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Investigation of the Influence of Social Trust, Network, and Shared Goals on Sharing Knowledge Attitudes among Saudi Academics in Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

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For over ten years, research on knowledge sharing has been a subject of focus, with the understanding that it can contribute to an organization's success. However, in Saudi Arabia, relatively little research has been conducted on this topic compared to other countries. The present study explores the impact of social trust, networks, and shared goals on the perception of academics in high-learning educational institutions toward knowledge sharing in Saudi Arabia. The study employs social trust, networks, and shared goals as independent variables. It examines their influence on attitudes toward knowledge sharing while considering control variables such as gender and experience. Data was assembled through a survey method using purposive sampling, and 88 usable responses from HEIs were analyzed. The study's findings proposed a positive relationship between social trust, social network, shared goals, and academic attitudes toward knowledge sharing. These results can benefit Saudi HEIs in developing policies to become knowledge-based institutions. The researcher recommends building a supportive and inspiring work environment for academics in order to exchange their knowledge with each other. The researcher addresses the limitations of the current study and provides a valuable suggestion for future research; conducting a comparative study that focuses on knowledge-sharing practices is recommended. This study does not explore mediating variables, so considering incentives as a mediating factor may result in valuable results for both public and private higher education institutions and business organizations within the context of Saudi.

In recent years, knowledge sharing has gained significant attention in the academic community as a crucial aspect of fostering innovation, collaboration, and overall organizational success. Within higher education institutions, knowledge sharing among academics is pivotal in advancing research, improving teaching practices, and promoting intellectual growth. Understanding the factors that influence knowledge-sharing attitudes among Saudi academics is particularly important, considering the rapid development of the higher education sector in Saudi Arabia.

The Kingdom's Vision 2030 entails a strategic shift toward fostering a knowledge-based economy. This transformation involves prioritizing and investing in research and development, innovation, education, and technology adoption. By embracing these initiatives, the Kingdom aims to drive economic growth, enhance competitiveness, and create sustainable development by utilizing and advancing knowledge-intensive industries and practices.

According to Razak et al. (2016), knowledge sharing (KS) is a strategic approach for businesses to gain a competitive advantage. This means that for organizations, knowledge is imperative, and sharing it across the organization must be utilized as a competitive tool (Argote et al., 2000). The importance of sharing knowledge and consistently exchanging it with coworkers and administration in their day-to-day activities is recognized by academics (Ramayah et al., 2014). It was even suggested (Cheng et al., 2009) that the impact of KS in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) could be higher in magnitude than its impact in business organizations because HEIs participate in the production of knowledge, distribution, and application.

Numerous studies have explored the factors that impact attitudes toward knowledge-sharing in different organizational settings (Tan, 2016). Academic institutions, like other organizations, heavily rely on knowledge sharing. However, it is interesting to note that there is limited empirical research on the knowledge-sharing attitudes of academic staff in higher education institutions, particularly in Saudi Arabian HEIs. Previous studies have primarily focused on organizational, individual, cultural, and technological factors, with few examining social factors such as social trust and network ties. Shaqrah et al. (2013) concentrated on social capital factors, including shared language, vision, and social interaction, and their influence on attitudes and expectations toward knowledge sharing in Jordan.

The present investigation aims to explore the influence of social trust, network relationships and shared goals on the attitudes of Saudi academics toward sharing knowledge. These variables are based on the theory of reason action TRA and TBA; Social trust refers to the belief and confidence individuals have in others within their social network, while network relationships represent the connections and interactions among individuals within the academic community. On the other hand, shared goals encompass the common objectives and aspirations that academics share in their pursuit of knowledge creation and dissemination.

The significance of this study lies in the potential to uncover valuable insights that can enhance knowledge-sharing practices and foster a collaborative culture within Saudi higher education institutions. By examining the interplay between social trust, network relationships, and shared goals, it is possible to identify the key determinants facilitating or hindering knowledge sharing among Saudi academics. The findings of this study can contribute to the development of targeted strategies, policies, and interventions aimed at promoting a vibrant knowledge-sharing ecosystem within the Saudi academic community.

The study anticipates that the results will shed light on the nuanced dynamics underlying knowledge-sharing attitudes among Saudi academics. Social trust, network relationships, and shared goals are expected to be key predictors of knowledge-sharing behaviors. The findings will contribute to the existing literature on knowledge management, particularly in the context of higher education institutions in Arab countries; in addition, these findings will provide practical implications for policymakers, administrators, and educators seeking to foster a culture of knowledge sharing and collaboration. The findings of this study can shed light on the relationships between social trust, network relationships, shared goals, and knowledge-sharing attitudes. The results may identify drivers and barriers to knowledge sharing among Saudi academics.

Literature Review

Thi Chung and Thi Tram Anh (2022) investigation showed the context of governmental establishments in Vietnam focused on elements that improve or impede knowledge-sharing behavior. While their study context differs from the recent study regarding the country and sector, their findings on the association between trust and knowledge sharing are relevant. In addition, they concluded that trust was significantly associated with knowledge sharing (Thi Chung & Thi Tram Anh, 2022). This supports the importance of trust influencing knowledge-sharing attitudes, which can also apply to recent studies on Saudi academics.

A recent publication explored the relationship between knowledge sharing, management support, and the mediating roles of affiliation and trust among professoriate staff in Hong Kong universities (Lo et al., 2021). Their findings indicated that strong support from top management positively impacted fostering affiliation and trust, which, in turn, contributed to knowledge sharing. However, the context and sample differ. Furthermore, the comprehensive literature review conducted by Santhose and Lawrence (2023) is relevant to recent studies as it explores factors influencing knowledge management and sharing within organizations. Their review identified trust as a significant factor in promoting knowledge sharing, which aligns with the focus of this study. Additionally, their review highlighted organizational culture as a factor influencing knowledge sharing (Santhose & Lawrence, 2023).

Overall, the findings from these studies and the literature review contribute to the understanding of factors that influence knowledge-sharing attitudes and behavior. While there may be contextual differences between the studies and the recent study on Saudi academics, Asrar-ul-Haq and Anwar (2016) organized a meta-analysis of 64 articles released in the *Journal of Knowledge Management* from 2010–2015, which discussed the problems, obstacles, and movements in Knowledge Sharing (KS) and Knowledge Transfer (KT) across diverse corporations and regions. The study accentuated a rift in the literature about KS practices in developing countries and pinpointed that cultural dimensions are considered one of the most crucial KS enablers. Furthermore, the writers uncovered that the majority of the studies on KS had been published by developed countries, and there is a growing importance in KS from other countries, such as the United Kingdom and Malaysia (Asrar-ul-Haq and Anwar, 2016).

Previously, Al-Adaileh and Al-Atawi (2011) organized research in the Saudi telecom sector using a descriptive methodology to examine the effects of various organizational cultural elements on the exchange of knowledge, involving susceptibility to change,

modernization, trust, ability to work in teams, attitude, knowledge flow, staff involvement, management, customer service, and reward direction. The study's findings showed that from the viewpoint of Saudi Telecom Context's (STC) employees, several organizational culture variables, like trust, modernization, knowledge flow, management, team unity, and customer adjustment, significantly impact KS. This study proposed that looking at these elements and a few other cultural characteristics across various Saudi industries could lead to fruitful and intriguing findings (Al-Adaileh & Al-Atawi, 2011). These studies emphasize the importance of cultural dimensions and organizational culture in facilitating knowledge sharing. Asrar-ul-Haq and Anwar's study underscores the need to consider cultural factors in knowledge sharing practices, particularly in developing countries. On the other hand, they specifically focus on the telecom sector in Saudi Arabia, highlighting the influence of various organizational cultural elements on knowledge exchange. Both studies provide insights into the role of culture in knowledge sharing processes and emphasize the significance of understanding cultural dynamics within specific contexts (Al-Adaileh & Al-Alawi, 2011).

Academics play a considerable role in knowledge sharing in HEIs. However, academics hardly systematically share their knowledge with their peers and the administration. Because academics are not successfully exchanging knowledge, HEIs may need help to respond to a shift to a knowledge-based economy and institutional performance issues. (Al-Adaileh & Al-Atawi, 2011; Wang & Noe, 2010). An analysis of the KM and KS literature reveals a shortage of studies addressing elements that impact KS among academics in Higher Educational Institutes generally and in Saudi Arabia specifically (Fullwood et al., 2013; Sohail & Daud, 2009), despite the numerous studies referring to KS in a business environment (Aurelie Bechina Arntzen et al., 2009; Mc Manus et al., 2016; Razak et al., 2016). Several studies have looked at challenges in the broader framework of information exchange amidst staff members of firms as a result of this increased interest. Nevertheless, there has not been much thorough research done on information exchange among university teachers.

Despite the importance of knowledge sharing in higher learning institutions (HEIs), extensive research in this area, particularly among university faculty and staff, needs to be increased. This study aims to address this gap in the literature by investigating the significance of social trust, social networks, and shared goals on attitudes toward knowledge and its contribution to knowledge-sharing practices among teaching staff in public higher institutions in Saudi universities. This is why this study is crucial for knowledge sharing among academics and responding to the knowledge-based economy and institutional performance.

Theoretical Framework

The positive inclination toward sharing knowledge is believed to be influenced by one's attitude (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). It was also highlighted that the relationship had garnered substantial empirical support (Kuo & Young, 2008). Kuo and Young findings demonstrate that an individual's knowledge-sharing sentiments reflect their willingness to engage in the process. Hence, the attitude toward knowledge sharing emerges as a significant aspect of one's intention to share knowledge. Attitudes hold sway over individuals in various aspects of their lives and serve as determinants of their behavior.

Furthermore, attitudes provide a framework for interpreting the world and integrating new experiences (Ogunmoye, 2008). By comprehending an individual's attitude toward something,

one can accurately predict their overall behavioral patterns toward that particular subject. It was also observed that attitude, according to a previous report, is a learned predisposition that shapes positive or negative responses to specific objects, situations, institutions, or individuals (Aiken, 2000). Therefore, attitude reflects an individual's character and serves as a crucial determinant of their behavior, providing a lens through which they interpret the world and assimilate new encounters (Ogunmoye, 2008). It was suggested that attitude frequently influences workers' interactions (Argote & Ingram, 2000). They propose that organizational knowledge resides within individual interactions, forming the foundation for gaining a competitive advantage (Argote & Ingram, 2000).

Social network refers to the patterned organization of a collection of actors and their relationships, which can promote partnership and create an appropriate knowledge-sharing environment (Jones et al., 1997).

The present study hypothesizes that TA's closer relationship among employees can lead to a more progressive approach toward sharing knowledge. It proposes that increased social networking among academics in HEIs will positively impact their attitude toward knowledge sharing. When employees are inclined toward the same goals, mutual understanding and exchanging of ideas are promoted, which can encourage knowledge sharing; this is considered as shared goals. Holding discussions or brainstorming sessions can assist in cultivating a knowledge-sharing environment (Chow & Chan, 2008). The third hypothesis of the present investigation proposes that increased shared goals among academics in HEIs will positively impact their attitudes toward knowledge sharing.

The objective of the present study is to examine if social trust causes an increased influence on academic attitudes toward knowledge sharing. Also, do social networks affect academics' attitudes toward knowledge sharing? In addition, to evaluate if the shared goals and academic attitudes impact knowledge sharing. The present investigation aims to examine if social trust cause an increased influence on academic attitudes toward knowledge sharing.

Hypothesis 1: A positive relationship exists between social trust and attitudes toward knowledge sharing

Hypothesis 2: A positive relationship exists between the social network and attitudes toward knowledge sharing.

Hypothesis 3: A positive relationship exists between shared goals and attitudes toward knowledge sharing.

Method

The researcher collected the data through purposive sampling from academic staff in higher learning institutions in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. One hundred questionnaires were distributed online to the academic staff, and the response rate was 88%. The sample characteristics are presented in [Table 1](#).

Table 1
Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	48	54.5
	Female	40	45.5
Department	Economics	5	5.7
	Accounting	2	2.3
	Business Administration	65	73.9
	Banking	14	15.9
	Finance and investment	2	2.3
Qualification	Professor	7	8.0
	Associate Professor	10	11.4
	Assistant Professor	45	51.1
	Lecturer	26	29.5
Age	less than 26 yrs.	3	3.4
	26 to 30 yrs.	14	15.9
	31 to 35 yrs.	17	19.3
	36 to 40 yrs.	7	8.0
	41 to 45 yrs.	9	10.2
	46 to 50 yrs.	21	23.9
	more than 50 yrs.	17	19.3
Experience	less than 6 yrs.	8	9.1
	6 to 10 yrs.	44	50.0
	11 to 15 yrs.	8	9.1
	16 to 20 yrs.	8	9.1
	more than 20 yrs.	20	22.7

Measurement of the Variables

To construct measurement items for our study, we used validated measures from preceding research and adjusted them to fit our specific context of knowledge sharing. We drew on previous studies by Chow and Chan (2008) and Bock et al. (2005) to establish measurement items for the constructs of social trust, social networks, shared goals, and attitudes toward knowledge sharing. These items were presented as questions, and respondents were asked to rate their agreement with each statement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to disagree.

Results

Reliability Analysis

Reliability refers to the compatibility of measurement results. In this study, the degree of consistency between multiple measurements of variables was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The minimum acceptable value for Cronbach's alpha is .70, but it can be lower in exploratory research, according to Hair et al. (2010). Nunnally (1978) suggested that Cronbach's alpha values greater than .60 are reliable. The reliability analysis results are shown in Table 2, demonstrating that all the scales have adequate levels of reliability (Cronbach's alpha surpasses the minimum value of .6). Thus, the measures adopted in this study are reliable.

Table 2
Cronbach's Alpha for all Study Variables

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Social trust	8	.84
Social network	5	.88
Shared goals	5	.87
Attitude towards knowledge sharing	5	.87

Descriptive Statistics of Variables

In Table 3, the descriptive statistics of the variables are demonstrated. The most outstanding mean score was for shared goals (2.24), right after it was social networks (2.07), while attitude towards sharing (1.61) had the lowest mean score.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of the Examined Variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Attitude	1.60	.54	88
social trust	2.05	.71	88
social network	2.07	.79	88
shared goals	2.24	.74	88

Correlation Analysis

Table 4 presents the results of the correlation analysis conducted to study the initial pattern of associations among the study variables. Table 4 indicates a significant positive correlation between all three independent variables (social trust, social network, shared goals) and the dependent variable attitudes toward knowledge sharing.

Table 4

Correlation Analysis of the Associations among the Study Variables

		Social Trust	Social Network	Shared Goals	
Spearman's rho	social trust	Correlation Coefficient	1.00		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.		
		N	88		
	social network	Correlation Coefficient	.66**	1.00	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.	
		N	88	88	
	shared goals	Correlation Coefficient	.57**	.85**	1.00
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.00	.
		N	88	88	88

Note. *Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed); **Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Hypotheses Testing

The study examined the relationship between social trust, social networks, shared goals, and attitudes toward knowledge sharing (KS) through hypotheses predicting positive relationships. The results were presented in Table 5, and the two control variables showed no influence on attitudes toward KS. In the first step, they showed only -.18 to -.20% of the variance. In the second step, the independent variables cumulatively contributed 35% of the variance in attitudes towards KS, supporting H1, H2, and H3. The regression coefficient indicated that social network had the most significant influence ($\beta = .44$), followed by social trust ($\beta = .22$) and shared goals ($\beta = -.05$) among the independent variables.

Table 5

Multiple Regression: Control Variables, Independent Variables Attitude toward KS (Beta Coefficient)

Variables	Attitudes to words	Knowledge sharing
control variables	Step 1	Step 2
gender	-.18	-.23
employees experience	-.20	-.23
Social trust		.22
Social network		.44
Shared goals		-.05
R ²	.03	.39
Adjusted R ²	.01	.35
ΔR^2	.03	.35
F change	1.70	15.74

Note. Significant levels: ** $p < .01$; + $p < .10$

Summary of Hypotheses Testing

The study uncovered that all three hypotheses were supported. The first hypothesis (H1) that a positive relationship exists between social trust and attitudes towards knowledge sharing was supported. The second hypothesis (H2) supported a positive relationship between the social network and attitudes toward knowledge sharing. Lastly, the study also supports the third hypothesis (H3) that there is a positive relationship between shared goals and attitudes toward knowledge sharing. These findings advocate that social trust, networks, and shared goals are essential in promoting positive attitudes toward knowledge sharing.

Discussion

This study utilized correlation analysis to examine the associations among the variables after establishing their reliability through Cronbach's alpha. The results showed positive relationships among most variables, including social trust, social networks, shared goals, and attitudes toward knowledge sharing. The study found that academics who regarded distributing their knowledge as contributing to achieving desired outcomes had more positive attitudes toward knowledge sharing. Additionally, the degree of social trust affected the outlook of colleagues' demeanor and motives, resulting in a greater likelihood of knowledge sharing among trustworthy colleagues. Those with a more extensive social network with colleagues were also more likely to share their knowledge due to high expectations and social pressure. The study supported this hypothesis, which was consistent with previous studies (Dong et al., 2010; Mohammed Fathi et al., 2011; Chow & Chan, 2008). In previous research conducted by Yuan et al. (2016) and Le and Lei (2018a), the impact of trust on knowledge sharing was investigated. However, contrasting results were found in an earlier study by Yeo and Gold (2014), where a negative association between trust and knowledge sharing was discovered. These discrepancies can be attributed to sample characteristics and demographics variations, as Yeo and Gold's (2014) study focused on an industrial context with employees engaged in resource competition. While numerous studies have explored the relationships between trust and knowledge sharing, further investigation is necessary to deepen our understanding of these dynamics.

Furthermore, shared goals among employees were evident in promoting mutual understanding and exchange of ideas, resulting in knowledge sharing. Shared goals were the ultimate motive behind people's willingness to share their knowledge. Within an organization, shared goals can be achieved through cooperation and knowledge sharing. The study uncovered a strong relationship between shared goals and attitudes toward knowledge sharing, which aligned with preceding studies by Mohammed Fathi et al. (2011) and Chow and Chan (2008). Overall, the study's findings highlighted the importance of social trust, social networks, and shared goals in promoting positive attitudes towards knowledge sharing among academics.

Theoretical Implications

The study discloses that social trust, networks, and shared goals variables are decisive factors for academics' attitudes toward knowledge sharing. These results implied that the collective trust among staff, identical shared goals among members, and the grid of unofficial relations are all essential components in stimulating the staff's intention to share knowledge.

Managerial Implications

The outcome of this study aids team leaders in constructing an environment that inspires social relations amongst colleagues, that alongside a good relationship and an increase in mutual trust, can boost knowledge-sharing behaviors leading to more members that are susceptible to sharing their knowledge, which will assist the motion of knowledge from individual levels to group or team levels, to organizational levels, and inter-organizational levels. The variable of shared goals between academic staff has a significance on the attitudes towards knowledge sharing, as pointed out by the research, hence why special missions and goals must be constructed by management. Therefore knowledge is contributed to and acknowledged by the staff of the institution. Additionally, it is prudent for human resources to select employees who present mutual interests and goals. Furthermore, utilizing the results of this study focuses on benefitting the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia in its steady efforts to facilitate the process of building a knowledge-based economy.

In order to decide what elements play an essential role in KS and constitute practical courses of action to boost KS behaviors among their academics, this observational evidence can be utilized by the institutions of HEIs in Saudi Arabia.

An additional practical aspect of this study is that the possession of knowledge within an individual is not entirely supervised by management; academics must work in a supportive and inspiring environment for them to exchange their knowledge with each other. This becomes more effective when considering the variety of cultures within an institution; a friendly workplace leads to employees becoming more inclined to participate in knowledge sharing.

Study Limitation and Future Research

This study serves as a valuable stepping stone, shedding light on a limited number of teaching staff in higher education Institutions. However, the researcher recognizes the potential for further exploration, suggesting future studies encompass a larger sample incorporating numerous Saudi academic institutions. A comparative analysis between private and public academic institutions could offer insights into diverse outcomes. It is essential to acknowledge that this study primarily focused on specific variables, leaving room for expanding the future research scope.

Conclusion

The significance of knowledge in organizational survival cannot be exaggerated. However, perceiving how to effectively collect and share knowledge in organizations remains a dilemma. This study aimed to fill a gap in existing research by investigating the influence of social trust, networks, and shared goals on sharing knowledge among HEIs academics in Saudi Arabia. The study surveyed 88 respondents from HEIs in Riyadh and found that social trust, networks, and shared goals had a progressive influence on attitudes toward sharing knowledge. The study presents theoretical and practical implications for knowledge sharing in the workplace. Organizations can use these insights to create environments encouraging knowledge sharing and develop successful strategies for leveraging knowledge.

Declarations

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Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Ethics Approval

Not applicable.

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