

Determinants of HRIS Adoption Among Gen Z HR Professionals in SME Contexts A Conceptual Analysis

Devmika Mandinu¹, Anuja Sathis², Pasindu Chanuka³, Nimesh Gimhan⁴,
Nisha Jayasuriya⁵ and Nirmani Dayapathirana⁶

^{1,2,3,4,5,6}SLIIT Business School, Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology, Sri Lanka
bm22623386@my.sliit.lk

Abstract: In the modern world, where there is technological acceleration, including in Small and Midsize Enterprises (SMEs), the use of Human Resources Information System (HRIS) in SMEs is becoming more popular. However, the adoption is not uniform, as many behavioural, organizational, and environmental factors influence the adoption. Accordingly, this research investigates a conceptual model based on Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), identifying the antecedents of HRIS usage in the context of Generation Z HR professionals in SMEs. To account for the antecedents of HRIS adoption, the conceptual study considered the original four UTAUT constructs, added environmental factors, and presented a new conceptual framework with gender moderating all relationships. Consequently, the mechanistic model proposes that the acceptance of HRIS is conditioned by personal factors, the organizational supportive system, and environmental factors. Nevertheless, recent research from 2004 to 2026 in the Dimension database suggests that since Gen Z employees are digital natives, they are likely to expect optimal workflow. For this reason, Gen Z employees have an important role in HRIS implementation. Thus, the current study fills the research gap with respect to the adoption of the UTAUT framework in the context of SMEs, and considers environmental factors in an attempt to provide a more thorough view of HRIS adoption. Practically, this research will assist SME managers and HR managers to design HRIS solutions that meet the expectations of Gen Z employees to improve user acceptance and usage. Overall, the proposed framework provides a sound basis for improving HRIS adoption and supporting effective digital HR transformation in SMEs.

Keywords: Gen Z, HR professionals, HRIS adoption, UTAUT

Introduction

With the modern fast-changing business environment, it is important to make strategic business decisions to keep business continuity and growth; therefore, understanding and growing the human resources is key to the success of any organisation ([Azmal et al., 2024](#)). Therefore, it's important to use an HRIS to understand employee behaviour. HRIS is defined as the human resource management system that's used to inquire, store, and analyse employee information about a company's employees ([Azmal et al., 2024](#)). The concept of HRIS was started in the 1990's, and at the start, this information was a valid HR decision-making process, but with time it transferred in to a strategic tool that helps management to make strategic business decisions. This system included employee personal information such as name, sex, and mobile numbers, as well as educational and professional qualifications, which were given as papers to the HR department by employees ([Kovach et al., 2002](#)). This HRIS holds a prominent place in the HR landscape of today's world.

When it comes to understanding workplace diversity, it's important to understand how employees from different generations differ. According to the ([Department of Census and Statistics, 2023](#)) 35.2% of the of the total workforce is Millennials, and 30.4% of the total population in Gen X and Gen Z is 15.8% of the total workforce. Therefore, although there is a higher number of workforces of Millennials and Gen X, Gen Z is the upcoming generation. According to past research, Gen Z is an individual born between 1997 and 2012, who is heavily tech savvy and a digital native generation that has grown up with the evolution of the internet and the usage of smartphones ([Romainha et al., 2025](#)). Therefore, there the most familiar generation with modern technology. Gen Z workplace technological behavior is shaped by different value orientations, such as immediacy, personalization, and autonomy, which systematically alters established technological acceptance relationships ([Lopes, 2025](#); [Schroth, 2019](#)). Therefore, it seems that Gen Z needs a focused theoretical attention relative to other generations, and models such as the integrated theory of technology acceptance and use in contemporary organizational contexts need to be reassessed with Gen Z as a starting point.

SME is an organization that has employees from 5 to 500 ([Ayyagari et al., 2011](#); [Harney, 2021](#)). When it comes to the Sri Lankan Context 75% of all the businesses in Sri Lanka are SME'S ([Bank, 2024](#)). SMEs face constraints such as limited resources, low IT expertise, and basic HR practices, which affect HRIS adoption, while their small structure gives HR professionals greater influence over decisions ([Oliveira & Martins, 2011](#)). Therefore, with the small number of employees in an SME HR department, the low number of HR employees has a high ability to

make strategic decisions. Therefore, since Gen Z is the future main workforce, its import to understand what factors affect SME Gen Z HR professionals' HRIS adoption.

Despite the use of UTAUT in focusing on HRIS, several key unresolved problems can be identified, namely the lack of sufficient explanation of how environmental factors and Gen Z-specific work values together influence HRIS adoption in SMEs, thus leaving some critical gaps in understanding adoption behavior in this context ([Y. Dwivedi et al., 2019](#); [Schroth, 2019](#)). Accordingly, the first gap is that, although a UTAUT has been applied to HRIS, most studies have focused on its core constructs, which include performance expectations, effort expectations, social influence, and facilitating conditions, but have neglected broader environmental factors, such as competitive pressures and digital ecosystem influences ([Y. Dwivedi et al., 2019](#)). The second gap is that past studies on HRIS adoption have mostly focused on large organizations, with limited attention paid to SMEs, which face various constraints such as limited resources, low technological readiness, and irregular human resource practices ([Marler & Parry, 2016](#); [Oliveira & Martins, 2011](#)). Finally, although Generation Z is a technology-savvy generation, there is a lack of research focusing on Gen Z HR professionals, as Gen Z's digital-native characteristics and expectations can significantly shape their HRIS usage behaviour ([Priporas et al., 2017](#)). It is necessary to uncover these gaps, and this conceptual study has the potential to fill them.

Further, this conceptual paper has two primary objectives: to identify a broad set of independent variables that influence HRIS adoption, including technological, environmental, and individual dimensions, and to develop a unified conceptual framework that explains HRIS adoption intentions, with particular relevance to SMEs and Gen Z HR professionals. In line with these objectives, the conceptual study addresses two main research questions. These are, what are the main technological, environmental, and individual factors that influence HRIS adoption? and how do these factors collectively explain HRIS adoption intentions within the proposed conceptual framework?

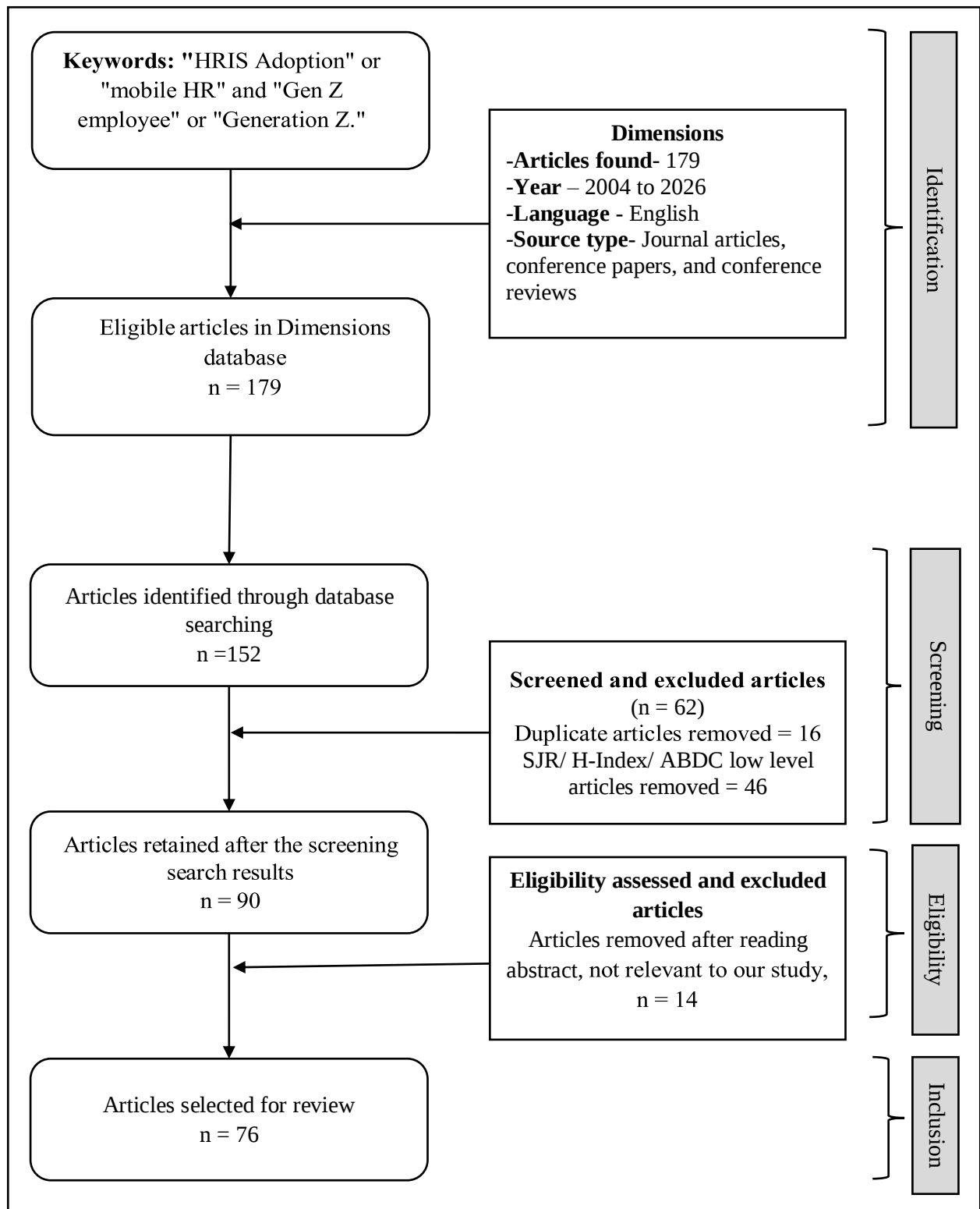
Literature Review

Prior studies were included based on the following pre-specified criteria, and the relevance and quality of the studies included in this concept paper were verified using the Dimensions database, which clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. According to the Table , overall criteria mainly considered here were publication in peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and conference reviews between 2004 and 2026, being written in English, and focusing on employee HRIS adoption in organizational contexts. These were used for this review and included past studies that were empirical, conceptual, or review-based research that provided insight into the adoption drivers, barriers, or social influences of HRIS adoption ([Bhokare et al., 2026](#)). Studies conducted in global contexts, rather than being limited to a region, were also considered to capture a broader range of adoption factors. The PRISMA flow chart below, Figure 1, describes the steps involved in identifying, screening, qualifying, and including selected studies. Overall, 76 Dimensions database publications and key SJR Q1 records met all inclusion criteria and were included in this Concept study.

Table 1: Dimensions Publication Data Summary Table

Metric	Value
Total Publications	179
Time Period	2004 - 2026
Total Citations	1,516
Most Common Publication Type	Edited Book (97 papers)
Top Sources	Studies in Systems, Decision and Control (12)
Top Research Fields	Commerce, Management, HR and Services

Source: Authors' compilations.



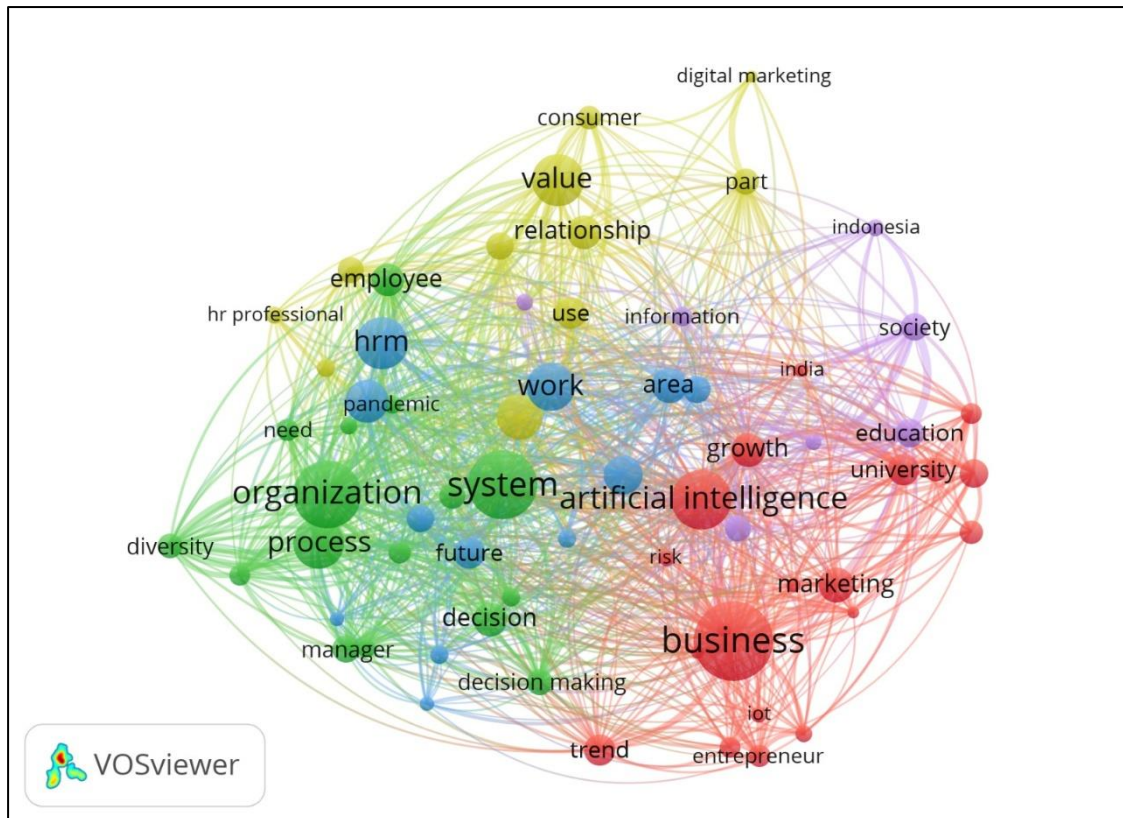


Figure 2. Keyword Network Map

Source: Authors' compilations using VOSviewer.

The bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer was performed to identify the intellectual structure of HRIS adoption and digital human resource management. According to Figure 2. **Keyword Network Map** researchers identify four prominent thematic clusters as keywords co-occurrence, in the green cluster represented organizational systems and HRM processes also highlighting the factors like infrastructure and this cluster reflect of facilitating condition, and the red cluster highlighting the artificial intelligence and business applications and demonstrating the performance based approach to technical evaluation in the field of human resources and this reflect of Performance expectancy, The yellow cluster represents the relational social behavior aspects of technology use in the workplace also Validate the social influence. Lastly, the blue cluster is more focused on education and public values, and also reflects emerging societal and regulatory influences on digital HRIS. This result supported extending the UTAUT framework by using environmental factors, and this result reveals major gaps in HRIS adoption.

HRIS Adoption in the Digital HR

Digital HRM frameworks describe how these technologies are leveraged to digitize HR processes, utilize self-service, and maintain a data-driven HR function. For example, mobile HR information systems and web-based HR portals enable employees and organizational managers to access HR services via smartphones and other digital devices, also it allows to view real-time information, which greatly improves usability and flexibility ([Shakir et al., 2024](#)). Previous studies have shown that organizations that effectively implement mobile HR information systems can improve HR efficiency, streamline workflows, and enhance user experience, but may face challenges such as resistance to change, limited resources, and lack of training ([Aslam & Akram, 2024](#)). This shows that Digital HR has both advantages and disadvantages.

Moreover, new studies show that many organizations, especially in traditional sectors, still demonstrate relatively low levels of digital HR innovation and rely on partially digitized or legacy HR systems ([Jooss et al., 2021](#)). Digital HRM is not just about technology, but also about rethinking the role of HR within the entire organization. Past research on digitalization in HR suggests that HR management needs to go beyond basic automation and use digital tools to generate strategic insights, and support workforce planning, and contribute to organizational agility ([Sharon & Aggarwal, 2025](#)). This often involves HRIS business warehousing, using comparative analytics to identify new trends and risks in the workforce, and leveraging digital techniques to improve employee engagement

and development ([Saxena & Mishra, 2023](#)). As a result, HRIS is closely linked to digital transformation processes within organizations, where HR functions play a role as users and change agents.

Theoretical Foundation: UTAUT in HRIS Adoption

The UTAUT describes a broad framework for explaining and explaining the use of information systems by integrating key elements from earlier models, such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). UTAUT theory proposes that performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions directly influence behavioural intention, thereby predicting actual usage behaviour ([Venkatesh et al., 2003](#)). Compared to TAM, which primarily focuses on perceived usefulness and ease of use, and TPB, which emphasizes attitudes and subjective norms, UTAUT offers a more comprehensive and unified explanation by incorporating both individual perceptions and social-organizational factors ([Ajzen, 1991](#); [Venkatesh et al., 2003](#)). In research on HRIS, UTAUT has consistently validated it across different sectors and countries, and it demonstrates strong predictive power in explaining the acceptance of HR new technologies by employees in the organization ([Y. Dwivedi et al., 2019](#)).

Past HRIS-related studies confirm that performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and social influence significantly influence HRIS adoption, while facilitating conditions often perform as facilitating factors rather than as direct predictors of intention ([Azmal et al., 2024](#)). These findings further strengthen the relevance of UTAUT as a model for explaining HRIS adoption behaviour. The domain of human resource management demonstrates the usefulness of UTAUT in explaining technology adoption. For example, most research on FinTech adoption has found that UTAUT constructs, including performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions, are significant predictors of users' intention to adopt digital financial services ([Tariq et al., 2024](#)). While alternative models such as TAM provide a simpler structure, they often lack the ability to capture facilitating conditions and social dynamics, which are critical in organizational settings like HRIS adoption. Similarities are found in HR technology and previous HRIS studies, with environmental factors, ease of use, and technical support influencing user satisfaction and continued use. These new findings suggest that the UTAUT framework provides a strong foundation for evaluating new digital systems, including HRIS and mobile HR applications, and analysing how variables are connected.

Performance Expectancy and HRIS Adoption

Gen Z HR professionals believe that performance expectations and the use of HRIS will improve their job performance, efficiency, and effectiveness in managing human resources ([Shabib et al., 2021](#)). In the human resource management context, performance benefits can include faster processing of employee requests, more accurate data, better reporting, improved compliance with regulations, and analytics to support employee planning and talent management. Young HR professionals are likely to view systems that provide performance benefits positively, as they are expected to handle high amounts of information and provide timely insights into management. Furthermore, empirical evidence from HR technology studies suggests that constructs such as perceived usefulness and performance expectations consistently predict high adoption intentions ([Dey & Saha, 2020](#)). Therefore, it is also important to consider how it impacts HRIS adoption and performance expectancy.

Effort Expectancy and HRIS Adoption

The usability, clarity, and user experience of the HRIS user interface and related processes capture the expectation. For Gen Z and young HR professionals who are accustomed to mobile apps and responsive digital platforms, complex systems can be frustrating, especially for users, and can create resistance, even if the underlying functionality is powerful ([Herman et al., 2024](#)). However, few new studies suggest that the effect of effort expectancy may gradually weaken over time as users become accustomed to using digital systems ([Azmal et al., 2024](#)). For Gen Z employee users who are highly exposed to intellectual platforms, the effect of effort expectancy may act as a basic expectation rather than a strong motivational factor.

Social Influence and HRIS Adoption

Social influence here reflects the degree to which Gen Z professionals perceive that important influential individuals or groups, such as supervisors, peers, upper management, or external professional communities, believe that HRIS should be used. In SMEs, where organizational culture and leadership behaviour can be as strongly influenced by technological decisions, clear encouragement and initiative from upper management or senior managers to use digital HR tools can play a crucial role ([Shakir et al., 2024](#)). Additionally, professional social networks and peer groups in society, and for young professionals who are still developing their professional identity, can influence perceptions of what constitutes up-to-date and professional human resource practices. Considering the studies based on the UTAUT framework for various sectors have shown that social influence can

significantly influence user behavioural intentions, especially in contexts where technology use is subject to normative expectations ([Tippavajjula & Sharma, 2026](#)). Therefore, it is also important to consider how it impacts HRIS adoption and social influence.

Facilitating Conditions and HRIS Adoption

The enabling Facilitating conditions here indicate that the technical and organizational infrastructure is in place to support Young Gen Z professionals in using HRIS. This includes access to appropriate digital hardware and software, reliable internet connectivity, technical support from IT staff or vendors, user training, and clear policies on data security controls. In resource-limited SMEs, the availability of this system can be a critical factor in enabling or limiting HRIS adoption ([Shakir et al., 2024](#)). Studies on HRIS user satisfaction indicate that inadequate IT support, inadequate training, and high technical stress can undermine user attitudes and reduce the likelihood of sustainable system use ([Herman et al., 2024](#)). On the other hand, a well-facilitated, environmentally friendly facility can encourage experimentation and learning of this approach among all users.

Environmental Factors and HRIS Adoption

Environmental factors are external conditions within which an organization operates, and they considerably influence technology adoption decisions ([Dwivedi et al., 2020](#)). These factors go on to show that even though UTAUT is a strong predictor, environmental factors also have a meaningful influence on technology adoption decisions. These factors represent the business environment such as technology development, regulatory environment, competition, or social digitalization. In this sense, [Dwivedi et al. \(2020\)](#) and [Verhoef et al. \(2021\)](#) show evidence that the adoption of technologies is affected by external environmental pressures imposed on organizations. Industry-level factors are also important for HRIS adoption in general. These include digitization, e-governance initiatives by governments, and competition within the industry to modernize human resources ([Alshamaileh et al., 2013](#)). Therefore, external factors are an unavoidable fact, and they are a significant factor in an organization.

Furthermore, [Vial \(2019\)](#) showed that context and technologies shape expectations and preconditions of digital systems usage. Environmental factors are more relevant to Gen Z professionals, who are more affected by global technological advancement and global digital ecosystems. Environmental factors such as competition, industry conditions and regulations have also been found to have a meaningful impact on HRIS adoption and organizational technology adoption decisions in previous studies ([Rahayu & Day, 2017](#)). This leads to the addition of a new construct in the UTAUT model: environmental factors for HRIS adoption.

However, previous extensions of the UTAUT have mainly emphasized individual and organizational level variables, but have limited consideration of macro-level environmental influences ([Y. Dwivedi et al., 2019](#); [Venkatesh et al., 2003](#)). This is a theoretical limitation, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises, which are more sensitive to external pressures due to their limited internal resources ([Oliveira & Martins, 2011](#)). Therefore, the inclusion of environmental factors by capturing these external influences, which are not adequately addressed in existing UTAUT extensions, provides a crucial extension.

Overall, the variables selected in this conceptual study are based on the strong theoretical basis of the UTAUT model, which has been widely validated as a reliable framework for explaining technology adoption behaviour ([Dwivedi et al., 2020](#)). The relevant variables, performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions, are included here due to their consistent empirical support in previous studies. Importantly, by incorporating environmental factors as an external contextual layer, this study enhances the explanatory power of UTAUT and addresses its limitations. It also provides a broader and clearer framework for understanding HRIS use in SME business environments. Accordingly, this integration will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of HRIS adoption in contemporary organizational contexts.

Gender and the Moderating Effect

UTAUT identifies demographic factors such as gender, age, and experience as important moderators of technology adoption relationships. In this conceptual study, gender is considered the primary moderating variable due to its consistent impact on users' perceptions of technology. Here, gender is found to significantly affect key UTAUT constructs and environmental factors, consistent with previous studies. Previous studies have found that men are more influenced by performance expectations, while women are more influenced by effort expectations and social influence ([Venkatesh et al., 2003](#); [Venkatesh et al., 2016](#)). However, in the Gen Z cohort, where age and income are relatively similar when considering other moderator variables, gender provides a clear difference in behavioral responses. It is the most appropriate of these mediating factors for examining differences in HRIS

adoption. Therefore, the explanatory power of the model would be strengthened by capturing how adoption relationships may vary within the Gen Z HR professional group through the inclusion of gender as a moderator.

Proposed Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

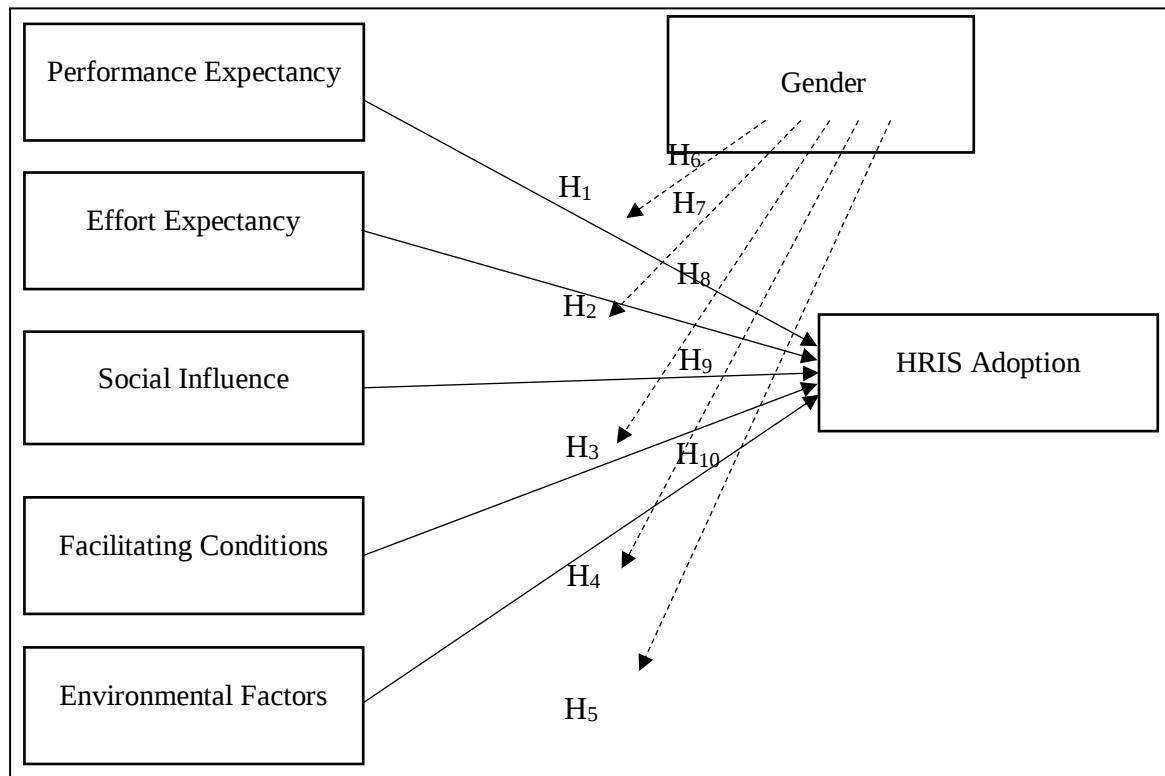


Figure 3: Proposed Conceptual Framework

Source: Authors' compilations

The proposed framework builds directly on the findings of the prior literature on technology adoption, and in particular, UTAUT and its components consistently identify performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and enabling conditions as key determinants of user acceptance (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Venkatesh et al., 2016). Accordingly, this conceptual study translates these established constructs into hypotheses H₁–H₄ to explain HRIS adoption behavior among Gen Z HR professionals in small and medium-sized enterprises. Furthermore, the literature has highlighted that UTAUT alone does not fully capture the contextual influences, such as competitive pressure, regulatory environment, and digital ecosystem readiness, which are increasingly important in technology adoption decisions (Y. Dwivedi et al., 2019). Based on this gap identified in the literature, environmental factors are introduced as an extended construct in H₅. Furthermore, the mediating effect of gender on the relationships identified in previous literature is introduced through this conceptual framework from H₆ to H₁₀. Accordingly, the proposed conceptual framework enables a more comprehensive and practical framework to explain HRIS adoption in SME settings. The conceptual framework outlines the expected relationships between performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, enabling conditions, environmental factors, and HRIS adoption, and the mediating effect of gender. Hypotheses are formulated based on these relationships

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- **H₁:** There is a significant impact of performance expectancy on HRIS adoption.
- **H₂:** There is a significant impact of effort expectancy on HRIS adoption.
- **H₃:** There is a significant impact of social influence on HRIS adoption.
- **H₄:** There is a significant impact of facilitating conditions on HRIS adoption.
- **H₅:** There is a significant impact of environmental factors on HRIS adoption
- **H₆:** Gender significantly moderates the relationship between performance expectancy and HRIS adoption.
- **H₇:** Gender significantly moderates the relationship between effort expectancy and HRIS adoption.
- **H₈:** Gender significantly moderates the relationship between social influence and HRIS adoption.
- **H₉:** Gender significantly moderates the relationship between facilitating conditions and HRIS adoption.

- **H₁₀:** Gender significantly moderates the relationship between environmental factors and HRIS adoption.

These hypotheses provide a structured framework for data collection and analysis.

Significance of the Study

The proposed conceptual study is important from theoretical and practical perspectives. From a theoretical perspective, it expands the UTAUT by considering environmental factors alongside core constructs performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions in explaining Generation Z HR professionals' adoption of HR information systems in SMEs. Also, allows for the identification of gender-based differences through the mediating effect of gender. Although some literature describes the application of UTAUT in technology adoption contexts, it is primarily limited to large organizations and does assume a quantitative interaction between generational characteristics and SME-specific barriers (Dwivedi et al., 2020). Moreover, studies of the HRIS field have considered users as a uniform group with little attention to Gen Z as its own distinct digital native cohort (Priporas et al., 2017). This thus contributes to literatures by providing a more current and contextualised understanding of digital HR adoption through integrating and synthesising these dimensions into one framework, especially in resource-poor environments associated with SMEs (Marler & Parry, 2016). In practice, the research offers valuable insights for SMEs and HR practitioners on the successful implementation of HRIS. In SMEs, due to a critical shortage of financial and technical manpower resources, adoption of HRIS becomes a wasted investment if ineffective.

However, the proposed framework indicates that organizations should focus on improving perceived benefits of performance increase and ease of use, along with social and managerial support, while promoting facilitating conditions such as training and infrastructure (Dwivedi et al., 2020). In addition, incorporating environmental aspects emphasizes the need to address external pressures such as digital transformation trends, competition, and regulatory influences that are particularly relevant for SMEs in dynamic business environments (Strohmeier, 2020). These insights can also help organizations better align their HRIS strategies with the expectations and work behaviours of Gen Z employees, ultimately leading to higher adoption rates and greater human resource operational effectiveness.

Conclusion

The conceptual study provides a broad conceptual explanation of HRIS use among Gen Z HR professionals in small and medium-sized enterprises and extends UTAUT to include environmental factors. Theoretically, it advances the literature on technology use by integrating performance expectations, effort expectations, institutional influences such as enabling conditions, and external influences such as environmental influences into a unified framework and moderating gender. This provides a more comprehensive understanding of adoption behaviour in the context of SMEs in the business world. In practice, this study provides valuable guidance to SMEs' managers, policymakers, and HRIS developers on various needs such as improving system use, investing in training and technical support, and strengthening digital infrastructure. It also addresses external pressures, such as competition and regulatory support to accelerate adoption.

However, the conceptual study is limited by its conceptual nature. This may affect the robustness and generalizability of the findings beyond Gen Z and small and medium-sized settings, as the proposed relationships have not yet been empirically tested. In addition, as environmental constructs are broad, they need to be further refined into specific, measurable dimensions. Future research could focus on empirical validation of the conceptual framework using quantitative methods such as structural equation modelling through prospective studies. It should also focus on testing its applicability across industries, countries, and generational cohorts. Further studies could further disentangle environmental factors and better understand their individual effects. This could strengthen the explanatory power and practical relevance of the model.

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