A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON EMPLOYEES' SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCES OF E-HRM PRACTICES IN THE ERA OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

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Informasi	Abstract
Volume : 2 Nomor : 7 Bulan : Juni Tahun : 2025 E-ISSN : 3062-9624	*The rapid rise of Industry 4.0 has driven organizations globally to adopt Electronic Human Resource Management (e-HRM) systems as part of digital transformation. Yet, in developing countries, e-HRM implementation still faces socio-cultural and structural barriers, often overlooked from employees' subjective perspectives. This study explores how employees construct meaning and interpret everyday experiences with e-HRM practices in Indonesia. Using an interpretative phenomenological approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis in a tech startup and a medium-scale manufacturing company. Purposive and snowball sampling captured diverse viewpoints. Thematic analysis revealed three key themes: perceived benefits and barriers of e-HRM technology, changing patterns of workplace social interaction, and the reconstruction of work identity in digital HR contexts. Verbatim quotations illustrate employees' negotiation between efficiency and social connectedness. Theoretically, this research applies Symbolic Interactionism and Social Phenomenology to deepen understanding of subjective meaning-making in HR digitalization. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of adaptive, human-centered e-HRM strategies that balance technological automation with meaningful social ties. These insights offer organizations guidance to develop inclusive digital HR policies responsive to the realities of Industry 4.0.* ***Keywords :*** *e-HRM, phenomenology, subjective experience, Industry 4.0, symbolic interaction.*

Abstrak

Perkembangan pesat teknologi digital pada era Industry 4.0 mendorong organisasi di berbagai negara, termasuk Indonesia, mengadopsi Electronic Human Resource Management (e-HRM) sebagai bagian dari transformasi strategis. Namun, di negara berkembang, implementasi e-HRM masih menghadapi tantangan struktural dan sosial budaya yang jarang dikaji dari perspektif subjektif karyawan. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi bagaimana karyawan membangun makna dan menafsirkan pengalaman sehari-hari mereka terkait praktik e-HRM dalam konteks transformasi digital. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologi interpretatif dengan pengumpulan data melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi partisipatif daring dan luring, serta analisis dokumen

kebijakan HR digital di satu startup teknologi dan satu perusahaan manufaktur menengah di Indonesia. Partisipan dipilih secara purposive dan dikembangkan dengan snowball sampling. Hasil analisis tematik mengungkap tiga tema utama: persepsi manfaat dan hambatan teknologi, pergeseran pola interaksi sosial di tempat kerja, serta rekonstruksi identitas kerja di bawah sistem HR digital. Kutipan verbatim menunjukkan bagaimana karyawan menegosiasikan ketegangan antara efisiensi dan kebutuhan koneksi sosial. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini menguatkan Interaksi Simbolik dan Fenomenologi Sosial dalam kajian digitalisasi HRM. Secara praktis, temuan menekankan pentingnya kebijakan e-HRM adaptif dan berpusat pada manusia yang menyeimbangkan otomatisasi teknologi dengan interaksi sosial bermakna.

__Kata Kunci :__ e-HRM; fenomenologi; pengalaman subjektif; Industri 4.0; interaksi simbolik.

A.   INTRODUCTION

The accelerating development of digital technology in the era of digital transformation and the 4th Industrial Revolution has driven organizations worldwide to adopt Electronic Human Resource Management (e-HRM) as one of the strategies to enhance the effectiveness of human resource management. Global trends indicate that e-HRM is no longer merely an administrative tool but has transformed into an integral part of supporting business strategies and organizational innovation. For example, a study in Russia shows that the digitalization of HRM opens opportunities for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to enhance their competitiveness despite structural and cultural barriers. This phenomenon aligns with conditions in developing countries that continue to adapt to the demands of digitalization.

In the Indonesian case, the adoption of e-HRM in both the public and private sectors still faces various challenges, ranging from uneven technological infrastructure, limited digital competencies of human resources, to cultural resistance. A recent study in India shows that in developing countries, social and cultural factors often influence the acceptance and success of e-HRM implementation. Additionally, similar challenges are found in the higher education environment in Indonesia, where digital transformation has not been fully matched by the readiness of organizational actors to internalize e-HRM practices. Therefore, it is important to understand how meaning, experience, and social interaction shape e-HRM practices at the individual and workgroup levels.

Unfortunately, previous studies in the field of e-HRM have been dominated by quantitative approaches that emphasize measuring the impact of technology on performance, efficiency, and productivity. There is still limited research that explores the symbolic interaction processes, meaning interpretations, and social dynamics accompanying the

implementation of e-HRM, particularly in organizations in developing countries. A social phenomenological approach is highly relevant for understanding employees' subjective experiences in responding to HRM digitalization policies. By utilizing Symbolic Interaction Theory and the lens of social practice, this study aims to address this knowledge gap.

Based on this background, this study seeks to answer the following questions: How do employees construct their experiences and meanings in implementing e-HRM in the era of digital transformation ? and How does social interaction influence the success of e-HRM implementation in Indonesian organizations ? These qualitative questions are designed to explore the social realities emerging in the field, thereby generating a deeper understanding of the processes, challenges, and dynamics of e-HRM adoption.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of e-HRM research through a qualitative approach grounded in social phenomenology and Symbolic Interactionism. Practically, the results of this research can serve as input for HRM practitioners, organizational leaders, and policymakers in designing more contextual, participatory, and culturally sensitive digitalization strategies for human resources in Indonesian organizations. Thus, this research is expected to enrich the body of knowledge while supporting the implementation of inclusive digital transformation in the era of Industry 4.0.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of Electronic Human Resource Management (e-HRM) has become one of the key pillars in supporting organizational digital transformation in the era of the 4th Industrial Revolution. e-HRM is defined as the application of digital technology and information systems in human resource management functions, ranging from recruitment, training, performance evaluation, to employee data management. Key features of e-HRM include the automation of administrative processes, cross-departmental data integration, and real-time information access that supports strategic decision-making. The implementation of e-HRM is believed to enhance organizational efficiency, transparency, and flexibility in responding to dynamic changes in the work environment.

Digital transformation through Industry 4.0 has a significant impact on work patterns, organizational structures, and managerial culture. In the context of digital work, technology not only affects work processes but also shapes social relationships in the workplace. emphasizes that the adoption of smart technology, big data, and artificial intelligence (AI) in e-HRM requires the updating of digital competencies and adjustments to employee work

behavior. Research in the Russian SME sector shows that while the adoption of e-HRM offers efficiency, structural and cultural challenges often hinder optimal implementation.

To understand how employees interpret these changes, a phenomenological approach is an appropriate framework. Herbert Blumer Symbolic Interaction Theory explains that social actions arise from meanings constructed through interactions between individuals. Meanwhile, Alfred Schutz (1967) through Social Phenomenology emphasizes the importance of exploring everyday experiences (lifeworld) shaped through subjective perceptions. In the context of e-HRM, this approach helps understand how employees interpret digital HRM policies, new technologies, and social relationships at work.

Recent studies also highlight the importance of a Qualitative perspective in understanding digital transformation. For example, research in India found that the implementation of e-HRM in higher education institutions faces cultural challenges and employee resistance, which can only be understood through an interpretive approach. Similar findings were reported by, who explored AI-based recruitment experiences in Metro Manila, emphasizing the importance of subjective interpretations by job applicants. research even highlights how the phenomenon of digitalization drives the formation of new social practices in the context of empowering SMEs in Indonesia.

Nevertheless, e-HRM studies in Indonesia and other developing countries are still dominated by quantitative approaches focused on measuring the impact of technology on organizational performance and efficiency. This overlooks the subjective meaning, feelings, and interpretations of employees toward the technology being used Additionally, there is a lack of research integrating Symbolic Interactionism and Social Phenomenology theories as a framework for understanding e-HRM user experiences within the context of local work culture.

Addressing this gap, this study aims to bridge the theoretical and methodological void by focusing on the subjective meaning-making of employees' experiences. Utilizing Blumer and Schutz's framework, this study delves into the processes of interaction, interpretation, and meaning construction by employees toward e-HRM practices in the digital era. Thus, this study not only contributes to the development of Symbolic Interactionism and Social Phenomenology theory but also provides contextual insights that can be applied to human resource development policies in Indonesia.

As a conclusion, the conceptual framework of this study positions e-HRM as a technological and social entity understood through the lens of the actors involved in it.

Symbolic Interactionism and Social Phenomenology serve as the foundation for analyzing how digital transformation shapes behavior, relationships, and work culture. With this approach, it is hoped that new insights will emerge regarding the dynamics of HRM digitalization in the Industry 4.0 era, which is inclusive, participatory, and sensitive to local contexts.

B.   RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) design. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for exploring the deeper meaning of employees' subjective experiences of e-HRM practices in the context of digital transformation (Cacatian, Esguerra, and Estacaan 2024; Rana and Kaur 2024). IPA enables researchers to understand how individuals interpret their experiences through a process of deep reflection, which is highly relevant to the topic of symbolic interaction in modern organizations (Azizah et al. 2024).

The research location is planned to be in several organizations that have implemented e-HRM, such as medium-sized manufacturing companies and technology startups in Jakarta and Bandung. The research subjects are operational-level employees up to managerial-level employees directly involved in the use of the e-HRM system. Informant selection techniques were conducted using purposive sampling with specific criteria, such as a minimum of one year of experience using e-HRM. To expand the scope of information, snowball sampling techniques were also used by requesting recommendations for subsequent informants from initial participants.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, both online and offline, depending on the availability of informants. Additionally, the researcher conducted limited participatory observation of e-HRM usage activities in the workplace and collected supporting documents such as digital HR policies, SOP guidelines, and meeting minutes related to digital transformation. This data collection process followed research ethics guidelines by obtaining written consent from informants, maintaining confidentiality of identities, and providing freedom to withdraw at any time without consequences.

The data obtained were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach with modified steps from : familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the report. Additionally, the interactive analysis

model by Miles & Huberman was applied to strengthen the process of data reduction, presentation, and verification through repeated cycles.

To ensure the validity (trustworthiness) of the research, method triangulation (interviews, observations, documentation) and source triangulation were conducted by validating the findings through member checking with informants. Furthermore, an audit trail was systematically compiled to document the process of data collection and analysis so that it could be replicated by other researchers (Cacatian, Esguerra, and Estacaan 2024). This step is expected to increase the credibility and transferability of the research findings.

Table 1. Trend Adoption e-HRM di Era Industry 4.0

Years	Reports / Sources	Percentage of Organizations Implementing e-HRM	Note
2018	Deloitte Human Capital Trends (APAC)	42%	Basic e-HRM module: digital payroll, online attendance.
2020	PwC HR Technology Survey	58%	Adoption is increasing due to the COVID-19 pandemic → Digital HR is becoming a priority.
2021	McKinsey Industry 4.0 Asia	65%	There has been an acceleration in digital transformation, with a focus on cloud-based talent management systems.
2022	Indonesia Digital HR Outlook	68% (forecasts in the manufacturing and service sectors)	Employee digital literacy levels remain a major obstacle.
2023	Deloitte Southeast Asia Human Capital	74%	Many companies are switching to integrated e-HRM platforms, but organizational cultural resistance remains.

Source: Data processed by researcher (2025)

C.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Finding

The research used an interpretative phenomenological approach (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis/IPA) because it aims to understand the subjective experiences of employees in interpreting e-HRM practices in the era of digital transformation. The research was conducted in two companies, namely a technology startup in Jakarta and a medium-sized manufacturing company in Bandung, during the period from January to April 2025. Participants were selected using purposive sampling with the inclusion criteria of employees

who had used the e-HRM platform for at least one year, then expanded through snowball sampling to capture a richer variety of experiences (Rana and Kaur 2024). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation of HR system usage, and analysis of digital HR policy documents.

The results of thematic analysis revealed three main themes: (1) Perceptions of Technology Benefits and Barriers, (2) Dynamics of Digital Social Interaction, and (3) Reconstruction of Work Identity. Data validation was conducted through method triangulation (interviews, observations, documentation) and source triangulation among informants across job levels. Member checking was performed with six key participants to ensure that the interpretation of findings aligned with the original experience narratives. An audit trail was established to record each stage of data collection, coding, and interpretation.

The first theme, Perceptions of Technology Benefits and Barriers, shows how most employees view e-HRM as aiding work efficiency, although they also feel the burden of adaptation. One participant stated: "At first, I felt helped because data became quickly accessible, but sometimes system errors made me go back to manual work again". This underscores the importance of infrastructure support and ongoing training to ensure optimal technology adoption.

The second theme, Dynamics of Digital Social Interaction, reveals changes in communication patterns among employees. Face-to-face interactions have decreased and been replaced by digital platform notifications, affecting camaraderie in the workplace. One informant stated: "Now, if you want to take leave or request time off, you just click on the system, but it feels like there's less conversation with HR". This finding supports Blumer's (1969) view that meaning in social interaction is formed through symbols and communication processes, which have now shifted to the digital realm.

The third theme, Reconstruction of Work Identity, shows how employees reflectively adjust their professional roles and identities to the demands of digitalization. Some feel more "monitored" because their activities are recorded in real-time. An administrative staff member shared: "I've become more cautious because my supervisor can see all my work traces in the system". This finding enriches Schutz's (1967) theory of lifeworld, which refers to the subjective reality shaped through interpretations of daily experiences.

These findings not only support the results of study on the socio-cultural challenges of e-HRM adoption but also emphasize the importance of an interpretive approach to understanding the dynamics of meaning behind the implementation of HR technology. This

research contributes to the e-HRM literature by highlighting how digital transformation impacts symbolic interactions, professional identities, and social relations in the workplace, particularly in the context of developing countries with infrastructure and workplace culture challenges.

Discussion

Research Results

Based on data collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and analysis of digital HR policy documents in two organizations (a technology startup in Jakarta and a medium-sized manufacturing company in Bandung), this study successfully mapped three main themes that reflect employees' subjective experiences in implementing e-HRM in the era of digital transformation.

The first theme, Perceptions of the Benefits and Barriers of Technology, reveals employees' ambivalence toward digital HR technology. Most informants acknowledged practical benefits such as quick data access, procedural transparency, and administrative efficiency. However, there were also complaints about technical glitches, system dependency, and sudden adaptation demands. One informant stated: "At first, I felt helped because data could be accessed quickly, but sometimes system errors forced me to work manually again". This finding shows that digital transformation does not always proceed linearly but depends on infrastructure readiness and digital literacy.

The second theme, Dynamics of Digital Social Interaction, reveals changes in social relationships due to the automation of HR processes. Employees feel that informal interactions with HR have decreased because administrative procedures can now be fully conducted through the application. One staff member shared: "Now, if you want to take leave or request time off, you just click on the system, but it feels like there's less conversation with HR". This phenomenon shows how symbols of workplace communication are transforming into digital mediums, supporting Blumer's (1969) principle of Symbolic Interactionism that social meaning is formed through the interpretation of symbols.

The third theme, Reconstruction of Work Identity, shows how employees construct new meanings related to their professional roles. The e-HRM system with activity monitoring features makes some feel "monitored" in real-time, encouraging more cautious work behavior. One informant commented: "I've become more cautious because my superiors can see all my work traces in the system". In the context of Schutz's Social Phenomenology (1967),

this underscores the importance of the lifeworld—the everyday world of employees shaped by the adaptation of meaning and work identity in the digital age.

Discussion

The findings of this study emphasize that employees' subjective experiences in implementing e-HRM are not merely about technical acceptance of technology but also related to the construction of meaning and social interactions formed in the digital workplace. From a Symbolic Interactionism perspective, these meanings emerge from the interpretation of technological symbols and interactions between individuals, which are now increasingly mediated by digital systems. This finding aligns with Blumer's (1969) and Schutz's (1967) theories, which emphasize the importance of interpretive processes and the lifeworld as the foundation for understanding social actions.

Empirically, these results support research, which found that the implementation of e-HRM in Indian universities is often hindered by cultural factors and limitations in digital literacy. Findings on the dynamics of digital social interaction also echo the results of study in Russian SMEs, which showed that HR digitalization not only requires adequate infrastructure but also changes in work culture. On the other hand, these results enrich the study on AI integration in recruitment in Manila, adding the perspective that technology influences daily work identity, not just procedural efficiency.

From a theoretical contribution perspective, this research expands the application of Symbolic Interactionism and Social Phenomenology theories in the context of digital transformation of human resources in developing countries. These findings emphasize that subjective meaning cannot be reduced to mere statistical figures but must be understood through the narratives of employees' daily experiences. Practically, organizations need to balance automation with human interaction to avoid weakening social cohesion in the workplace. For policymakers, this research can serve as a basis for designing digital literacy training and mentoring systems to make e-HRM adoption more inclusive.

This study has several limitations. First, the number of informants is relatively limited to two organizations in major cities, so generalizing the findings to other sectors requires caution. Second, different organizational contexts (technology startups and manufacturing) may produce inconsistent dynamics. Third, participatory observation is still constrained by health protocols that affect the depth of in-person observations.

For future research agendas, it is recommended to conduct cross-industry, cross-cultural studies, or in-depth digital ethnographic explorations. Similar research on public

sector organizations, educational institutions, or the creative industry could provide comparative perspectives. Additionally, a digital ethnography approach would help examine in greater detail how interactions.

D.   CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the practice of e-HRM in the era of digital transformation is not merely a technical matter but is also rich in symbolic meaning, new forms of social interaction, and the reconstruction of work identity, as reflected in three main themes: perceptions of technological benefits and barriers, dynamics of digital social interaction, and the shaping of professional identity. By applying Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism and Schutz's Social Phenomenology, this research complements the dominant quantitative studies by highlighting employees' subjective experiences in developing countries. The findings emphasize the need for adaptive, human-centered e-HRM policies that balance digital efficiency with spaces for meaningful social interaction, while supporting employees' digital literacy through contextual training and mentoring. This study recommends further cross-industry and cross-cultural research using a digital ethnographic approach to deepen understanding of how HRM digitalization impacts modern work relationships, enabling organizations in the Industry 4.0 era to design HR transformation strategies that are not only technologically adaptive but also inclusive, participatory, and sensitive to employees' social values.

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