

# The Role of Demographic Variables on Knowledge-Sharing Behaviour among Academicians

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**Abstract**—Every organisation needs to recognize knowledge as an important asset for individuals as well as the organisation itself order to survive in competitive environment. Since knowledge sharing is a critical activity for academicians, it has to be enhanced by stimulating individuals to share their knowledge voluntarily with other individuals and to contribute to the organizational knowledge base. Hence, institutions should focus on motivating the academicians to share knowledge among themselves, across the departments, institutions, and industries; and to contribute to the knowledge base. **Objective:** To identify the role of demographic variables on knowledge-sharing behaviour among academicians. **Results:** Every individual's attitude is subject to his own personal traits and to the environment or surrounding that the individual belongs to or is attached with. In the university, knowledge is intensively created and disseminated through research and publication. This is the most probable due to the belief that individual knowledge is not necessarily easy to be retrieved. Thus academicians play their roles as knowledge providers by transferring and sharing their knowledge through written contributions, organisational communications, personal interaction, and communities of practices activities. Motivational factors may be categorized according to different age, gender, designation, and organizational tenure of the academicians. This topic prompts individuals to actually oblige in sharing the knowledge. The reason is due to the fact that knowledge-sharing actually give more benefits than pitfalls. Individuals should require motivation to exchange the knowledge for the organization to gain competitive advantage. **Conclusion:** This concept paper provides an insight on the role of demographic characteristics towards knowledge-sharing behaviour among the academicians.

**Index Terms**—Demographics; Knowledge; Knowledge-Sharing Behaviour; Academicians.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge sharing is a part of knowledge management that highlights sharing of acquired knowledge with other people. Knowledge becomes vital specifically in an organisation, intended to face the era of economic globalisation. Thus, becoming a world class employee in this situation is a challenge for any person, if they do not have the necessary knowledge. In every sector, accomplishment of any organisation is tremendously reliant on its employees' performance. In order to fulfil organisational needs, the individual employee has to be involved in knowledge management; so that, he or she will be a valuable asset to the organisation. In the institution of higher learning, academicians should be able to develop and identify, seek advice from others, maintain their own learning, build up

good resources, and supports in order to remain competitive. However, this ideal can sometimes be difficult to realise because if given a choice, people prefer not to share their knowledge due to multiple reasons [1]. Those reasons include organisational factors, stressors, and personal gains. Once people are hesitant to share their knowledge with others in the organisation, knowledge gaps will emerge. These knowledge gaps will become a barrier in achieving the desired outcomes [2]. For this reason, knowledge sharing is observed to be one of the most vital practices within the knowledge management framework, which is the contribution made by individuals to the collective knowledge of an organization. Despite the growing body of empirical studies on knowledge-sharing behaviour, literature that focuses on the role of demographic variables remains scarce. This paper aims to provide an insight on the influence of demographic variables (individual characteristics) such as age, gender, designation, and organisational tenure towards knowledge-sharing behaviour.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This review has undertaken a series of published articles for assessment of demographic variables and its impact on knowledge-sharing behaviour among academicians. The review has carried out by scrutinizing the collection of published literature. Initially, the abstracts and keywords were utilized for the inclusion and exclusion of the published materials. After the finalization of studies for this review, different themes have been developed to assess the demographic variables. Knowledge sharing behaviour and demographic variables were two major themes; furthermore, the theme of demographic variable has been divided into gender, age, organisational tenure, and designation.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Knowledge-sharing behaviour among academicians

Higher education institutions are in the knowledge business since they are involved in knowledge creation and dissemination and learning. As stated by Sallis and Jones [3], they claimed that there is as much need for knowledge sharing in education as there is in the corporate world. In addition, Rowley [4] stated that universities' members must recognise and respond to their changing role in a knowledge-based society. Universities need to be consciously and explicitly managing the processes associated with the creation of their knowledge assets, and to recognise the value

of their intellectual capital to their continuing role in society, and in a wider global marketplace for higher education.

Among all the phases of knowledge management, knowledge sharing has been claimed to be the most important part of knowledge management [5]. It is also a critical area that needs more attention within the overall knowledge management domain [6]. Knowledge sharing has been defined as the process of capturing knowledge or moving knowledge from a source unit to a recipient unit [7]. Sharratt and Usoro [8] stated that there must be some form of exchange between both the source unit and the recipient unit for sharing. In short, knowledge sharing can be referred as the exchange of knowledge between two parties in a reciprocal process, allowing reshaping and sense-making of the knowledge in the new context.

Sallis and Jones [3] described that academics are expert knowledge workers engaged in teaching, writing, and research, and their academic institutions generate value using their intellectual assets. In particular, sharing knowledge is a part of daily job and work activities for academicians. They create, manage, disseminate, and share knowledge with each other and with other students [9]. Moreover, the knowledge created, stored, and shared serve as a knowledge repository for academicians, researchers, and students to both distinguish the academic institution, as well as to enhance their own knowledge and help them advance in their careers [10]. Therefore, realizing the importance of knowledge sharing for academics in terms of promoting their own learning and innovation [11] will certainly encourage them to practice it. During the last few years, there has been an increased awareness on the benefits of knowledge sharing and a growing number of organisations have been adopting such strategies. Yet despite this, almost none of those organisations are in the higher education sector [3, 12].

In relation to the situation above, this paper aims to show how demographics is one of the factors that can give effect on knowledge-sharing behaviour in organisations. Currently, there are only a few studies that look into the impact of demographic factors on knowledge-sharing behaviour. Several researchers [13, 14] have attributed the individuals' demographic variables to knowledge-sharing behaviour. Constant et al. [15] have found that employees with the highest level of education and more working experiences have positive attitudes towards sharing, and are more likely to share their expertise. However, a results, concerning the expertise-knowledge sharing relationship, has been mixed. Wasko and Faraj [16] found no relationship between expertise and knowledge sharing, but Constant et al. [15] suggested that when other employees are asking questions using the organisation's knowledge management system, employees with higher expertise are more likely to share useful knowledge. Riege [11] believed that differences in age, gender, or education levels may be barriers to knowledge sharing. This study does not conclude whether age, gender, education or experience levels themselves have an effect on knowledge-sharing behaviour; however, it provides an insightful explanation on how the differences in them can act as affecting factors. Among demographic variables that have been studied were gender, age, organizational tenure, and job position.

## B. The Demographic variables and knowledge-sharing behaviour

### 1) Gender

One of the factors that may contribute to knowledge-sharing behaviour is gender. With regard to gender, Lin [17] and Miller & Karakowsky [18] claimed that even though it has some impact on knowledge-sharing behaviour, gender does not significantly influence an individuals' behaviour. Gender prescribes specific behaviour patterns and helps to clarify the social behaviour of men and women [17]. The attributes of men's organisational behaviour are known to be individualism, competitiveness, and self-promotion [18]. Men's perception of seeking knowledge and feedback from their colleagues is one of dependence and loss of control. Therefore, they tend to avoid such situations of knowledge sharing [18], unless benefits like improved performance and success arise from them [19].

Women's level of altruism is higher than men's; their attributes being kindness, understanding and consideration [17]. Thus, women may be more predisposed to engage in knowledge sharing, as they also perceive differently the benefits of the process. For women, support and close social relationships with co-workers represent the benefits of sharing knowledge [19]. Consequently, they tend to seek and share knowledge more directly than men [18]. In this way, gender appears to influence knowledge-sharing behaviour. Drawing from the social exchange theory, Boardia, Irmer, and Abusah [13] investigated the influence of evaluation apprehension and perceived benefits of knowledge sharing on the intention to share knowledge. They considered two contexts, namely, when sharing occurs directly between individuals and when sharing occurs through contributions to an electronic knowledge management system. Women exhibited higher perceptions of benefits from knowledge sharing than men in both contexts, such as whether knowledge sharing occurred interpersonally or via a knowledge management system. Given these findings, one would expect women to be more likely to engage in knowledge sharing than men.

There are also a few other studies investigated the role of demographic variables in knowledge sharing suggest that such variables may be important antecedents of knowledge-sharing behaviour. Drawing from the social network theory, Lin [19] found that gender moderated the effects of instrumental and expressive ties on knowledge sharing. Specifically, it found that the relationship between instrumental ties and knowledge sharing was stronger for females; while that between expressive ties and knowledge sharing was stronger for males. Similarly, Taylor [20] found that the use of knowledge management systems was significantly influenced by gender, with males consistently reporting higher levels of usage of the email, data mining, knowledge repository, and yellow page components of the knowledge management system they investigated. A study by [13] suggested that females have higher perceptions of knowledge sharing benefits as compared to their male counterparts. It also suggested+ that gender may influence knowledge-sharing behaviour. All these studies would seem to suggest that gender influences knowledge-sharing behaviour even if only indirectly; in other words, by influencing other variables that are themselves directly related to knowledge-sharing behaviour. The findings by Boateng et al., [21] indicated that male teachers tend to share

their knowledge more than their female counterparts. In contrast, Lin [14] asserted that females are more likely to share their knowledge than males due to higher levels of uncertainty among female employees, especially when they are working in a group [18].

### 2) Age

Employee's age is another demographic variable that impacts on the knowledge-sharing behaviour. It has an impact on willingness to share knowledge. Several studies offer age as one of many variables [11, 22]. For the most part, studies show that the more age compatible a team is, the more likely that team will engage in effective knowledge sharing. Thus, age differences are likely to stifle knowledge sharing. Older workers are sometimes technology resistant or may feel threatened by younger employees they consider rivals. Slagter [23] recommended more proactive management style toward older employees to facilitate successful use of knowledge management [24]. As indicated by Nagamani & Katyayani [25] in their study with 334 respondents from various private engineering colleges in India revealed that there is a very weak relationship between age group and knowledge-sharing behaviour, but no significant behavioural differences are observed towards the knowledge sharing by different age group respondents. This is contrary to the findings of Garg and Rastogi [26], which proved that older teachers are more pro-social than younger colleagues with the results of 25-30 age group are recorded less knowledge-sharing behaviour score than the respondents of age group 31-40, 41-50 and above 50 respectively. Such finding is in line with the findings of Shi-Jer Lou et al. [27] who found that respondents of age group 30-39 express more knowledge-sharing behaviour than 40-49.

### 3) Organisational tenure

Tenure appears to be another variable that gives influence on knowledge-sharing behaviour. Boardia, Irmer, and Abusah [13] found organisational tenure to be a good predictor of knowledge sharing, when knowledge is shared interpersonally. However, this effect does not happen, when sharing occurs through databases. In a similar context to the findings of Boardia et al. [13] on organisational tenure, Ojha [22] claimed that it has a negative significant relationship with knowledge sharing. Meanwhile, Keyes [28] and Gumus [29] found that tenure within the organisation had no effect on knowledge sharing. However, other studies reported that organisational tenure has a positive significant relationship with knowledge-sharing behaviour [30, 31]. Besides, Bakker et al. [32] reported a positive correlation between team tenure and knowledge sharing by indicating that the longer team members have been together; the more likely they are to engage in knowledge-sharing behaviour. Another similar finding reported by Babalhavaeji & Kermani [33] revealed that the length of teaching experience was the strongest predictor for knowledge-sharing behaviour among the teaching staff in Iran. The study indicates that the staff with the highest teaching experience will lead to knowledge-sharing behaviour among the other staff members. In addition, the study conducted by Nagamani and Katyayani [25] revealed that there is a significant but weak relationship exists between the working experience and knowledge-sharing behaviour.

### 4) Designation

Another demographic variable that seems to have a considerable impact on knowledge-sharing behaviour is designation. Designation is believed to influence the knowledge-sharing behaviour among the academicians. Based on the qualitative study conducted by Roziana, Azizah, and Hamidah [34], it is found that there are differences in the attitude of academicians towards knowledge-sharing behaviour according to their designation level. The difference in job level, such as between a professor and lecturer, creates a gap in knowledge-sharing behaviour to the point, where it may even slow down the knowledge-sharing behaviour. The juniors normally feel uncomfortable about approaching the senior level and higher status academicians. This is an indication that knowledge sharing difficulty is triggered by status quo. Besides, the results revealed that there is some degree of complacency at the level of a senior professor. They are oblivious of their responsibility towards a development of the academia and their role as the leader in knowledge sharing because of the achieved level; the comfort zone as a senior professor. Thus, the young ones stay among themselves. The senior professors prefer not to share their knowledge with an inexperienced person whom they may regard as free-riders [35]. As stated by Roziana *et al.* [34], their finding explained why the differences of perceptions between the individuals, who choose to guide juniors and who prefer juniors to learn from their own experience, are almost equal. This is similar to the finding of Shi-Jer Lou *et al.*, [27], where job title differences fetched different knowledge-sharing behaviours.

As a concluding remarks, this review paper has assessed published literature about demographic variables and its association with knowledge sharing behaviour. It has been evaluated that higher education is directly associated with the knowledge sharing behaviour. Therefore, it is identified that universities always play a significance role in enhancing the knowledge sharing activities. Moreover, four differential demographic variables have been highlighted by the review, which included gender, age, organisational tenure, and designation. The review identified that all of these four demographic variables have their key role towards improving knowledge sharing behaviour.

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