technology engagement. Moreover, the contributions to the literature enrich the academic discourse on technology usage, highlighting the significant role of organisational culture in shaping technology engagement processes.

Furthermore, reflections on the research journey, structured through Kolb's experiential learning cycle, offer a personal account of the challenges, learnings, and achievements encountered during this study. This reflective exploration not only personalises the academic inquiry but also highlights the practical implications of the findings for organisational change and technology adoption strategies.

Overall, this chapter contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between organisational culture, working practices, and technology use, laying the groundwork for future research in this field and offering practical guidance for organisations navigating their own digital transformation journeys.

CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

7.0 Introduction

This final chapter aims to summarise and synthesise the findings from an extensive study on digital transformation within a large retail organisation, with a specific focus on the use of ESNs. The research explored the complex interplay between organisational culture, technology utilisation, and the dynamics of change within the retail sector, providing insights into how digital tools are reshaping business practices and employee interactions.

The journey of this research explored how digital transformation manifests within organisations, especially through the pivotal role of ESNs. It traced the utilisation and integration of digital technologies across various timelines, identifying both the challenges and opportunities faced by employees at different organisational levels.

This chapter will revisit the key findings and will present practical recommendations based on these findings, aimed at enhancing the implementation and use of digital technologies in similar organisational settings. The limitations encountered during the study will be addressed, and directions for future research will be proposed, suggesting ways to further investigate the transformative impact of digital technologies in retail and beyond.

By synthesising these insights and recommendations, this chapter sets the framework for ongoing discussions and further explorations into the transformative potential of digital tools within organisational contexts, aiming to foster a productive dialogue on these critical themes.

7.1 Revisiting the Research Foundation

Despite the significant role of digital transformation within organisations, driven by advancements in ICTs, existing research predominantly focuses on customer interactions with technology rather than internal usage by employees. Particularly within the retail sector, which is marked by high customer interaction and competitive market dynamics, there is a notable scarcity of studies that explore the internal use ESSs. This research gap highlights the need for a deeper understanding of how digital tools like ESSs are integrated and utilised within retail

organisations. The retail sector's dynamic nature and its rapid adoption of digital innovations call for a detailed exploration of the resistance to and acceptance of technology from an employee perspective.

In response to this identified gap, the aim of this study was established to explore, understand, and explain the use of an ESS within a large retail organisation in the United Kingdom.

The methodological framework of this study was grounded in interpretivism, adopting a single case study approach to explore the internal dynamics of a large retail organisation, referred to as "Sellers" for anonymity. This qualitative research design facilitated a detailed exploration of employees' subjective experiences and interpretations within their organisational context.

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which were complemented by secondary data to ensure comprehensive triangulation of findings. Secondary data sources included documentation, archival records, and textual or content analysis, providing additional context and substantiation to the insights gathered from interviews. The semi-structured interview format featured open-ended questions that were rigorously reviewed by a panel of 15 industry and academic experts, ensuring the content and construct validity of the instruments used.

Participant selection employed a non-random sampling strategy encompassing snowball, convenience, and purposive sampling techniques. This method aimed to capture a broad range of perspectives across various organisational levels and departments, factoring in demographic attributes such as age, gender, and educational background that influence technology usage (Al-Zaabi, Choudrie and Lebcir, 2012; Al-Ghaith et al., 2010).

The study was conducted over three distinct timelines, Zero, One, and Two, each correlating with different stages of the COVID-19 lockdowns. This longitudinal structure allowed for an examination of changes in ESS usage and employee behaviour over time. A total of 36 interviews were conducted with 12 participants, each interviewed three times to track the evolution of their interactions with the ESS during and after the pandemic restrictions.

Thematic analysis and open coding techniques were utilised to analyse the data collected across the timelines. This analysis was designed to achieve theoretical saturation, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the emergent themes, and confirming that no new data would alter the research conclusions (Yin, 2003).

This rigorous methodological approach underpinned the study's objective to explore, understand, and explain the use of ESS within "Sellers," linking empirical findings to broader discussions on digital transformation and internal communication technologies within the retail sector.

7.2 Summary of Findings

In the thematic analysis process, the emerged codes were strategically categorised, linking them to both organisational culture and working practices. This categorisation was pivotal for understanding how these codes are not merely isolated elements but integral components that weave together the fabric of the organisation, influencing the relationship between technology usage (Mariategui, 2013), evolving work practices (Choudrie et al., 2017), and the overarching organisational culture. Such an approach is crucial for comprehensively understanding how technological tools like ESNs are not just tools of utility but are embedded within the cultural and operational frameworks of the organisation.

Employing Schein's model of organisational culture, known for its focus on the deeper, often unconscious aspects of culture like underlying assumptions, values, and artifacts (Schein, 1992), provided a profound lens through which the intricacies of organisational culture at Sellers were examined. This model was effectively complemented by institutional theory, which looks at the broader societal and regulatory structures impacting organisational practices (Scott, 2014). The Covid-19 lockdown exemplified this interplay, as it forced a rapid shift to remote work, thereby emphasising the critical role of ESNs in maintaining communication, collaboration, and business continuity. This scenario highlighted how Sellers' digital tools and platforms became central to interaction, reflecting and reinforcing the company's values around flexibility, partnership, and high-quality customer service during challenging times.

Furthermore, the lockdown period demonstrated the application of institutional theory through the adaptation to new societal norms and regulatory expectations regarding remote work. This adaptation illustrated how Sellers' response to enhancing ESN usage not only aligned with external pressures but also showcased the organisation's resilience and proactive adaptation to unprecedented conditions. This intersection of institutional pressures and the deeper aspects of organisational culture facilitated a swift and effective response to external challenges, illustrating the dynamic interplay between deeply rooted cultural values and broader environmental pressures. This comprehensive approach provided valuable insights into how

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

organisational culture at Sellers both shapes and is influenced by external societal forces, crucial for understanding the organisation's digital transformation journey in the face of global challenges.

In Timeline Zero, the thematic analysis provided critical insights into the organisational culture at Sellers, particularly illustrating how the usage of ESNs both influences and is influenced by internal dynamics. Key organisational culture themes such as Partnership Structure, High-Quality Customer Service, Personalised Communication, and Proactiveness were identified from the data. These themes were highlighted through detailed examinations and interpretations of interview transcripts, offering tangible examples of how employees interact with digital tools and with each other. Additionally, themes related to material constraints, such as the lack of formal training and issues with information visibility, as well as external pressures including policy directives, policy-based systems, and the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown, also emerged.

As the study progressed through Timeline Two, key themes identified in Timeline Zero at Sellers continued to be relevant but evolved in two specific areas. The theme of Personalised Communication transitioned into the Integration of Personal and Professional Digital Tools, reflecting a shift toward blending personal and professional communication more seamlessly through digital platforms. The theme of Lack of Formal Training expanded into broader Digital Literacy Barriers, pointing to deeper, systemic challenges in digital engagement and proficiency among employees. This evolution highlights a recognition of ongoing digital skill development and adaptation needs beyond initial training.

Furthermore, the remaining themes also saw significant evolution. The Partnership Structure initially met with resistance to mandated communication methods, yet over time, employees increasingly recognised the benefits of ESNs in enhancing communication and fostering organisational success. This reflects a deeper assimilation of the partnership ethos and a shift towards integrating individual autonomy with organisational digital transformation efforts.

The High-Quality Customer Service theme, initially focused on autonomy in service delivery, transitioned towards a strategic utilisation of digital tools like Hangouts/Google Chat to enhance service efficiency and responsiveness, indicating a shift towards digitalisation in service practices.

Proactiveness within the organisational culture, which initially emphasised recognition and collaboration, increasingly leveraged digital platforms for visibility and career advancement, showing a deeper integration into the organisational culture linked to tangible performance outcomes.

Lastly, the theme of Discretion to Decouple/Loosely Couple showed a transition from a decoupled state with flexible ESN policy usage to a more structured integration of ESNs into daily work processes, aligning more closely with organisational procedures and policies.

These themes collectively illustrate a dynamic evolution within the organisation, driven by internal cultural shifts and external pressures like the COVID-19 pandemic. This comprehensive evolution highlights the organisation's strategic integration of digital tools to enhance operational efficiency and cultural alignment.

In addition, throughout the study, workarounds played a critical role in the organisation's adaptation to digital transformation. Initially characterised as mostly harmless, these workarounds allowed employees at various levels to maintain operational continuity while minimally engaging with new digital tools and policies. Over time, the nature of workarounds evolved to become essential, particularly at middle and higher levels of the organisation, reflecting deeper integrations and significant modifications to work processes. This shift was evident in the strategic utilisation of digital communication tools and in response to external pressures such as COVID-19 lockdown. Notably, the response varied significantly by organisational level, with higher levels showing greater utilisation of the ESN and a more pronounced evolution of workarounds from harmless to essential. This progression underlines a dynamic adaptation process where employees increasingly leveraged these strategies not only to align with organisational goals but also to respond effectively to external demands, highlighting the pivotal role of workarounds in facilitating organisational change and digital integration across different levels of the organisation.

7.3 Recommendations

Given the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the retail sector in adapting to digital transformations, this study offers targeted recommendations specifically designed to enhance the effectiveness and impact of technological implementations in retail settings. These recommendations aim to bridge the gap between theoretical insights and practical applications, ensuring that digital tools like ESNs are effectively integrated in ways that align with the

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

distinctive needs and dynamics of the retail environment. By focusing on the specific context of retail, these guidelines seek to support industry leaders, policymakers, and academics in driving forward digital innovation and organisational growth within this sector.

1. Cultivate a Digital-Ready Organisational Culture: Retail organisations should foster a culture that embraces digital change, supporting a landscape where innovation through technology is not only accepted but encouraged. This involves promoting a mindset of continuous learning and adaptability among all employees, crucial for navigating the fast-paced retail environment.

2. Enhance Digital Literacy Across All Levels: Retail organisations should tailor their digital literacy programmes to address the specific needs of different employee levels. For lower-level employees, who demonstrated significant gaps in digital literacy, focus on foundational skills for example, practical applications in customer service and inventory management. For higher-level employees, enhance trainings such as strategic use of digital tools for decision-making and personalised marketing. This targeted approach ensures that all employees are equipped to effectively utilise digital technologies, aligning their skills with organisational digital transformation goals.

3. Integrate ESN Use in Daily Workflows Across Organisational Levels: Retail organisations should ensure that the use of ESNs is deeply integrated into the daily workflows and working practices at all organisational levels. This integration should focus on coupling ESN functionalities with specific job roles and departmental needs, promoting seamless communication and efficient collaboration. By aligning ESN usage with the actual working practices and responsibilities of employees from the shop floor to the executive suite, organisations can enhance productivity and foster a more connected and responsive work environment.

4. Develop Responsive Feedback Mechanisms: Establish dynamic feedback systems to continuously assess the effectiveness of digital tools. Retailers should encourage feedback from all organisational levels, using insights to fine-tune strategies and technology implementations in real-time, which is crucial in the retail sector where consumer trends and behaviours can shift rapidly.

5. Implement Strategic Change Management: When introducing new digital tools or platforms, retail managers should employ strategic change management practices to ensure smooth transitions. This includes providing clear communication about the changes, training sessions

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

to ensure everyone is competent in using new technologies, and ongoing support to address any challenges that arise.

6. Foster Collaborative Ecosystems: Encourage collaboration not just within the organisation but also with external partners, suppliers, and technology providers. Collaborative ecosystems can enhance innovation, providing retailers with access to the latest technologies and best practices that can be adapted for their specific needs.

7. Evaluate Long-term Impact of Digital Tools: Retail organisations should not only focus on the immediate benefits of digital utilisation but also consider the long-term impacts on their business model and industry position. This involves regular reviews of how digital strategies align with the organisation's long-term goals and the evolving retail landscape.

8. Promote Policy Development for Digital Integration: Advocacy for policies that support digital transformation in retail is crucial. This includes policies that facilitate data protection, cybersecurity, and fair digital practices, ensuring that the integration of digital tools is sustainable and beneficial for all stakeholders involved.

By following these recommendations, retail organisations can enhance their digital transformation efforts, ensuring that the utilisation of ESNs and other digital tools leads to significant improvements in operational efficiency, customer satisfaction, and competitive advantage.

By exploring these areas, future research can significantly advance the theoretical and practical knowledge of digital transformation processes, enhancing the strategic and operational benefits of ESSs in various organisational contexts.

7.4 Limitations

Despite the comprehensive methodological framework and rigorous data analysis employed in this study, there are several limitations that should be acknowledged. These limitations not only offer a context for interpreting the findings but also suggest avenues for future research to build upon the current study's insights:

The study's use of a single case study approach, focusing on "Sellers," a large retail organisation in the United Kingdom, while providing a rich and detailed understanding of digital transformation within a complex and multifaceted business environment, presents limitations concerning the generalisability of the findings. "Sellers" possesses a wide array of departments

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

and a diverse employee base, which enhances the breadth of data and provides varied insights into the integration and utilisation of ESS. This diversity within a single organisation offers a unique opportunity to observe interactions across different organisational levels and functional areas, potentially increasing the relevance of the findings to other large organisations with similar structures. However, despite these strengths, the results may not be directly applicable to other retail settings or sectors with different cultural, economic, or technological environments.

Moreover, the participant selection employed non-random sampling methods (snowball, convenience, and purposive sampling), which might introduce selection bias. This approach prioritises depth over breadth and may not fully represent the diversity of perspectives that could be present in a larger, more randomly selected sample pool.

Furthermore, this study's timelines conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and coincided with various stages of lockdowns, which may have influenced the participants' experiences and usage of ESS due to unusual work conditions. These conditions might affect the sustainability of observed behaviours and technology usage patterns post-pandemic.

Finally, although the study covered three timelines, the longitudinal scope was restricted to the duration of the pandemic lockdowns. Longer-term follow-ups could provide further insights into the lasting impacts of ESS usage on organisational practices and employee behaviours.

These limitations highlight the need for caution in applying the study's findings universally. Future research should consider employing a multi-case study design, extending the research beyond the retail sector, or incorporating more objective measures of technology usage and impact to complement self-reported data. Additionally, exploring the post-pandemic implications of ESS usage could offer valuable insights into the permanent changes in digital work practices. These directions would enhance the robustness and applicability of the research on digital transformation within organisational settings.

The limitations identified in this study naturally pave the way for further inquiry. Recognising these areas where the scope is constrained highlights specific opportunities for deepening and broadening the research on digital transformation. The subsequent section on future research will explore these opportunities, offering directions that promise to extend the understanding and implications of ESS usage within and beyond the retail sector.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

7.5 Future Directions

As the study on the use of ESS within the retail sector has shed light on numerous factors of digital transformation, the dynamic integration of technology into organisational practices offers continual opportunities for further investigation. This research has laid a robust groundwork for examining the profound effects of digital tools on organisational dynamics, but the rapid advancement and evolving nature of digital technologies suggest extensive prospects for future exploration. Building on the current study's findings, the following areas are identified for future research to deepen and expand our understanding of ESS across different dimensions:

To address the limitation of generalisability associated with a single case study approach, future research should consider employing a multi-case study design. This approach would involve analysing digital transformation using ESS across multiple retail organisations, which may vary in size, market reach, and organisational structure. By comparing and contrasting different retail environments, researchers can identify common patterns and unique outliers, thus enhancing the robustness and applicability of the findings. Such studies would also allow for the exploration of how cultural, economic, and technological contexts influence the integration and effectiveness of digital tools, providing a more comprehensive understanding that could inform industry-specific strategies.

Moreover, given the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on organisational operations and the accelerated utilisation of digital technologies, it is crucial to explore the long-term implications of ESS usage beyond the immediate crisis response. Future studies could focus on how organisations sustain or modify their digital practices as they transition to a new normal. Research could particularly examine whether the rapid digital adaptations made during the pandemic become permanent or if organisations revert to pre-pandemic practices. Such investigations would provide valuable insights into the resilience and adaptability of digital strategies over time and could help in understanding the evolving needs of employees and the organisation in a post-pandemic landscape.

Furthermore, investigations into how digital transformation manifests in various sectors, such as manufacturing, healthcare, or education, could provide insights into industry-specific challenges and opportunities. There is a significant potential to explore the effectiveness of ESS in diverse cultural contexts, assessing how global applicability and cultural distinctions influence technology integration. Further studies could incorporate emerging technologies like

235

artificial intelligence and machine learning with ESS to enhance functionalities and improve organisational efficiencies.

Future research might also focus on developing and evaluating custom-built ESS solutions tailored to specific organisational needs, comparing their effectiveness with off-the-shelf solutions. Additionally, evaluating various training programmes designed to enhance ESS adoption and utilisation could optimise training strategies to ensure comprehensive employee readiness.

Lastly, analysing how different policy frameworks and regulatory environments impact ESS adoption and usage could provide valuable guidelines for policymakers to support effective digital transformations.

7.6 Conclusion

This study has systematically explored, understood, and explained the use of an ESS within a large retail organisation in the United Kingdom, shedding light on the intricate dynamics of digital transformation from an internal perspective. The findings highlight how ESS is integrated and utilised across various organisational levels, revealing a complex interplay between technological utilisation and organisational culture.

Through rigorous qualitative analysis, this research has contributed to the academic discourse on digital transformation by providing deep insights into the resistance to and acceptance of technology by employees. It has also offered practical recommendations for retail organisations to enhance their digital transformation strategies, ensuring that these initiatives align with and support the organisational culture and employee needs.

Moreover, the study's limitations and suggested areas for future research pave the way for further investigations that could expand the understanding of digital transformation across different contexts and sectors. By addressing these limitations, subsequent research can build on the foundational work provided here, continuing to enrich the field's knowledge and application of digital tools within organisational settings.

In conclusion, this thesis not only fills a critical gap in the existing literature on internal uses of ESS within the retail sector but also provides a robust framework for future research and practical applications in the realm of organisational digital transformation. The findings and

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

recommendations serve as a foundation for both academic researchers and industry practitioners aiming to navigate and leverage the complexities of digital integration effectively.

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281

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Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Interview Questionnaire

<u>**Timeline Zero Interview Questions**</u>

1. To what age group do you belong to?
18-20
21-30
31-40
41-50
51-60
61-70

2. Gender
Male
Female

3. Highest level of education
Below High school
High school
High Diploma
Bachelor
Postgraduate (Masters / PhD)

4. What is your current position?

5. How long have you been working for Sellers Plc?

6. Do you use the internet? If yes, when did you begin using the internet? Why, where and how you began using the internet? How often do you use the internet? How do you use the internet? What are the main purposes of using the internet? Why do you use the internet for these purposes? When do you use the internet? Where do you use the internet?

If no, why not? What are the reasons of not using the internet? What will motivate you to start using the internet?

7. Do you use any type of Online Social Networks? How do you feel about use of Online Social Networks? What makes you feel like that? How Online Social Networks can be beneficial? Could you please provide some examples? When/where/how it can be more

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

beneficial? How Online Social Networks can be harmful? Could you please provide some examples? When/where/how it can be more harmful?

8. For the mentioned Online Social Networks above, do you have any colleagues in your friend list/followers/followings? If yes, how do you feel about it? Why are you connected to your colleagues? If not, why not?

9. Are you part of any informal Sellers group such as WhatsApp group outside of your workplace? How long have you been in this group/ Why did you join it? Who informed you of it? Do you mind who will be added to the group? When would you contact your colleagues through this group? Where do you use this group? How do you use this group?

10. What are the communication tools that you are using most, least at Sellers? When do you use each of these tools? Where do you use each of these tools? How are you using these tools? Out of all communication tools you have mentioned, which one is the best and why?

11. When facing an issue do you prefer to change the communication tools (telephone, email, mobile phones and etc.) that you are using or to change your work routine? How flexible is your work routines? When would you change your routine/ tools? Where would you change your routine/tools? How would you change your routine/ tools? Could you please provide an example?

12. Do you use Hangouts/Google Chat? What are the purposes of using Hangouts/Google Chat? When did you begin using Hangouts/Google Chat? How often do you use Hangouts/Google Chat for work purposes? Who informed you to use Hangouts/Google Chat? Which devices you use to communicate through Hangouts/Google Chat? What are the main purposes of using Hangouts/Google Chat? Why are you using Hangouts/Google Chat for these purposes? When do you use Hangouts/Google Chat? Where do you use Hangouts/Google Chat?

13. How many hours a day are you spending using Hangouts/Google Chat? Why not more or why not less? What could make you to spend more/less time on Hangouts/Google Chat? Where do you spend more/less time on Hangouts/Google Chat? When do you spend more/less time on Hangouts/Google Chat?

14. Before Hangouts/Google Chat, what were the main ways of communication at Sellers? How different is Hangouts/Google Chat to other experiences? Have you found the previous experiences useful in using Hangouts/Google Chat? If using Hangouts/Google Chat was/is difficult, then how have you been supported to be able to use the system better?

15. Do you always use Hangouts/Google Chat? If not, why not? When do you use it? What purposes do you use Hangouts/Google Chat for? Do you have any policy/strategy/incentive/motivation for using Hangouts/Google Chat? Are you going to be

rewarded if you use Hangouts/Google Chat? If yes, how you will be rewarded? What is the reward? When you will be rewarded?

If no, please state why would you think so and how did you determine this? Could you please provide any example?
In the following questions, I am now seeking you to reflect upon the Covid 19 situation.

16 A. How are/were you working during COVID-19 lockdown? Which tools are/were you using more/less during the time? Why? What made you to choose the tool? How do/did you feel about the tool that you are/were using during this time? Has this changed your perception about the usage of this tool? How? After the lockdown, will you change or have you changed the way you use to work before the lockdown? Why? How will it change or how has it changed? What made you or not made you to change?

16 B. Considering COVID-19, are/were you working longer/less hours doing your activities? Why? How are/were you spending your time doing your work? When are/were you doing your work? Where are/were you doing your work? What activities are/were you doing for your work? How and who is monitoring the activities you do for your work? How this has/had affected your productivity? How all these affecting/affected your whole life? How all these affecting/affected your job?

17. To what extent Hangouts/Google Chat is/isn't useful at Sellers? Why? How could it be more/less useful? When could it be more/less useful? Where could it be more/less useful? **.** **Did** Hangouts/Google Chat help during Covid 19? How, what, when, where and why?

18. Has Hangouts/Google Chat affected the quality of your work at Sellers? Why? Please provide an example? How could it affect the quality of your work? When could it affect the quality of your work? Where could it affect the quality of your work? Please share any past experience?

19. Is Hangouts/Google Chat more/less useful for specific Department/ Organisational Level/ Area/ Branch and etc.? How is it more/less useful? Where is it more/less useful? When is it more/less useful? Why do you think so? Please support your answer by an example.

20. Are there any rules, frameworks or policies around the use of Hangouts/Google Chat? Are you aware of what are they? Please name them. How are/could rules and policies affect your work and usage of Hangouts/Google Chat? When and Where are these rules and policies affecting you or could possibly affect you? If not affecting why not or why could not affect?

21. Do you have enough facility (such as smart phone/iPad/laptop) available to use Hangouts/Google Chat? Are these facilities your personal ones? Where are/aren't you able to use them? When are/aren't you able to use them? How are/aren't you able to use them?

22 A. Have you faced any problem or challenge when using Hangouts/Google Chat? What type of problems or challenges have you faced? What was the problem? Why have you faced these problems/challenges? When did you faced mentioned problem(s) or challenge(s)? Where did you face mentioned problem(s) or challenge(s)?

22 B. If you faced any problem or challenge while using Hangouts/Google Chat, do you know whom should you contact to receive help and support? Do you know for what type of issues and challenges you should contact them? Do you know how you should contact them to receive help and support? Do you know when you should contact them?

23. Have you ever been in contact with anyone mentioned in previous question? Why have/haven't you contacted them? If you have contacted them, has the problem been resolved? How the problem has been solved? When the problem been resolved? Are there any Manual, Website, Blogs, Twitter accounts, LinkedIn, Instagram or Facebook available to refer to for support? Do you use more online services, or do you refer to a hard copy? Do you have support available 24hours 7 days a week such as Chatbots?

24 A. When did you realise you had the problem? Who helped you? Was this person in the workplace or at home or within your friends' network? How did they help and support you? What did they help and support you? When did they help and support you? Where did they help and support you? Why did they help and support you? If they are family or friend, would you go back to them for other issues and challenges that you face? Have you been told by them that you can call, email or WhatsApp them at any time? Was the issue been resolved immediately or did you have to wait for the issue to be resolved? How long did it take to find a solution to resolve the problem? What has that resolution led to? If you waited for the problem to be resolved, did you use any other application platform or different ways in the meantime to complete the job? What different ways have you used? Why have you decided to do so?
If you have waited for the problem to be resolved, why have you not used any other ways or other application platform to do your job?

24 B. If you have done your job in a different way by using a different application platform as mentioned in the previous question in place of Hangouts/Google Chat, how did it help? What platform did you use? Why did you use them? How did you learn about those ways and application platform? How do you compare them with Hangouts/Google Chat? If it was optional which one would you choose to do your daily tasks? Why? Do you think the

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

alternative way you have used, or Hangouts/Google Chat are good enough to be used on their own or they should be used together? Why you think so?

25. If you could suggest an option, feature or function to be added to Hangouts/Google Chat, what would that be? Why would you suggest that? How this new function, option or feature would be helpful in your current position? Where this new function, option or feature would be helpful? When this new function, option or feature would be helpful?

26. In the absence of your suggested function, what are you doing to do your job now? How are you doing that specific job? Could you please provide an example?

27. Have you ever been trained to use Hangouts/Google Chat? If yes, why did you have the training? What type of training did you have? How was the training? Do you find the training useful now in your daily practices? When did you have the training? Where did you have the training? Who trained you?
If not, why didn't you have the training? What type of training would you consider is most applicable to your current position? When you should have had that type of training? Where you should have had that type of training? Are you still using Hangouts/Google Chat if not why not?

28. Could you please name few constraints (any limitation, any difficulties) you face when using Hangouts/Google Chat on your daily tasks? Why do you face these mentioned constraints? When do you face these mentioned constraints? Where do you face these mentioned constraints? What suggestion could you provide to Hangouts/Google Chat/Sellers to overcome the issues originating from these constraints?

APPENDIX 2: Content validity form

<u>Content Validity- Interview Questions</u>

<u>The use of Enterprise Social Network, the case of Sellers</u>

The use of Online Social Network is increasing within organisations for different purposes including their external and internal communications. Enterprise Social Network (ESN) is type of Online Social Network that is used by enterprises for internal communication purposes and social interaction within their enterprise.

ESN has been improving organisational communication processes by creating visibility, persistence, edit ability, and association. Successful information-seeking is a cost effective way of identifying the knowledge of other employees, appreciating that knowledge, accessing to that employee easily, and pursuing the information.

However, new technologies such as ESN are not being accepted within organisations because a major barrier/challenge is to convince employees to use them. In many cases, people are not motivated to use the technologies because of different factors such as trust, perceived usefulness and complexity.

Therefore, the overall purpose of this research is to explore, identify, understand and explain the use of an ESN within an organisation.

In order to achieve the aim of this study, data will be collected from Sellers Partnership partners. Sellers has introduced an ESN called Hangouts/Google Chat. Therefore, this study will collect data from Sellers partners by conducting interviews in order to extract factors influencing employees' usage of Hangouts/Google Chat within Sellers.

This preliminary validation process, is designed to ensure the questions being asked are pertinent to aims of this social networking research.

Instructions are on the following page.

On behalf of the research team, thank you for your time and participation.

Content Validity - Instructions

A copy of interview questions has been provided.

For each individual question we would like your opinion on whether you believe that question is:

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

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Essential to aims of this research.

Useful, but not essential to the aims of this research.

Not necessary to the aims of this research

Please highlight or tick the box for EACH question according to the statement you think is applicable from the three options given above.

Once you have done this please save the document and email it back.

Please enter your name here:

Questions	**Essential**	**Useful, but not essential**	**Not necessary**
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

14			294
15			
16-A			
16- B			
17			
18			
19			
20			
21			
22-A			
22-B			
23			
24-A			
24-B			
25			
26			
27			
28			

Please enter your comments here if needed:

Thank You.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

Question Number	Essential	Useful, but not essential	Not necessary	Comments
1	10	2	0	**Sellers- Admin:** Add age group 61-70. **Sellers- Planner:** Needs to be expanded to include over 60's.
2	9	2	1	**Academic- Brunel:** It may be useful to add at least one more option for the gender or to specify that you asking for the participants' gender at birth. **Sellers- Admin:** Additional options needed for gender. **Sellers- Shop floor:** More options required for this question. **Sellers- Planner:** The question should be SEX?
3	9	2	1	**Academic- Brunel:** It may be better to use terms like "primary, secondary, higher graduate, higher post graduate" when it comes to education but this could be determined based on the overall result of your pilot study.
4	10	2	0	**Academic- Brunel:** It may be useful to also ask information about the participants' level on the management lander of the organisation (no-management, junior management, middle management, senior management). For example "*Would you consider your role to be managerial and if yes at what level?*".
5	9	3	0	**Sellers- Planner:** Maybe relevant younger people being more clued up to social networks.
6	10	1	1	NA
7	10	2	0	**Research student- Herefordshire (1):** What makes you feel like that? I have concerns with this question and how it can be measured when analysing answers obtained from respondents. When/where/how it can be more harmful? The where and when is ok and valid; however, I believe the how have already been explored thus makes it repetitive.
8	8	4	0	**Research student- Herefordshire (1):** If yes, how do you feel about it? Again I have concerns with this question and how it can be measured when analysing answers obtained from respondents.
9	11	1	0	**Sellers- Planner:** Definitely important for communication purposes.
10	10	1	1	NA

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

11	**8**	**3**	**1**	**Research student- Herefordshire (1):** Purely suggestive remark. I feel the question is fine; however, use of channel instead of tool maybe better. "To read like this, when facing an issue do you prefer to change the communication channel?"
12	**11**	**1**	**0**	**Research student- Herefordshire (1):** I found both questions under number 12 similar. Both I believe will get you similar if not the same reply.
13	**8**	**3**	**1**	NA
14	**11**	**1**	**0**	NA
15	**8**	**3**	**1**	NA
16-A	**7**	**5**	**0**	NA
16- B	**7**	**5**	**0**	NA
17	**10**	**2**	**0**	NA
18	**9**	**2**	**1**	**Research student- Herefordshire (1):** Both questions 17 and 18, I think both will generate the same response from participants.
19	**10**	**2**	**0**	NA
20	**12**	**0**	**0**	NA
21	**12**	**0**	**0**	NA
22-A	**11**	**1**	**0**	NA
22-B	**12**	**0**	**0**	NA
23	**10**	**2**	**0**	**Academic- Brunel:** I think this question requires rephrasing and use of examples as the link with question 22 is somehow vague.
24-A	**11**	**0**	**1**	NA
24-B	**11**	**1**	**0**	NA
25	**11**	**1**	**0**	NA
26	**9**	**2**	**1**	NA
27	**11**	**1**	**0**	NA
28	**11**	**1**	**0**	**Research student- Herefordshire (2):** What is the difference between questions 22a and 28 in terms of problems/challenges/constraints using Hangouts/Google Chat? They seem to add duplication and could be merged into one question?

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

General Comments	**Academic-University of Hertfordshire (2):** Questions are fine and provide a good opportunity for you to gather rich data. The questions cover detailed area of proposed research objectives and the use of a specific ESN within an organisation.
	Academic-University of Hertfordshire (3): The large number of questions (you ask approx. 200 questions) will make it difficult to conduct the interviews.
	Academic- Brunel University London: In general, I have found the questions very comprehensive and I think it covers all the intended research objectives. My only worry would be that it is very long, and every question is practically divided into numerous sub questions. This can affect the time required for each interview session as well as the time required for transcription and analysis the interviews. If you aim to interview small number of Sellers employees, then it will be fine but if you aim to interview a large number of participants then you may want to consider making your questions lighter.
	Research student- Herefordshire (2): I found the information presented in both, your Content Validity Form and Expert Panel Interview Guide to be well-organised, clear, unambiguous and free of technical terms. The interview questions follow a natural and logical flow. Moreover, I think you have made great use of open-ended questions and included a good mix of descriptive, structural and contrast questions.
	I particularly like how you put the abbreviations to the different factors after each question as I presume this will facilitate the analysis of the data.
	There are only below aspects I would probably consider:
	1- I find all questions to be relevant and useful, but I would be concerned about the time interviews will take, as for interpretative studies, 10 to 12 questions are usually recommended (excluding probes/prompts). In your case, you have more than double so I wonder whether interviews will take too long for both yourself and the participants?
	2- In terms of your probes/prompts, I find them to be consistently useful and I understand the more detail, the better so as to get a good level of granularity from the answers. What I wonder is whether for some questions there could be too many probs/prompts, e.g. in question 24a, and whether that could become a bit choppy and affect the flow of the interview?
	Sellers- Planner: Question 20 – 28: all of these questions can be simplified by asking "has anyone used Hangouts/Google Chat? If so, how did you find using it? Were there any problem(s) using it and were you able to find the answers to solve them whether it be using a different method or another kind of media. Maybe ask to give an example of a problem.
	Sellers- Manager: Considering the objectives of this research very good choices of questions; Yet, there are so many questions and lengthy questions!
	Have you considered the time this will take you to do the interviews?

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

	I would suggest to either reduce the number of your questions or the number of partners that will contribute on this.

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study

APPENDICES

Exploring and Understanding the Adoption and Use of Online Social Networks in Organisations: a Qualitative Study