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# Enterprise Social Media and Employee Engagement: A Qualitative Study on Content, Perception, and Sense of Belonging in Internal Public Relations

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**Abstract**

Workplace communication technologies such as Teams, Slack, and FirstUp continue to serve as vital tools for effective internal public relations in today's postmodern organizational landscape. Gaining a deeper understanding of how these tools enhance employee engagement, influence employees' perceptions of their organization, and foster a sense of belonging is essential for talent retention, sustained business operations, and long-term organizational success. Despite this importance, research remains limited on the types of content shared on workplace communication platforms and how such content shapes intra-organizational perceptions while nurturing a sense of belonging among employees. This qualitative study aimed to explore the intersection of enterprise social media (ESM), employee engagement, and internal communication practices in contributing to organizational success. Framed by Social Exchange Theory (SET), the study employed in-depth semi-structured interviews and conducted a thematic analysis of the data. The findings indicate that professional development content, interactive posts, and gamified elements significantly promote employee engagement. Employees viewed ESM content as not only a reflection of the organization's culture, but also as a resource that supports their work performance. Furthermore, ESM platforms were found to enhance employees' sense of belonging by facilitating social connections and creating systems of professional support. The study concludes that internal public relations (iPR) professionals should incorporate gamified and interactive content into their communication strategies to promote work-life balance and reduce employee stress. Beyond content strategy, organizations must also utilize workplace communication technologies more effectively to strengthen employee engagement and foster meaningful peer-to-peer connections.

*Keywords*: employee engagement; employees' perception; employees sense of belonging; enterprise social media; internal public relations; social exchange theory; collaboration and knowledge sharing.

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## Introduction

The rise of hybrid work marked by a combination of remote and in-office arrangements represents a fundamental shift in how organizations function. Accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, this transformation has required organizations to adopt flexible work models that prioritize both operational continuity and employee well-being (Afedzie et al., 2023). As organizations navigate this transition, hybrid work environments are reshaping the dynamics of employee engagement and organizational culture (Hiremath, 2024). Central to this evolution is the advancement of digital communication technologies, which have enabled real-time, asynchronous collaboration across distributed teams (Teevan, 2022).

Digital tools such as Microsoft Teams exemplify this shift, with usage rates significantly increasing in the post-pandemic period (Teevan, 2022). While these platforms offer employees greater

flexibility and contribute to work-life balance (Eng et al., 2024; Gannabathula, 2024), they also introduce new challenges, such as weakened interpersonal connections, communication breakdowns, and difficulty sustaining team cohesion (Gannabathula, 2024). As such, effective internal communication strategies are increasingly vital to organizational success. Transparent, two-way communication fosters trust, collaboration, and employee commitment, especially in hybrid environments where employees are physically dispersed (Kimani, 2024).

In this context, enterprise social media (ESM), internal web-based platforms that facilitate employee interaction have become an essential component of internal communication. These platforms enable employees to share information, exchange feedback, and participate in collaborative dialogue. Within internal communication research, one emerging concept is *employee ideation*, which refers to the exchange of ideas, feedback, and creative contributions among employees on ESM platforms. Such ideas are characterized by multi-vocal interactions where employees not only propose new ideas, but also respond by agreeing, critiquing, modifying, or combining others' suggestions to enhance organizational knowledge and innovation (Gode et al., 2020). These interactions reflect the participatory nature of digital communication in modern organizations and are often seen as indicators of employee engagement.

Despite these advancements, employee engagement levels have shown signs of decline. For example, Harter (2025) reports that only 31% of U.S. employees currently feel engaged in their roles—the lowest in over a decade. Disengaged employees pose risks not only to individual organizations but also to the global economy, with Gallup (2024) estimating an $8.9 trillion loss in productivity due to declining engagement worldwide. Interestingly, although behaviors like ideation and collaboration are often viewed as signs of engagement, they do not necessarily translate into a deeper sense of organizational belonging—a dimension of engagement that remains underexplored.

This growing concern invites further investigation into how digital tools, particularly ESM, can be leveraged to support both employee engagement and organizational belonging. Although research on ESM is expanding, two critical gaps persist. First, there is limited understanding of the types of content shared on ESM that employees perceive as engaging. Second, little is known about how employee interactions with ESM content influence their sense of belonging within the organization.

To address these gaps, this study explores how enterprise social media are used in internal public relations (iPR) to facilitate employee engagement and a sense of belonging. Guided by Social Exchange Theory (SET), this qualitative inquiry examines (a) the types of content employees find engaging on ESM platforms, (b) how they interpret and respond to these content interactions, and (c) how such experiences contribute to their sense of connection to the organization. By centering employee perspectives, this study provides practical insights for internal communication professionals and contributes to a deeper theoretical understanding of ESM's role in cultivating engagement and belonging in the workplace.

## Literature Review

This literature review examines the intersection of enterprise social media (ESM) and employee engagement, establishing the conceptual foundation for the study. It begins by defining ESM and outlining its use in organizational communication, collaboration, and knowledge sharing. The review then explores the outcomes and challenges of ESM use, particularly its role in shaping employee engagement. Finally, it reviews key dimensions of engagement and highlights how internal communication strategies can foster a motivated and connected workforce.

## Defining Enterprise Social Media

Enterprise social media (ESM) has emerged as a transformative internal communication tool in today's digitized workplace. Defined broadly, ESM refers to web-based platforms integrated into organizations to facilitate internal communication, collaboration, and social interaction among

employees. Men et al. (2020) describe ESM as platforms designed specifically for internal purposes, enabling content sharing, tagging, and collaboration. Leonardi et al. (2013) offer a more detailed view, defining ESM as "web-based platforms that allow workers to communicate messages with specific coworkers or broadcast messages to everyone in the organization; explicitly indicate or implicitly reveal particular coworkers as communication partners; post, edit, and sort text and files linked to themselves or others; and view the messages, connections, text, and files communicated, posted, edited and sorted by anyone else in the organization at any time of their choosing" (p. 2).

While Leonardi et al.'s definition is widely cited, ESM can also be understood through its integration of various communication technologies such as microblogging, social tagging, and internal networking (Leonardi et al., 2013). These tools are not meant to function in isolation, but rather as components of a broader, integrated platform. Examples of such enterprise systems include Microsoft Yammer, IBM Connections, Jive, Salesforce Chatter, and Microsoft SharePoint, which collectively serve as the backbone of digital interaction in many modern organizations (Mathiesen & Fielt, 2013; Men et al., 2020).

## Usage of Enterprise Social Media in Organizations

The increasing digitization of work, accelerated by generational changes and global technological shifts, has driven the widespread adoption of ESM tools. As noted by Men et al. (2020), the millennial generation having grown up in the digital era now dominates the workforce, bringing with them an expectation of interactive and participatory communication. According to a McKinsey Global Institute (2016) survey cited by Men et al. (2020), 93% of organizations report using at least one social technology, with 80% deploying these tools specifically for internal communication.

ESM is commonly used to enhance employee collaboration, manage knowledge, and facilitate innovation. Platforms such as Yammer, SharePoint, Jive, and Slack are routinely employed in technology companies like Best Buy and IBM to support communication across departments, foster team integration, and promote organizational learning (Mathiesen & Fielt, 2013). These platforms also enable synchronous and asynchronous interactions, making them particularly vital in hybrid and remote work environments. Černikovaitė and Karazijiene (2023) emphasized that effective hybrid communication requires timely, relevant, and accessible communication channels, which are conditions that ESM platforms are well-suited to fulfill.

Additionally, organizations are increasingly integrating AI and automation into these systems to enhance user experience and performance. Features such as automated workflows, chatbot integration, and real-time feedback mechanisms not only streamline information flow but also foster team engagement and cohesion (Benke, 2019; Jiménez & Ouariachi, 2020).

## Employee Outcomes of Enterprise Social Media

A growing body of research highlights the positive relationship between ESM use and employee engagement. Ewing et al. (2019) argue that ESM's interactive and participatory nature closely aligns with engagement principles, promoting openness, collaboration, and shared purpose. Men and Bowen (2017) emphasize that platforms encouraging user-generated content give employees a voice, allowing them to express ideas, share concerns, and participate in organizational dialogue — all these serve as catalyst for engagement.

Empirical evidence also supports this claim. For example, Haddud et al. (2016), as cited in Ewing et al. (2019), found a relationship between higher ESM use and increased self-reported employee engagement within a multinational company. Similarly, Jackson et al. (2007) observed that internal blogging helped employees feel more connected to their organization and its values. Molla (2019) reinforced this view by noting that ESM platforms dismantle hierarchical barriers, thus: encouraging communication across different levels of the organization and sparking innovation.

However, not all findings are uniformly positive. Chen et al. (2023) and Schlagwein and Hu (2017) argue that the multifaceted use of ESM complicates measurement of its outcomes. Employees

may use the same platform for different purposes, ranging from formal collaboration to informal chatting, making it difficult to isolate its engagement effects. Moreover, Barber and Santuzzi (2015) and Luqman et al. (2021) caution that frequent ESM use may also lead to stress, information overload, and reduced creativity, especially in environments with unclear boundaries or overwhelming digital demands.

## Challenges and Risks of Enterprise Social Media

Despite its benefits, the use of ESM presents several challenges. Privacy and data security remain primary concerns, as employees may unintentionally share confidential information or company strategies on internal platforms (Apambila, 2025; Andriole, 2010). To mitigate such risks, Boudreaux (2010) advocated for comprehensive social media policies that outline acceptable conduct, legal disclaimers, and information security protocols. Wilcox et al. (2014) similarly recommend structured governance to protect organizations' informational assets and reputation.

Power dynamics within organizations may also be disrupted by the egalitarian nature of ESM platforms. Skeels and Grudin (2009) and Molla (2019) argue that interactions on public and internal social platforms can blur traditional hierarchies, particularly when managers and subordinates engage as peers. This aligns with D'Aprix's (2008) argument that digital communication tools have contributed to a shifting organizational power structure, in which employees increasingly value transparency and collaboration over rigid authority.

In hybrid and remote settings, the need for structured and meaningful communication becomes even more pressing. Researchers argue that organizations must pay close attention to communication timing, frequency, and content relevance to avoid digital fatigue and ensure inclusive participation (Černikovaitė & Karazijiene, 2023; Chincea et al., 2024). Integrating live and asynchronous components, such as virtual meetings and chat-based exchanges, can simulate face-to-face encounters and preserve human connection across distributed teams (Brown et al., 2018; Wang & Tang, 2023).

## Employee Engagement

Employee engagement has emerged as a critical factor in achieving organizational success, drawing growing attention from both researchers and practitioners. As a strategic priority, employee engagement is widely recognized for its role in fostering employee dedication, enhancing productivity, and improving workforce retention. According to Aldoy and McIntosh (2023), employee engagement is an evolving concept, prompting organizations to seek innovative approaches for enhancing performance and developing human capital. In response, organizations are increasingly adopting strategies to align employees with their mission, values, and objectives, while keeping them actively involved in their specific roles (McIntosh, 2023).

More specifically, employee engagement reflects employees' willingness to invest discretionary effort toward the attainment of organizational goals. It is closely tied to critical organizational outcomes, including improved financial performance and operational efficiency (Shami et al., 2015). Engaged employees demonstrate high levels of motivation, involvement, and commitment, not only to their jobs but also to the broader organizational mission. Consequently, engagement contributes to higher levels of innovation, productivity, and overall workforce stability (Febrian & Solihin, 2024).

Kahn's (1990) foundational framework offers a deeper understanding of employee engagement by emphasizing its physical, cognitive, and emotional dimensions. The cognitive component pertains to employees' beliefs and perceptions about the organization, its leadership, and the work environment. The emotional aspect involves how employees feel about these same factors, shaping their affective connection and attitudes toward the organization. The physical dimension, on the other hand, concerns the amount of energy employees devote to fulfilling their job responsibilities. Together, these components illustrate the multidimensional nature of engagement and underscore its psychological depth.

Given its complexity, sustaining high levels of employee engagement requires deliberate communication strategies. Apambila (2025) emphasize the importance of internal communication in fostering engagement, highlighting that communication practices must go beyond the transactional to support relational and emotional connections within the workplace. For instance, Pounsford (2007) found that communication strategies utilizing storytelling, informal dialogue, and coaching techniques were particularly effective in enhancing employee engagement. Similarly, Kim and Scott (2019) argue that platforms such as internal message boards that allow employees to seek information, express opinions, and raise concerns can deepen their involvement in organizational life.

Beyond interactive platforms, the content and tone of communication also matter. Communication materials that address employees' psychological and emotional well-being can uplift morale and positively influence job performance (Kim & Scott, 2018). These findings suggest that engagement is not only driven by opportunities for participation, but also by the quality and emotional connection of organizational messages.

Despite the implementation of varied communication strategies aimed at enhancing engagement, challenges remain. Ewing et al. (2019) point to a persistent engagement gap, citing a 2017 Gallup poll (Boyle, 2017) that revealed only 33% of U.S. employees and a mere 15% of global employees reported feeling engaged at work. These statistics suggest that while organizations increasingly invest in engagement initiatives, more targeted and evidence-based approaches are needed, particularly those that consider employees' perspectives and lived experiences within evolving workplace contexts.

## Theoretical Framework

To explore how enterprise social media (ESM), employee engagement, and internal public relations intersect to promote organizational belonging and success, this study draws upon Social Exchange Theory (SET) as its theoretical lens. Developed by George C. Homans (1958), SET conceptualizes social behavior as an exchange of material and non-material resources, including time, effort, approval, and recognition between individuals and groups. At its core, SET posits that relationships are formed and sustained through reciprocal exchanges that are perceived as fair and mutually beneficial.

SET is particularly useful for understanding how employees perceive their interactions with their organization, especially through digital platforms such as ESM. When employees feel that they are receiving adequate support, recognition, and access to opportunities, they are more likely to reciprocate by investing effort, showing commitment, and engaging in behaviors that support organizational goals (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This sense of reciprocity is foundational to engagement and is reinforced through consistent and transparent internal communication practices, which is one of the core functions of internal public relations.

From this perspective, enterprise social media can be viewed as a mechanism that enables social exchanges in the workplace. Employees contribute to ESM platforms by sharing ideas, offering feedback, supporting colleagues, and participating in discussions—forms of interaction that represent non-material resources. In return, when these contributions are acknowledged, validated, or acted upon by management or peers, employees experience a sense of belonging and psychological safety. This dynamic aligns with *rules and norms of exchange*, a key tenet of SET, which suggests that relational trust and mutual commitment emerge over time through consistent, fair exchanges (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Molm et al., 2000).

Additionally, *resource exchange theory* (Foa & Foa, 1974, 1980), a subset of SET, helps explain the types of value exchanged on ESM platforms, which can range from information and recognition to emotional support and feedback. These exchanges are not uniform in their impact; their value often depends on the source and the context, reinforcing the importance of relational dynamics in communication. For example, recognition from a senior leader on an ESM platform may carry more symbolic weight than a similar message from a peer.

Moreover, *emerged relationships*, another dimension of SET, are especially relevant in digital work environments where face-to-face interaction may be limited. Research suggests that when organizations "take care" of employees by offering feedback, addressing concerns, and creating inclusive communication spaces, employees are more likely to develop trust-based social exchange relationships (Shore et al., 1999). These relationships, in turn, influence employees' emotional and psychological investment in their work and in the broader organizational mission.

By applying SET to this study, the research aims to understand how employees perceive and evaluate their participation in ESM as a reciprocal process that shapes their engagement and sense of belonging. Specifically, SET helps frame the following analytical questions: (a) What types of content on ESM platforms do employees perceive as valuable or supportive? (b) How do employees interpret the organizational response—or lack thereof to their contributions on these platforms? and (c) How do these reciprocal exchanges contribute to their overall engagement and organizational attachment?

In summary, Social Exchange Theory provides a comprehensive framework for examining how communication on ESM platforms function, not merely as information sharing, but as an exchange of relational resources that influence employee attitudes and behaviors. Its principles emphasize the participatory and interactive nature of ESM, offering insight into how internal public relations can strategically cultivate a culture of engagement and belonging through meaningful, reciprocal communication.

## Research Questions

To address the study's overarching goal of understanding how enterprise social media (ESM) facilitates employee engagement and a sense of belonging, the following subsections review relevant literature pertaining to each research question. The review begins by examining the types of content shared on ESM platforms that employees identify as engaging, followed by a discussion on how employees perceive the impact of ESM content on their engagement. The final section explores how employees' experiences with ESM tools influence their sense of belonging within the organization. Together, these thematic reviews provide a conceptual foundation for the study's three research questions.

## Enterprise Social Media Content and Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is shaped not only by opportunities for interaction, but also by the specific types of content employees encounter in their organizational communication environments. While previous research has emphasized the value of enterprise social media (ESM) as a tool for promoting employee involvement, less attention has been paid to identifying which types of content most effectively foster engagement from the employees' perspective.

Men et al. (2023) observed that ESM platforms provide employees with interactive access to organizational information, enhancing transparency and inclusion—two factors known to increase engagement. However, the way employees engage with ESM content can vary in both form and intensity. Men et al. (2023) categorize these varying levels of involvement: at the lowest level, employees engage passively by reading or viewing organizational or peer posts; at a moderate level, they react to content through likes, comments, or shares; and at the highest level, they participate actively in one-on-one or group conversations centered around work-related topics. These graduated behaviors suggest that the nature of content encountered on ESM platforms may influence how deeply employees engage.

A similar pattern is reflected in Muntinga et al.'s (2011) typology of social media usage, which outlines a continuum of activity—consuming, contributing, and creating. While consuming involves basic engagement such as viewing and downloading content, contributing includes actions such as commenting or joining discussions. Creating represents the most active form of participation, where users generate new content for others. Adapted for internal communication contexts, this typology implies that the type of content available within ESM networks may motivate different forms of

employee engagement, ranging from passive observation to active co-creation (Men & Tsai, 2013; Tsai & Men, 2013).

Moreover, specific content formats, such as newsletters, training videos, podcasts, or social media-style updates have been identified as useful in cultivating employee trust, reducing information overload, and reinforcing a shared sense of purpose (ContactMonkey, 2025). Such content may serve as motivational resources that inspire employees to excel in their roles and align with broader organizational goals. Friedl and Verčič (2011) further argued that ESM platforms support engagement by offering communal, relational, and task-relevant content features that are closely linked to employees' functional responsibilities.

Despite these insights, the literature reveals a notable gap: while general benefits of ESM for engagement have been acknowledged, there remains limited understanding of *which specific types of content* employees perceive as most influential in facilitating their engagement at work. Addressing this gap requires moving beyond abstract claims about ESM's benefits and focusing on employees' own evaluations of the content they interact with on these platforms.

Accordingly, this study poses the following research question to explore how the nature of content shared on enterprise social media contributes to employee engagement:

**RQ₁:**        What types of content shared by organizations on enterprise social media do employees report as facilitating organizational engagement?

## Employees' Perception of Enterprise Social Media Content

While identifying the types of content that facilitate employee engagement is crucial, it is also important to understand *how* employees perceive and make sense of that content within the organizational setting. Employees' interpretations of internal communication are not uniform; meaning that they are shaped by individual experiences, organizational culture, and the perceived quality and relevance of the content shared. Therefore, gaining insight into these perceptions can provide a more nuanced understanding of the role enterprise social media (ESM) plays in sustaining engagement.

Jiang and Luo (2018), drawing on the work of Brown et al. (2015) and Liu et al. (2010), emphasize that high levels of employee trust contribute significantly to work performance, job satisfaction (Goris et al., 2003; Yang, 2014), organizational citizenship behavior (Duffy & Lilly, 2013; Liu et al., 2013), and ultimately employee engagement (Buckley, 2011; Liu, 2009). These outcomes are sustained not merely by the presence of content, but by how employees perceive the organization's appreciation of their contributions. As Rajala (2016) points out, perceptions of organizational support, recognition, and fairness, which was initially articulated by Eisenberger et al. (1986), play a critical role in determining employees' engagement levels. When employees feel that their efforts are acknowledged and valued, they are more likely to respond positively to the communication shared through ESM platforms.

This reveals the importance of employee perceptions as a mediating factor in the engagement process. It is not just what is shared on ESM that matters, but how employees interpret its meaning, relevance, and intent. Sharma and Bhatnagar (2016) note that internal virtual platforms offer employees opportunities to connect with colleagues and stakeholders, creating a sense of relational and emotional closeness. Such connections may lead to a more positive motivational state (Schaufeli et al., 2002) and strengthen what Hakanen and Koivumäki (2014) call "positive work engagement."

Further reinforcing this, Dedeoglu (2019) found that employees' perceptions of information quality influence the level of importance they attach to content shared on social media platforms. This suggests that employee perceptions are not only passive reactions, but are active judgments that influence how content is received, interpreted, and acted upon. When content is seen as high in quality—relevant, timely, and meaningful, it is more likely to stimulate deeper engagement.

Given this, it becomes necessary to explore not just the type of content shared on ESM platforms (as addressed in RQ1), but also how employees *perceive* and emotionally respond to this content in relation to their engagement at the workplace. This distinction focuses on the subjective meaning

employees assign to content. Thus: what they find motivating, affirming, or alienating—and how these perceptions vary across organizational contexts. Therefore, this study will address the question:

**RQ₂:** How do employees perceive enterprise social media (content) in promoting their engagement in the organization?

## Employees' Sense of Belonging and Enterprise Social Media Usage

In recent years, Enterprise Social Media (ESM) has become a central component of organizational communication and collaboration. Many organizations now rely on proprietary social media systems to support internal communication, foster knowledge sharing, and facilitate employee interaction (Weber & Shi, 2016; Waititu & Barker, 2023). While the functional benefits of ESM in supporting task execution and information flow are well documented, less is known about the *social experiences* ESM fosters within the workplace, particularly how such experiences contribute to employees' sense of belonging.

Some scholars have drawn attention to the potential challenges associated with ESM use. For instance, Chen and Wei (2019) identified two psychological burdens that employees may experience when using ESM: *information overload* and *social overload*. Information overload occurs when employees receive more information than they can process effectively, leading to cognitive fatigue. Social overload, on the other hand, stems from the pressure to offer continuous social support to colleagues, such as responding to messages, liking posts, or maintaining digital relationships, which can deplete employees' time and emotional energy. While these experiences can present obstacles, they also point to the deeply social nature of ESM interactions and the important role ESM plays in shaping workplace relationships.

Despite the growing integration of ESM into organizational life, research on employee engagement has not fully explored how employees' interactions on ESM platforms influence their *social experiences* in the workplace. These social experiences are crucial, as they help shape employees' organizational identity, provide a sense of shared purpose, and foster a sense of belonging. A sense of belonging is more than just feeling included; it reflects an employee's emotional connection to the organization and contributes to job satisfaction, commitment, and retention (Joseph, 2023; Chakraborty et al., 2024).

Recent studies suggest that ESM can serve as a digital space where belonging is fostered. Gonzalez et al. (2013) and Ali et al. (2023) emphasized that ESM platforms expand opportunities for interaction and collaboration, enabling employees to build community and experience social integration even in dispersed or hybrid work environments. These platforms allow employees to communicate informally, recognize one another, and feel part of something larger than their individual roles in the organization.

However, perspectives on this potential are not the same. Bradley and McDonald (2011) argue that the value created by social media in organizations is not inherently tied to the technologies themselves, but rather to the ways in which organizations enable employees to collaborate and connect meaningfully. From this viewpoint, the presence of ESM alone does not guarantee that employees will experience a sense of belonging. Instead, belonging is shaped by how employees use, interpret, and feel about their interactions on these platforms.

Given the contrasting perspectives and limited in-depth understanding of employees' lived experiences with ESM, it becomes important to explore the phenomenon qualitatively. A qualitative approach allows for deeper insight into how employees make meaning of their interactions on ESM, how these interactions influence their sense of inclusion, and how such experiences may differ across organizational contexts. Rather than measuring the direct impact of ESM on belonging, this study seeks to understand the ways in which employees experience and interpret ESM as a part of their social environment at the workplace. So, the research question below is proposed:

**RQ₃:** How do employees' experiences with enterprise social media influence their sense of belonging to the organization?

## Methods

*Participants*

Participants for this study are employees from different organizations with multiple offices in the United States and over a dozen international jurisdictions. The organizations specialize in banking, outsourcing, education technology, food and beverage production, technology, and lead generation; and have many staffs across the globe. The study recruited ($N = 12$) participants, who are end-users (i.e., employees) of the enterprise social network. Thus: males ($n = 6$) females ($n = 6$), with a minimum age (= 26) and a maximum (= 53). Due to academic commitments, participants availability, and conflicting schedules, the researcher could not gather the maximum interview data. However, Strand et al. (2003) argue that the experience and background of participants are more important than the sample size. Also, Wuest (2012) highlighted that using approximately 8-12 interview participants in qualitative research depends on the richness and variation in the data.

The researcher employed key informant or gatekeeping techniques to recruit all ($N = 12$) interview participants. Key informants or gatekeepers are specialists, whose position in organizations or community gives them knowledge about interview participants (Payne & Payne, 2004). The interview participants identified by the key informant in research serve as a valuable source of information to the researcher (Payne & Payne, 2004). The selection of employees who are end-users of enterprise social media for this study helped to enrich the data, by providing a more detailed response into the phenomenon under study.

*Data Collection*

The primary method for this research was qualitative in-depth interviews. The interview with participants lasted at least 30 minutes. This format encourages open-ended responses (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019), providing deeper insights into the research questions. Participants responded to semi-structured interview questions. The research pilot tested the interview instruments, to identify any potential issues before launching a full research scale. Depending on participants' availability and convenience, interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom. While the interview questions may differ from the specific research questions, they were designed to gather comprehensive information essential for answering the research questions. Based on the themes identified in previous literature and the research questions, the interview protocol consisted three categories: (1) participants' demographics (e.g., gender and education level); (2) their industry type and job titles; and (3) their general use of enterprise social media in the context of their organizational responsibilities.

I explained the study's purpose to the participants and confirmed that it had received approval from the Institutional Review Board. Participants were informed about the data collection process and that their involvement is voluntary. Participants were assured that all personal information will be kept confidential. Once participants agreed to take part in the interview, a consent form was provided for their reference. Since written consent will not be required, participants indicated their verbal consent at the beginning of the interview. All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed using Zoom's audio transcription function. To ensure auto transcription accuracy, I listened to each interview recordings while going through the transcripts.

*Data Analysis*

Thematic analysis was employed to examine the data, following the seven-phase approach proposed by Lochmiller and Lester (2017). This approach was chosen for its structured yet flexible design, which enabled a deep understanding of employee experiences with enterprise social media (ESM), employee engagement, and organizational belonging.

### *Phase 1: Preparing and Organizing the Data for Analysis*

All audio recordings from the 12 semi-structured interviews were compiled and organized in a central repository. Files were transcribed into Microsoft Word using Zoom's built-in transcription

tool. To ensure systematic organization, a structured naming protocol was used, labeling each file with a unique code based on the participant's number and gender (e.g., interview participant 1_Male, interview participant 2_Female). This facilitated consistent reference throughout the analysis process and supported the creation of a master data catalog, as advised by Lester et al. (2020).

### Phase 2: Transcribing the Data

Transcripts were created verbatim to ensure accuracy in capturing participants' responses, preserving exact language, pauses, and nonverbal cues (Lester et al., 2020). This level of detail was essential given the nature of the study's focus on perceptions, emotions, and experiences. All utterances, including fillers and hesitations, were retained to support in-depth interpretation.

### Phase 3: Becoming Familiar with the Data

I read and re-read all transcripts to become immersed in the data corpus (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). During this phase, I paid close attention to content related to the key constructs of the study: "employee engagement", "enterprise social media content", "employee perceptions", and "sense of belonging". I noted how employees described their interactions on enterprise platforms, references to specific types of content (e.g., gaming, videos, or leadership messages), and emotional or attitudinal responses toward ESM use.

### Phase 4: Memoing the Data

While reviewing the transcripts, I wrote analytic memos to capture emerging patterns and early interpretations (Lester et al., 2020). These memos included observations about participants' tone of voice, hand gestures (as observed during video interviews), facial expressions, and instances of enthusiasm or concern. For instance, when a participant used a firmer tone or leaned forward during discussions about sense of belonging, this was noted as an indicator of high emotional investment or concern. These cues informed the interpretive lens used in subsequent coding stages.

### Phase 5: Coding the Data

Coding was conducted in three iterative layers (Lester et al., 2020). In the first cycle, descriptive codes were generally assigned to segments of the data that corresponded to broad areas of interest, such as "engagement content," "social media participation," "perceived usefulness," and "belongingness." To support organization, Microsoft color schemes were used. Ash was used for demographic information; sea blue for general ESM usage in the company; purple for engagement-related content; green for employee perceptions of content; and yellow for belonging-related experiences.

In the second cycle, I refined codes by interpreting underlying meanings and clustering related responses (e.g., expressions of feeling heard, acknowledged, or overlooked). This phase focused on moving from surface-level labeling to more inferential categories, such as "feeling valued by leadership" or "content as motivator." In the third cycle, conceptual links were made across themes, for example, statements that indicated "content types → influence engagement → shape perceptions → foster belonging." This phase supported theory-driven interpretations, informed by Social Exchange Theory (SET).

### Phase 6: Moving from Codes to Categories and Categories to Themes

Once coding was complete, I grouped similar codes into broader categories, and then abstracted these into themes that directly responded to the study's research questions. The theme development followed the steps outlined by Lester et al. (2020), ensuring each theme was inclusive of its underlying categories and clearly reflected the relationships among them. For instance: Codes like "video updates," "game shows," and "training modules" were grouped into the category "informational content," which contributed to the theme "Content Types That Promote Engagement." Codes like "being seen," "heard," "included" contributed to the theme "Perceived Value and Belonging." Themes were reviewed and refined through back-and-forth comparison with the data to ensure they were grounded in participants' narratives and responsive to the research questions.

### Phase 7: Making the Analytic Process Transparent

To ensure analytic transparency and credibility (Lester et al., 2020; Anfara et al., 2002), an audit trail was maintained throughout the process. This included documentation of each phase, a

codebook, and a summary table linking codes to categories and final themes. Additionally, a thematic map was created to visually represent the analytic process and the relationships among the major concepts in the study. While frequency counts were not the primary analytic method, notable patterns in the recurrence of themes were recorded and discussed to reinforce trustworthiness.

## Results

**Table 1.** Interview participants' demographic information.

| The table below presents the demographic information of employees; however, to protect the identity and maintain anonymity of the 12 interview participants, I used pseudonyms to replace participants' real-name. Apart from participants' names, which have been concealed to maintain anonymity, all the other information described in Table 1 below is accurate.**Participants' Pseudonym** | Gender | Age | Education | Organizational Role | Industry Type | Years with Organization | ESM Tool Used | ESM use Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| Rivera | Male | 29 | Bachelors | Phone Verification Specialist | Banking | 2 | Teams | Daily |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Taylor | Male | 30 | Bachelors | Customer Service Representative | Outsourcing | 2 | Teams | Daily |
| Kim | Male | 30 | Masters | Trainer | Technology | 1 | Slack | Daily |
| Seun | Male | 26 | Bachelors | Supervisor | Education Technology | 2.5 | Teams and Slack | Daily |
| Bernard | Male | 30 | Bachelors | Exam Proctor | Education Technology | 1 month | Teams | Daily |
| Garcia | Male | 28 | Masters | Phone Verification Specialist | Education Technology | 2 | Teams | Daily |
| Rose | Female | 27 | Bachelors | Reputation Coordinator | Outsourcing | 7 months | Teams and Slack | Daily |
| Gina | Female | 31 | Bachelors | Customer Support Specialist | Banking | 3 | Teams | Daily |
| Melissa | Female | 29 | Bachelors | Phone Verification Specialist | Education Technology | 7 months | Teams | Daily |
| Abigail | Female | 53 | Masters | Internal Communications Manager | Food and Beverage | 6 weeks | Teams and First Up | Daily |
| Isabella | Female | 27 | Bachelors | Phone Verification Specialist | Lead Generation | 3 | Teams | Daily |

| Anita | Female | 29 | Bachelors | Human Resource Manager | Outsourcing | 2 | Teams and Slack | Daily |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

To address **RQ 1** on the types of content shared by organizations on enterprise social media employees report as facilitating organizational engagement, two thematic areas were developed: (1) professional development and work performance, and (2) interactive and gamified engagement content.

*Professional Development and Work Performance*

The professional development and work performance content directly relates to employees' growth in the organization, their performance, and career progression when performing their roles in the organization. Studies on the type of content that foster employee engagement focused on materials that enlighten employees on their psychological and emotional well-being. In this study, several categories emerged including training materials and educational contents; career progress updates; and knowledge base materials. Organizational content posted on *Teams*, provide employees with the access to training materials and educational content. Access to training and educational materials tend to develop and motivate them to perform their professional roles in the organization. For example, Bernard, an exam proctor at an educational technology company, emphasized:

We were upgraded. So, that educational part of upskill will happen. So, we'll go in contact with the trainer from the Philippines through teams and then we handle the training for a week. After a week, then we became launchers [sic]

In addition to providing training materials and educational content to help employees function in their organizational roles, contents on career progress updates, such as employee performance reports and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) update on the company's enterprise social media platform tend to be engaging to employees, when they are performing their organizational roles. Providing frequent updates on content about employees' performance helps them engaged because they get to monitor the performance of other employees, which motivates them to fully immerse in themselves in their roles. Apart from keeping track of high performing employees' performance, frequent updates give low performing employees the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with high performing individuals, where strategies for workplace improvement are shared. For example, Melissa, a Phone Verification Specialist at an education technology company stated that:

And so usually when they send the KPIs or the weekly dashboard, it usually gets engaging, because…you'd see your progress across all the requirements you're supposed to meet. And, so that usually gets engaged in because then you get to see the key performance of other colleagues. Then, we get to have talk about where you're lacking, and talk about where you have your strengths and all that [sic].

Building on Melissa's statement, when employees are unable to track their performance in the organization, it hinders their ability to engage and perform well. Through frequent updates on performance levels, low performing employees are unable to track their performance status to know how they are faring in the organization. Being able to know where you lack and seeking advise to compensate the deficit helps employees to fully immerse themselves in their organizational role. Taylor, a Customer Service Representative in an outsourcing company explained that:

If you are working for eight hours, and in every one hour you're not able to track your performance at the end of the day or month, and you later realize that you haven't performed well, you would see that it would really go against you…[sic]

Moreover, knowledge base content posted on a workplace social media platform has proven to be effective in engaging employees, when they are performing their organizational roles. The knowledge base contains relevant information about the employing organization. The relevant information are usually stored on a secure website, where only employees can access the content uploaded by the company. The relevant information stored on the company's secure website include audio, video, and pictures. These materials serve as a guide on the steps employees need to take when resolving issues in organization.    Garcia, a Phone Verification Specialist in an education technology company stated:

We have something called knowledge base and that is where everything about the company is being stored. It's more like a website. Sometimes when you go there, those things are in a document form, such as pictures and audio recordings on how to resolve call issues. There's also audio key meter to download and then drop it on Teams [sic]

*Interactive and Gamified Engagement*

Interactive and gamified content refers to materials designed to actively encourage employee participation and foster interaction with colleagues while carrying out their roles. From the interviews conducted with employees who use enterprise social networking tools, it became clear that features like quizzes with cash rewards, game shows and competitions, and even meme creation help boost engagement on these internal communicative platforms. For example, Rivera, a Phone Verification Specialist in a bank stated:

Most of the content that we receive on the internal social media platform has to do with work. Sometimes we have fun …[with] quizzes…where questions are being thrown, for us to and person who answers quickly a get reward.

Melissa, a Phone Verification Specialist in a technology company added that: "after the infused graphic there was something there was a quiz so more like you answer questions within seconds and then the winner gets a cash bonus like a 20 [%] salary increment" [sic].

Apart from quiz activities with cash bonuses, internal communication professionals and management responsible for managing the flow of information and content in the organization can organize game shows that allow employees to create their own content such as memes, emojis, and GIF. These contents tend to increase their engagement levels in the organization, when employees are performing their technical responsibilities. The ability for the corporate employees to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to create their own content inspires creativity and innovation in the company. In addition to inspiring creativity and innovation among employees, the exchange of these content give employees the opportunity to learn about individual teams' working style. All these activities challenge employees to be creative and innovative, while being sensitive to each other's working styles, especially during team projects. Kim, a trainer at a technology company also explained that:

We do game shows where there's a segment to use AI tools to create memes like cats wearing Jordan, or holding a sword, or fancy cars like Ferrari. These activities [give us] the experience of working with people to create something meaningful to win competitions. There are [also] a lot of emojis and GIFs [in that] if they're trying to say it's a Black Legacy competition time [,] they bring lights [and] use emojis with [nights] to represent that [sic]

Incorporating all the content types, which include professional development and work performance; social and cultural integration; and interactive and gamified content into a company's internal communication efforts will foster engagement among employees, when they are performing their organizational roles. Interactive and gamified content, such as quizzes with cash bonus, game shows and competition as well as using Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to create memes on a company's internal social networking platforms helps to engage employees, when they are performing their work roles.

To address **RQ 2** on employees' perception on enterprise social media (content) in promoting their engagement in the organization, three thematic areas were developed: (1) reflection of organizational culture and employee voice; (2) employee interaction and workplace community building; and (3) resources for performance, recognition, and professional development.

Reflection of Organizational Culture and Employee Voice

Enterprise Social Media (ESM) content as a reflection of organizational culture and employee voice pertains to employees perception of enterprise social media content in helping them stay informed/updated on organizational matters, engage with leaders in a way that reinforce their role in the organization, while allowing them to express their thoughts on issues. This study revealed that eemployees' participation through contributions and reactions to certain contents not work-related reflect/shape organizational culture, by ensuring that colleagues at the workplace stick with their job specifications. For example, Rose, a Reputation Coordinator at an outsourcing company stated that:

Sometimes some of our colleagues post things that are not related [to] client affairs [nor] [work] updates they [just posts funny gif funny videos which don't fit the purpose for the work. We've asked them to stop but sometimes they choose not to listen [sic]

Employees in organizations tend to share contents that are not related to the task they have been assigned to perform in the organization. These contents are personal and should be treated privately without posting it on a company's enterprise communicative platform, where organizational leaders share important updates in the company to employees. Meaning that enterprise communicative platforms where organizational leaders are active participants implies that the platform is strictly for business purposes. Content that are not germane to one's job specification distracts other employees from performing their responsibilities at the workplace. When employees are distracted from their assigned duty, it limits their ability to be highly performing individuals in the organization. Apart from limiting employees performance, distractive content can change the work culture and prevents the company from achieving its goals. Previous studies highlighted that management in organizations have the authority to decide which employee should be included as a participant on enterprise social media. This study indicated that management in organizations tend to control the flow of information on enterprise social media platforms to ensure that corporate employees consume the appropriate content. Internal public relations professionals responsible for employee communications in the organization needs to ensure that information and content distributed among employees align with their job specification. Seun, who is a Supervisor at an education technology company stated:

Sometimes the agent try to share information or comment on certain things that they need to do personally with their team members. But they do that on the *Teams* page that leadership is on, which [is] something I [think] is not appropriate [a]nd if that happens, I make sure [that] I [point] the agents out and let them know [that] this team's page is for leadership. So, if they have any personal side chats with their team members, they could just message them directly not on the main page [sic]

In relation to employees' contributions and response to certain types of content, which tend to reflect the organizational culture, enterprise social media platforms serve as tools for employees to speak on behalf of organizational leaders. In serving as the mouthpiece of corporate leaders, employees speak in the tone of organizational leaders where they pay attention to the slang and most

used term, when a leader is communicating with a particular stakeholder group. The opportunity given to employees to serve as advocates for organizational leadership is a clear indication of the role that enterprise social media tool play in fostering trust between employees and upper-level management. Abigail, an Internal Communications Manager at a food and beverage company explained how ESM tools have helped her to become the mouthpiece of organizational leaders:

I think anytime someone's asking for your opinion [about what has been posted]. They're asking you to contribute. A lot of [the] times in Teams, you'll end up having conversation streams. But if it's something that's coming out from leaders, like if I'm sending messages on behalf of leaders…I try to write in the voice of the leader. If they have certain expressions they use or if there's a cultural difference in how they communicate, I try to capture that on their behalf [sic]

*Employee Interaction and Workplace Community Building*

Employee interactions and workplace community building looks at the perception that employees have about the contents on enterprise social media, as fostering their interactivity. Employees interactivity are fostered through organized activities, building community, and strengthening relationships leading to workplace engagement. The following activities tend to enhance employees interaction and build workplace community, where employee relationships are strengthened, ultimately leading to team engagement in their work performance: (a) group discussions, where ideas are shared, and work colleagues get to debate on work-related and non-work-related topics; (b) team bonding activities like quizzes, puzzles, and informal conversations outside work roles; and (c) sharing fun and engaging content, such as memes, emojis, funny images, which fosters good relationships among employees. Rivera is a Phone Verification Specialist in the banking industry, and he likes to engage in intellectual discussions pertaining to controversial issues on politics, elections, presidential debates, sports, and current developments in other countries. In an interview with Rivera, he stated:

…when I say fun, [it is] not necessarily games. It could be questions and answers. For instance, it could be something random like you could ask who is the vice president of the US? What's going on in Russia right now, or what is happening in India. I mean something of that sort. I like controversial issues where we have to argue and someone has to win, because I'm a little competitive. So, when it comes to controversies, I adore them. We also talk about sports. Sometimes we talk about informal topics that are not work-related and it going on in our country Ghana [sic]

Activities such as solving puzzles inspire team collaboration when employees are performing their organizational responsibilities. The work collaboration that internal social media social platform facilitate among employees tend to make them feel engaged when employees are performing their professional duties in the organization. Previous studies have indicated that the negative consequence of enterprise social media tools is that it breeds workplace loneliness and isolation. The findings in this study suggest that workplace loneliness among corporate employees is possible, when internal communication efforts concerning assigned duties among employees do not inspire teamwork, but solely focus on how individual members should go about performing a task. Taylor, a Customer Service Representative at an outsourcing company, explained that the activities that involve team collaboration to solve puzzles make him and other colleagues at the workplace feel engaged, when executing their roles in the organization. In an interview, Taylor stated:

Among the organization's activities, what excites me is when we have one-on-one conversation with our supervisors or sometimes participate in puzzles, where we pick a topic or one of the 14-15] modules, choose one person to supervise that particular module and explain it to the team how the model should. These modules help us to learn about the product in the market and it's educational.

In addition to organizing activities to increase employees' involvement in their task orientation, quiz shows and the creation of memes among various denominations (i.e., groups) tend to encourage competition among employees. These competitions increase employees involvement in their roles. Feeling immersed in these activities tend to give employees a sense of friendliness, which ultimately defines their work environment. In an interview with Kim, a trainer at a technology company, he stated:

We mostly run quiz shows. Not necessarily shows, but quiz segments, meme segments that makes us have a feel of the work environment. I don't know how to say [it] there are segments where you can create memes. So, it's like a competition between each house in organization. Sometimes there are questions, but I cannot remember the exact question. It's like you see how we do game shows and then they ask a question and anyone who gets it correct wins a prize[sic]

*Resources for Performance, Recognition, and Professional Development*

The resources for performance, recognition, and professional development theme looks at employees' perception of enterprise social media content as a valuable resource for tracking and enhancing their performance; stay updated on current developments, gaining recognition, which helps to enhance their engagement and motivation in the organization. Therefore, ESM content resources include the following: performance-based discussions and strategies for improvement; announcements of promotions (e.g., internal up-leveling); and company updates. Employees revealed that the content on a company's enterprise social networking platform that speaks to the good performance of colleagues tend to serve as a motivational resource for self-improvement, when performing their organizational responsibilities. One good example is Isabella, who is a Phone Verification Specialist at a lead generation company indicated:

If it's a content that has to do with something that I need to sit up. Sometimes you feel you are doing better, but when you compare your performance to other teammates, you will realize that you need to sit up and engage with your colleagues by asking those who performed well how they did it. This helps you to also work on your performance.

Also, enterprise social media content tend to spur discussions about team members work performance. The discussion about team members' performance inspires ideas on how to improve on areas that work colleagues are deficient. In addition to sharing ideas to help fellow employees perform better in the organization, team leaders develop an agenda that will influence the discussion, when they meet on enterprise social platform to dialogue about essential matters affecting the organization. The agenda that team leaders develop encompass all issues in the organizations that need to be addressed and not limited to specific kind. Previous studies highlighted that the implementation and usage of enterprise social media tools in organizations have influence on employees perception about the company they work for. Receiving favorable perception from the employees, who used frequently use enterprise social media tools as part of their operation require efforts from leaders such as executives, internal communication managers, and team supervisors to ensure that any performed activity on enterprise social media contributes to the success of the organization. In an interview, Seun, a Supervisor stated:

Sometimes it is merely about discussing and sharing ideas about what we need to do to help the team. Also, there are some of the things that are being brought up that we think is going to help the team. I mean when we have a meeting, they show a question or whatever the agenda is on the team's page and we all contribute to share ideas on how this is going to be beneficial to our team [sic]

Apart from ensuring that activities on enterprise communicative platforms contributes to organizational success, the content shared among employees mostly pertains to promoting or up-leveling internal members to meet the standards that organizations have in place to ensure its workforce become productive, when performing an assignment. When employees meet the

expectations or the standards of good performance, they receive promotion through the company's internal up-leveling initiatives as sign of appreciation for demonstrating good performance. Anita, who is a Human Resource Manager at an outsourcing company explained that her company's enterprise social media content mostly pertains to promoting or up-leveling internal members (i.e., employees). In an interview, Anita stated:

I've worked with Teams, and I think the recent one is probably using it to   announcing a promotion. I think that management use those contents to let we HRs know that this person has [qualified] [to be promoted] because we do internal up-leveling. Just as I was an agent, and I [was] promoted to be the HR. We also use that to congratulate people. In addition to using it to congratulate people, we use it to update employees on their performances. [sic]

To address **RQ 3** on how employees' experiences with enterprise social media influence their sense of belonging to the organization, two thematic areas were developed: (1) social connection and community building, and (2) organizational culture and identity.

*Social Connection and Community Building*

The social connection and community building considers how enterprise social media facilitates interpersonal relationships and community formation among employees at the workplace. Employees highlighted that the use of workplace social media (i.e., ESM) have helped them to develop personal relationships with their colleagues that go beyond work relations to establish work-family ties. The use of enterprise social networks at the workplace have created informal communication channels, for employees to discuss matters that do not pertain to their job specifications. Enterprise social media tools have also helped in virtually celebrating employees' personal milestones.

According to Fugate et al. (2009) and Leonardi (2014), workplace integration facilitates relational development and socialization processes, which facilitates communication and collaboration among employees at the workplace. Bernard, who is an exam proctor in an education technology company, explained how the usage of *Teams* has helped him to develop personal relationship with colleagues at his previous workplace even though he now works in a different organization. In an interview, Bernard stated:

I had a personal team that I handled. I still chat with people on the platform. Whenever I see teams I remember my team. It was very interesting, because everyone was connected whether at home or at work. There were other things we did on WhatsApp, but *Teams* was what we all chose. If there's work to be done and you are not able to do it, you can just send a chat on *Teams*, and someone will help you out. Even though I no longer work there, I still have it on my phone. Meaning that I still chat with the people I used to work with. This is possible because I have my own personal *Teams*

Apart from developing personal relationships that go beyond professional duties, enterprise social network at the workplace play the mediating role in resolving employee issues. The mediating role it plays help employees to build work-family relations as they perform their organizational responsibilities. Also, enterprise social media platform allow employees to create a community, where employees deliberate on critical issues such as delayed incentives without any formal communication from management explaining the cause of the delay. These discussions are usually held among employees on a different platform, where there is no management presence. Platforms without management supervision create a safe space and allow corporate employees to feel comfortable sharing and receiving information from their colleagues. Unlike consumer social media where information about an individual or organization is readily accessible to the public. To foster secure communication among employees, enterprise social media platform also provide a space for reconciling employee differences. The safe space enterprise social media platform create in addition to reconciling employee differences, is that it provides a haven for employees to discuss

pertinent organizational matters. The discussion of important matters in the organization tend to reduce employee stress level as they perform their organizational role, because they are allowed discuss other interesting subjects that are not related to their official duty. By allowing work societies and communities to emerge, employees attention are not always fixed on their work assignments, but it gives an alternative, for them to manage the stress they encounter due to organizational workloads. Internal public relations professionals charged with designing corporate messages must find to include social component to allow discussions, resolve employee differences, while reducing employees stress. Enterprise social media's ability to encourage discussion, resolve employee, and reduce their stress helps to create and sustain relationships in the organization.　Rivera, a Phone Verification Specialist in the banking industry explained:

…the reception from my colleagues when I first joined the team was amazing. It was as if they knew me already. Everybody was asking me questions such as "how long have you been here?" "what should we expect from you?," "what do you like?" do you like music? Everybody was asking me all kinds of questions. This made me feel like I am home. It feels like I have a family at the workplace. Even if you're mad at someone, before we even started working, someone might say something or ask a question that will make you forget about your emotional state and you will be happy.

In addition to reconciling differences, and helping employees manage their stress levels, enterprise social media create an informal communication space, for corporate employees to discuss personal matters that are not germane to their job specifications. The personal matters employees discuss on the informal communication space include deciding on meeting at convenient point when attending events. Because some employees have their own businesses that they manage, the informal communication space employees create on enterprise social media platform serve as a common marketplace, where employees tend to advertise their products to attract potential buyers who are employees within the same company. If an employee expresses interest in the advertised products, they tend to negotiate prices before performing a transaction. Melissa, who is a Phone Verification Specialist at an education technology company stated:

…so basically, chatting with colleagues. Sometimes we don't always chat about work. We talked about personal stuff. It could be talking to a colleague about meeting at a place. Or, we're taking a decision on something. It could also be about buying something from them or selling something to them or even discussing something different from what I just mentioned

Enterprise social media tool facilitates discussions about a post concerning the implementation of certain initiatives in the organization. When these new initiatives are posted, it becomes major discussion area for employees, because they will be affected if the initiative is implemented. Because enterprise social media tools allow employees to create their own groups, which allow team members to engage in discussions concerning new developments in the organization, they are able to share ideas for improved performance, when performing their organizational responsibilities. Given that internal communication professionals play a key role in employee communication and engagement, organizations will benefit when employees' perspective on new developments in the organization are shared with management through their internal communication efforts. Listening to employees' concerns regarding new changes in the organization strengthens their sense of belonging, which makes them stay committed to their responsibilities. Gina, a Customer Support Specialist stated:

…sometimes they post an update on what they are about to do in the company, and I'm able to discuss that update with my friends on a different platform. It allows you to create a group and discuss issues as well as share ideas. For example, last year They reviewed our salaries. They increased our salaries by just 7%, and we were upset so we created a group among ourselves and discussed the update

Enterprise social media have also served as a platform for celebrating employees' personal milestones such as birthdays and top-performing employees. Since employees in a digitally-driven environment are not able to celebrate these milestones in-person with their colleagues, enterprise social media serve a platform, where individuals are celebrated. Virtually celebrating employees' personal milestones in the organization is a clear indication of appreciating the efforts they invest, when performing their responsibilities in the organization. The celebration of employees' personal milestone in the organization becomes an opportunity, for employees who barely make friends develop new personal relationships with colleagues whom they have not worked on a project or assignment with. As new relationships between corporate employees are developed, employees' sense of belonging are strengthened.

Internal communication professionals play an important role in helping employees develop new relationships. Internal public relations efforts become more effective in forging new relationships, when frequent updates about birthday celebrants are posted on the company's enterprise social media platform. Posting frequent information on the next birthday celebrant help employees to become familiar with each other, as they perform their organizational responsibilities. Also, delegating responsibilities to other employees can help form new partnerships, which ultimately impact employees' sense of belonging in the organization. These responsibilities could include preparing birthday messages—or writing congratulatory notes to recognize employees' major achievements in the organization. Rose, a Reputation Coordinator at an outsourcing company, highlighted:

…we also celebrate birthdays virtually. The HR usually posts the next person celebrating his/her birthday and we will all send our wishes to the person. We also celebrate wins. I was on Slack yesterday, and I was chatting with one of our colleagues who made a post about someone's birthday. The birthday message he posted looked like ChatGPT. I texted him and said, "this your message looks like ChatGPT inspired." We all laughed about that statement I made. We had a short conversation and that was it. Using Slack is the only way I can make friends. Sometimes we have a post from HR on every Tuesday. The posts acknowledge the top performers for the previous week. There are several times that they do mention names of colleagues who are doing well in the company. This makes you feel part of the organization. [sic]

*Organizational Culture and Identity*

The organizational culture and identity component of employees' sense of belonging in the organization shows how enterprise social media reinforces organizational culture and employee identification. Employees' organizational culture and identity is expressed through cultural celebrations. *Microsoft Teams* have served as a platform, for virtually celebrating cultural events. The celebration of cultural events on the enterprise social media platform strengthen employees' sense of belonging in the organization. Cultural events recognize historical antecedents such as black history month help employees from different cultural backgrounds to connect with organization. The reason being celebrating historical events in organization is an indication that the organization is appreciative of employees' cultural values, which helps to shape the workplace culture. It is also an indication that despite employees' different cultural orientation, each employee shares a common experience, which shape our social experiences, as we perform our organization responsibilities. The social experience employees share among themselves tend to create a cultural environment where everyone feel belonged.

Apart from celebrating cultural events on enterprise social media platform, which tend to recognize employees' cultural identity, the platform is also used to promote employees' health as they perform their organizational responsibilities. Specifically, events like "Pinktober" which is a combination of pink and October. The pink stands for breast cancer awareness and October is the month devoted to universally celebrating such health event among women. Such health events in the company make employees, who have health concerns feel supported and loved as organizational

members. When employees feel supported and loved during their challenging times, it creates a workplace family that strengthens their sense of belonging. Internal public relations practitioners help in shaping employees' workplace social experience through transparent and consistent communication. The transparent and consistent communication internal communication professionals produce help to create an engaging workforce, build trust, and strengthen employee relationships in the organization. For example, Abigail—an Internal Communications Manager at a food and beverage company emphasized:

Right now, we will be celebrating Black History Month, and we usually have features about our famous black Americans that have impacted our world. When celebrating Women's History Month, we invite people to give shout outs to someone they know. Or, tell us about a woman in your life who's been a part of your success. I would try to invite content from the employees, so that they would have a sense of belonging too. We had an employee that was battling breast cancer, so we created a campaign in October and named it "Pinktober" because pink stands for breast cancer awareness. We wore pink shirts and this created a community, which made breast cancer victims felt supported and loved.

The various themes highlight enterprise social media as a powerful tool, for building and maintaining employee relationships. It indicates that workplace social media foster a sense of belonging among corporate employees as they collaborate and complete assigned tasks. Employees shared how enterprise media use in the organization have sustained their relationship with their colleagues. Bernard— an Exam Proctor whose company uses *Teams*, explained how he is able to connect with his team mates at his previous organizations. Apart from enterprise social media's ability to help employees to connect with previous colleagues, it has built a social support system where employees tend to support each other during important events.

## Discussion

This section uses the three explanatory pillars of the Society Exchange Theory (SET): (a) rules and norms of exchange; (b) resources of exchange; and (c) relationships that emerge, when employees are executing their professional roles in the organization developed by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) to further explain the findings of the study.

*Overview of Findings and Implications*

First, among the three thematic areas (thus: reflection of organizational culture and employees' voice; resources for performance, recognition and professional development; and employee interaction and workplace community building) pertaining to research question two (2), *resources for performance, recognition and professional development* aligns most closely with the principle of reciprocity under the *rules and norms of exchange* dimension of the Social Exchange Theory (SET). Employees' responses clearly suggest that their organizations are concerned about the growth of the workforce by posting contents that reflect the key performances of employees, which helps low-performing individuals to know areas that need more development. The posted content also gives low-performing employees the opportunity to coalesce, seek advise and strategies from high-performing colleagues on how to improve their work performance. The exchanged transactions regarding strategies to help low-performing employees improve their work performance tend to prepare them, for an advanced position within the organization through the company's internal up-leveling initiatives. The ability for low-performing individuals to enhance their skills, when performing their work roles denotes that organizations have set high standards that foster a culture of excellence, and continuous improvement, making no ground for mediocrity. These professional standards become the rules and norms of exchange in the organization.

In addition to setting high standards, sharing *resources for performance, recognition and professional development* build on the existing works of Men et al. (2023), where enterprise social media networks

in organizations provide employees with access to organizational information to enhance their engagement, and promote transparency and inclusivity. However, promoting transparency and inclusivity among employees does not mean making your organization open, where all sensitive information is readily available to employees. And, this is because of the growing concern of corporate espionage (or secret agent), which has become a common practice in today's business environment. D'Aprix (2008) argued that promoting transparency in a highly competitive world can be dangerous, because it makes your competitors gain advantage if they know your plans to introduce a new product or service.

Surveillance system in enterprise social media tools can help organizations track and prevent sensitive information from getting into the hands of wrong employees. Leonardi et al. (2013) stated that there are instances where employees want to maintain some level of privacy in their communication with others in the organization, but enterprise social media affordances make it impossible to maintain that privacy. This explains that the various functionalities in enterprise social media, such as blogs, wikis, status updates and microblogs, social analytics, and other collaborative tools allow employees to create groups meant for different purposes, such as discussing new developments in the organization or criticizing management actions.

Second, providing training materials and educational content for employees to develop professionally, while performing their duties in research question one (1) explains the *Resources of Exchange* (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) dimension of the Social Exchange Theory developed by George Homans (1958). Meaning that the skills employees tend to develop in their work relations with the organization turn into a service that they render in their "technical performance" (Organ, 1997, p. 89) to help the organization maintain its full operational status. As highlighted in the literature review, scholars such as Pounsford (2007) stated that company posts that incorporate storytelling, informal communication, and coaching lead to higher levels of employee engagement. Kim and Scott (2019) noted that a company's message board that allow employees to solicit information, share opinions, and express concerns drives their involvement in company activities. The results of the study suggest that not only does a company's post that incorporates storytelling or company's message board that allow corporate employees to solicit information promote their engagement at the organizational level, but the provision of training materials and educational content that help corporate employees to develop and build on their skills foster engagement in their task performance.

Third, the two themes (thus: social connection and community; and organizational culture and identity) in research question three (3) directly pertain to the *Emerged Relationship* function of the Social Exchange Theory (SET) in that interpersonal relationship among employees became popular across all the three themes. Apart from the different roles that employees perform in their organizations, it was evident in the findings that there was a strong camaraderie that existed among intra-organizational members. The bond between employees fostered "organizational citizenship behaviors" (Organ, 1997, p. 85), and "the good soldier syndrome" (Organ, 1988, p. 1) that make employees go beyond their job specifications to offer assistance to fellow employees on how to strategically resolve complex client issue— without receiving any benefit from the formal reward system (Organ, 1997). Despite the extra-role behaviors high-performing employees show, research on employee engagement indicates that there's a growing concern of a decline in workforce engagement in most organizations. More specifically, Harter (2025) reported that employee engagement in the U.S. has fallen to its lowest level with only 31% of employees feeling engaged in their organizational roles. When employees are disengaged in their organizational responsibilities, the effects go beyond organizations to impact global economies. According to Gallup (2024), a disengaged workforce has caused $8.9 trillion lost in global GDP.

*Theoretical Implications*

The study's findings enhance the three theoretical frameworks (i.e., the resources of exchange, rules and norms of exchange, and emerged relationship) of the Social Exchange Theory (SET). The

findings were discussed using the three theoretical frameworks, by selecting the appropriate thematic area in the research questions that best explain the various theoretical components.

RQ 1: Professional Development and Workforce Performance: The Resources of Exchange

Research question one's *professional development and workforce performance* theme speaks to the *resources of exchange* foundational idea. This thematic area explains the training materials and educational contents; career progress updates; and knowledge base materials that organizations provide to their employees is a symbolic gesture to enhance their productivity in the organization. According to Ozkeser (2019), employees who are well trained and equipped with resources are critical to organizational success. The symbolic investment of skills in corporate employees tend to go beyond using those skills in one's task performance. Using one's skills, knowledge, and time beyond individual task orientation to help fellow employees, especially in managing their emotions during difficult times go beyond economic values and plain material benefits as suggested by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005).

RQ 2: Resources for Performance, Recognition, and Professional Development: Rules and Norms of Exchange

Among the thematic areas in research question two, *resources for performance, recognition, and professional development* speaks to the rules and norms of exchange theoretical ideas of SET. The resources for performance, recognition, and professional development highlights that enterprise social media content resources serves as a sources for employees self-improvement. As stated in the findings, these content resources include: performance-based discussions and strategies for improvement; announcements of promotions; and company updates. The findings posit that if employees take advantage of these resources in the organization, they become well equipped and prepared to assume senior roles in the organization through the company's internal up-leveling initiatives. Taken advantage of these resources explain the norms of exchange that meet the high standards (i.e., excellence, productivity, and accountability) established by the organization guarantee promotion in the company. Sun et al. (2007) contend that high-performing employee practices, such as promotion from within, job security, and a broader career path signal an organization's intention to build long term exchange relationship with its employees. All these insights enhance the understanding of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) explored by Eisenberger et al. (1986), which explains the degree employees believe their organizations care about their professional growth.

RQ 3: Social Connection and Community Building; and Organizational Culture and Identity: Emerged Relationship

The two themes, which include: (a) social connection and community building; and (b) organizational culture and identity under research question three directly aligns with the emerged relationship foundational idea of SET. The study revealed that enterprise social media facilitates work-relationships among intra-organizational members. In the performance of their work roles, employees tend to seek assistance from colleague members whom they have not had any prior communication encounter with. Seeking help from fellow colleagues creates that newfound (or emerged) relationship that go beyond work relations to provide support to other colleagues when resolving an organizational issue. The support employees show each other are emotional and social.

*Practical Implications*

The application of Social Exchange Theory within organizational frameworks reveals how commitment to tasks, while demonstrating extra-role behaviors strengthens employee bonds and create an environment, where workers can thrive. Internal public relations professionals serve as critical agents in the exchanges between organizations and their employees, particularly as enterprise social media technologies become increasingly important in the performance of their responsibilities. Enterprise social media tools play a critical role in complementing internal public relations efforts, by offering a more improved alternative in employee communications and engagement.

In contemporary organizational communication practice, internal communicators leverage internal communicative platforms, such as Teams, Slack, and FirstUp, not only as a vehicle to transmit corporate information to internal and external stakeholders, but they use these enterprise communicative platforms as a space for strengthening employee relationships. Although some organizations tend to face infrastructure problems such as security vulnerability, privacy issues, and network challenges, when implementing enterprise social networking technologies. However, when successfully integrated into an organization's internal communication efforts, these tools foster employee engagement, promote knowledge sharing among workers, and help employees to develop their professional skills. All of these inspire innovation, which drives favorable organizational outcomes in areas such as financial performance and service delivery.

*Limitations and Future Research*

One limitation of this study is the recruitment of small interview participants as the goal was to conduct interviews to reach the qualitative marker, where new information from participants will not yield any significance or enrich the data pertaining to the phenomenon under study. The dearth of interview participants due to academic commitments and interview participants conflicting schedules restrict the generalizability of the findings to a broader population within various industries. Interviews conducted virtually limited the researcher's ability to interpret participants' non-verbal reactions to the research questions compared to face-to-face communication. However, future researchers can explore the role of enterprise communication technologies in employees' stress and emotional management, and workplace productivity in internal communication practice.

## Conclusions

The key findings of the study indicate that enterprise social media tools serve as a platform for releasing employees' stress due to organizational workload; it helps in consoling employees during challenging times such as major organizational change, while serving as a tool for emotional management. All these go beyond the purpose it is widely known for as a platform for sharing resources such as training materials and educational content, to encourage workforce development and facilitate knowledge sharing among corporate employees. In addition to serving as a platform, for workforce development and knowledge sharing, the research magnifies the significance of integrating communication, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies in an organization's communication processes.

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