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Social media's dark side: inducing boundary conflicts

Social media's
dark side

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the negative consequences of work-related social media use, and the extent to which the presence of social media policies in organizations are able to mitigate these consequences.

Design/methodology/approach – Internet-based survey data ($N = 575$) was analyzed using structural equation modeling to test the indirect effect of social media use on exhaustion through work/life conflict.

Findings – This study shows that there is a dark side to social media use, as employees' work-related social media use might be intrusive to their personal lives while simultaneously increasing life to work conflict. Furthermore, the results indicate that the current implementation of social media usage policies at work is not sufficient to defend employees against the negative consequences of social media use; namely, work/life conflict and ultimately exhaustion.

Research limitations/implications – The indirect pathways are assessed using cross-sectional data, which makes verifying causal relationships difficult.

Practical implications – The findings underscore the need for contemporary organizations to pragmatically intensify their efforts to mitigate the impacts of boundary conflict on workers' well-being that result from increased use of social media for work.

Originality/value – This paper is among the first to demonstrate that the use of social media for work is related to exhaustion through increased work/life conflict.

Keywords Exhaustion, Boundary management, Social media policies, Work to life conflict

Paper type Research paper

In recent years, communication technologies, and specifically social media, have been increasingly integrated in the workplace, leading to a redefinition of organizational structures, business processes and daily work routines (Bucher *et al.*, 2013). Social media use in organizations has been linked to effective communication practices (e.g. Trimi and Galanxhi, 2014; Vitak *et al.*, 2012), increased performance (Shami *et al.*, 2014), relationship management (van Zoonen *et al.*, 2014) and opportunities for collaborative work and the disclosure of professional identities (Ollier-Malaterre *et al.*, 2013). These positive associations that accrue from social media use have caused them to gain traction in the context of work (Shami *et al.*, 2014). Recent findings suggest that 36.5 percent of the tweets sent from personally owned Twitter accounts are work related (van Zoonen *et al.*, 2016). Although social media offers new and exciting methods of work-related interaction, this new communication paradigm also comes with challenges (Bucher *et al.*, 2013).

For instance, the integration of social media into organizations has made boundary management a more profound challenge for employees (Treem and Leonardi, 2012). On the one hand, social technologies might enable role transitions through increased flexibility and permeability (Hill *et al.*, 2003), which could ameliorate inter-role conflict by enabling employees to undertake role transition when necessary (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000). However, the hypothesis that the use of technology positively influences transitions between work and life roles lacks support in the literature; rather, Chesley (2005) found that the use of



technology increases negative spillover effects. These findings are substantiated by research that concludes that social media brings forth a blurring of boundaries between private and work domains, forcing employees to cope with demands from both domains simultaneously (Del Bosque, 2013; Ollier-Malaterre *et al.*, 2013). This can lead to an invasion of work into the private domain or vice versa (Ayyagari *et al.*, 2011).

To date, little is known about the negative consequences that might result from social media use, such as increased stress levels (Bucher *et al.*, 2013) or the blurring of boundaries (Del Bosque, 2013). For instance, if the notion that the entrenchment of social media for work is blurring boundaries is accepted (e.g. Ollier-Malaterre *et al.*, 2013), its use in the workplace may cause exhaustion as a result of increased boundary conflicts. However, in spite of apparent interest in the role of social technologies in shaping work and private life, their relationship with boundary conflicts has been inadequately tested.

The 24-hour connectedness facilitated by the use of social media for work might lead to an invasion of work into the private domain (Bucher *et al.*, 2013) and present employees with a classical organizational challenge of managing the boundaries between their professional and personal lives (Ollier-Malaterre *et al.*, 2013). Spouse, parent, valued team member, manager; individuals have multiple identities, both within and outside the workplace (Rothbard and Ramarajan, 2009). Typically, identities are triggered or activated one at a time in the relevant domains. However, on social media, identities often spillover or intermingle across domains (Ollier-Malaterre *et al.*, 2013), as social media complicates our metaphors of time and place, including the belief that audiences are separate from one-other (Marwick and Boyd, 2010). Although social media facilitates increased connectedness to the workplace, employees might simultaneously experience difficulties in navigating work/life boundaries (Vitak *et al.*, 2012).

In turn, work/life conflict can cause employees to experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion (Bakker *et al.*, 2005). Thus, new possibilities also present challenges, as employees have to learn to cope with an invasion of work matters into the private domain and vice versa. Simultaneously, organizations attempt to deal with the increasing use of social technologies in the workplace by implementing social media policies (Dreher, 2014). These policies are primarily aimed at reducing risks for the organization, such as legal liabilities, or at promoting responsible use to help employees navigate in these online environments (Dreher, 2014), thus, helping employees to maintain boundaries between professional and personal roles online (Linke and Zeffass, 2012). However, it is as yet unknown whether current implementations of social media policies at work are sufficient to defend employees against the consequences of use regarding work/life conflicts.

Work/life conflicts

Boundary theory explores individuals' role transitions between the different roles they occupy, and maintains that individuals erect mental fences around their work and life domains as a way of ordering these environments and their roles within them (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000; Ollier-Malaterre *et al.*, 2013). Employees cognitively and behaviorally demarcate physical, temporal and social arenas to organize their environments, creating different domains: e.g. "life" and "work" (Rothbard and Ramarajan, 2009). These boundaries delineate employees' professional and personal domains and help to avoid the co-activation of incongruent and incommensurable facets of their identities (Ollier-Malaterre *et al.*, 2013; Rothbard and Ramarajan, 2009).

This study focuses on the influence of work-related social media use on employees' perceived work/life conflict. Work/life conflict can occur in two directions: the interference of work with life or that of life with work (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). This construct is referred to as work/life (rather than work/family or work/home) conflict in order to emphasize the potential role of work-related social media use in interfering with one's personal life in general, including, but not limited to, family (Boswell and Olson-Buchanan, 2007).

Work/life conflict is defined as "a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and life domains are mutually incompatible in some respect" (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985, p. 77). Further delineation of the work/life conflict construct suggests two primary characteristics (Michel *et al.*, 2011). First, role pressures are directional and produce negative effects from one domain to another. Hence, work/life conflict is a form of inter-role conflict in which work- or life-role demands are mutually incompatible, so that meeting demands in one domain makes it difficult to do so in the other (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000). Role pressures originate from expectations expressed by others in the work and life domains, as well as from values held by individuals regarding their own role behaviors (Kahn and Quinn, 1970). Second, work/life conflict is generally seen as time-based, strain-based and behavior-based (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985).

Time-based conflict occurs when meeting demands in one domain consumes time needed to do so in others (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). The increased integration of communication technologies in the workplace specifically challenges spatial and temporal boundaries between life domains (Boswell and Olson-Buchanan, 2007). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) argued that demands may go unmet when an individual is either physically absent from a domain or is mentally preoccupied with another domain.

The use of communication technology has been associated with increased work/life conflict (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007). Similarly, the use of social media may result in feeling overly connected (Bucher *et al.*, 2013; Fonner and Roloff, 2012), and as such function as a role stressor, making it difficult for employees to mentally distance themselves from work or life roles (Park *et al.*, 2011). The absence of physical and temporal boundaries associated with these technologies may cause them to be used in ways that are intrusive to other life domains (Nansen *et al.*, 2010), making role transitions more difficult (Park *et al.*, 2011).

Strain-based conflict occurs when strain from one domain makes it difficult to meet the demands of another. Strain such as tension, anxiety or fatigue reduces one's personal resources, which are needed for in-role performance. Hence, strain-based conflict does not necessarily imply conflicting demands, but rather indicates that mere participation in one domain can produce strain that hampers role performance in another (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000). Several scholars have argued that the use of communication technologies may induce strain as a result of increased interruptions (Fonner and Roloff, 2012) or information overload (Bucher *et al.*, 2013). Likewise, work-related technology use after business hours is positively related to employees' perception of work/life conflict (Boswell and Olson-Buchanan, 2007). Similarly, as personal conversations on social media continue during work hours and work conversations continue during time off (van Zoonen *et al.*, 2016), they may distract individuals from their current role demands, causing strain.

Finally, behavior-based conflict occurs when "behaviors developed in one domain are incompatible with role demands in another domain, and the person is unable to adjust behavior when moving between domains" (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000, p. 182). Social

media complicates such role transitions, as the boundaries between work and life diminish (e.g. Del Bosque, 2013; Marwick and Boyd, 2010; Ollier-Malaterre *et al.*, 2013). For instance, as professional and personal worlds collide on social media (Ollier-Malaterre *et al.*, 2013), online utterances that are appropriate in the personal sphere might not be acceptable in a professional context, and vice versa (Marwick and Boyd, 2010). Furthermore, social media use in general can be seen as inappropriate, as its use in organizations has been associated with cyber-loafing and risky behavior (Lieberman *et al.*, 2011).

Hence, the use of communication technology has been associated with increased work/life conflict (Chesley, 2005; Golden and Geisler, 2007; Park *et al.*, 2011; Valcour and Hunter, 2005). It was argued above that social media use is related to time-, strain- and behavior-based work/life conflict. The general argument for the hypothesized relationship between work-related social media use and work/life conflict is substantiated by resource drain theory. This theory views resources such as time, attention and energy as finite (e.g. Edwards and Rothbard, 2000; Small and Riley, 1990; Staines, 1980). Thus, resources allocated to each domain subtract from the finite resources available to individuals (Michel *et al.*, 2011). As the processing and publishing of information on social media places demands on employees' cognitive or psychological capacities, this can cause the depletion of resources available for role demands in another domain (Michel *et al.*, 2011). Assuming that physical and psychological resources are limited, increased work demands in the form of work-related social media use will result in greater cross-domain conflict. Similarly, employees may process personal information on social media while at work, draining the resources they have available for work-related tasks and causing work/life conflict. As such, resource drain theory implies a positive relationship between work-related social media use and role conflicts.

Work/life conflicts and exhaustion

Before social media gained momentum in the workplace, Chesley (2005) linked the use of communication technologies at work to the distress of individuals through increased work/life conflict. In the context of telecommuting, cross-domain conflicts due to the use of communication technologies have also been associated with employee well-being (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007; Park *et al.*, 2011). In addition, the use of personally owned smartphones at work and at home has been linked to emotional exhaustion through work/life conflict (Yun *et al.*, 2012). This is especially important given that social media is often used on mobile devices (Humphreys *et al.*, 2013).

These findings are supported by an abundance of research linking work/life conflict to a variety of attitudes and behaviors of individual and organizational relevance. For instance, work/life conflict is predictive of emotional exhaustion, depression, cardiovascular illness and lowered job and life satisfaction (Golden, 2012; Karatepe and Tekinkus, 2006; Mauno and Kinnunen, 1999). Moreover, Bakker *et al.* (2005) demonstrated that work/home interference is a primary source of exhaustion. Similarly, a longitudinal study by Demerouti *et al.* (2004) showed a significant relationship between work/home interference and exhaustion. Individuals who experience conflict between different roles are subject to exhaustion as a result of the tensions between different life domains, which is likely to drain their emotional energy (Golden, 2012):

- H1. Work-related social media use is positively related to (a) work to life conflict, which is in turn positively related to (b) emotional exhaustion.
- H2. Work-related social media use is positively related to (a) life to work conflict, which in turn is positively related to (b) emotional exhaustion.

Social media policies

To effectively deal with the potential risks from employees' social media use, organizations develop and implement social media policies (Dreher, 2014). As employees use social media both at work and for work, many organizations are developing social media policies as part of contemporary governance practices (Johnston, 2014). Some policies acknowledge the merging life domains: "Use of social media by staff and contractors is not limited to the workplace and occurs for professional and personal purposes both in and out of work hours" (Johnston, 2014, p. 7). With respect to the work/life distinction, almost all policies make the point that individuals must take responsibility for their social media actions (Johnston, 2014). When these policies are successful, they are likely to reduce any negative effects resulting from work-related social media use.

Social media policies advise employees on how social media communications should be dealt with (Dreher, 2014; Linke and Zeffass, 2012). These guidelines are often formulated to educate employees on the use of social media, both on the job and for personal use (Linke and Zeffass, 2012). Thus, these policies advocate the responsible use of social media and provide advice on how best to use these tools to achieve a desired result (Macnamara and Zeffass, 2012). Similarly, these policies should help mitigate negative consequences for employees and ultimately organizations (Dreher, 2014) by providing behavioral etiquette and addressing issues such as the separation of professional and private comments (Linke and Zeffass, 2012). Employees are likely to uphold these rules due to the psychological and implied contract between employees and their organization (Rousseau, 1989). Hence, the relationship between work-related social media use and boundary conflict is conditional upon the presence or absence of social media policies:

H3a. Social media policies reduce the positive relationship between work-related social media use and work to life conflict.

H3b. Social media policies reduce the positive relationship between work-related social media use and life to work conflict.

Methods

Participants and procedure

A total of 575 employees voluntarily and anonymously participated in an internet-based questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered among Dutch employees who worked at least 20 hours per week in an organization with at least 30 employees. These employees worked 39.28 (SD = 9.95) hours on average per week. Of these respondents, 64.3 percent were male. The average age of the respondents was 42.06 years (SD = 11.33); 37 percent held a managerial position within their organization. The employees worked in the following sectors: government/public administration (16.5 percent), education/science (12.0 percent), healthcare (11.7 percent), business services (11.1 percent), trade/commercial services (7.3 percent), industry (6.4 percent) and financial services (5.0 percent).

Measures

Social media use for work was assessed using six items, based on the taxonomy proposed by van Zoonen *et al.* (2016). The items included: "I share organizational accomplishments on personally owned social media." As this scale has not been validated, it was cross-validated with an independent sample. The results of this validation are presented with the CFA.

Social media policy. Social media policies were assessed using three items, including “My organization has specific policies in place concerning the use of social media.” This scale was derived from the work of Macnamara and Zeffass (2012).

For the dependent variables, well-validated scales with promising psychometric qualities can be drawn upon. Work/life conflict was measured using four items derived from Netemeyer *et al.* (1996), including items such as “The demands of my work interfere with my home and family life.” In turn, life/work conflict was measured using five items derived from Netemeyer *et al.* (1996). This scale includes items such as “I have to put off doing things at work because of demands on my time at home.”

Emotional exhaustion represents the individual stress dimension of burnout and refers to feeling overextended and depleted of emotional and physical resources (Maslach *et al.*, 2001). This construct was measured using five items of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). This included items such as “A full day’s work is a heavy burden for me.”

Social media policy was measured with dichotomous indicators (1 = yes, 0 = no). All other variables were measured on a five-point Likert scale anchored (1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree). The means, standard errors, zero-order correlations and α coefficients are outlined in Table I. Table II lists all scale items.

Analysis

Structural equation modeling using AMOS 20 was used to test the hypotheses. In order to gauge model fit, several fit indices were assessed. Two incremental fit indices were used: the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) and the comparative fit index (CFI). Model fit indices of > 0.95 indicate good model fit. Two absolute fit indices were examined: a standardized version of the root mean squared residual (SRMR) and the root mean square of approximation (RMSEA), with cutoff values of ≤ 0.08 and ≤ 0.05 , respectively, which indicate a close model fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999). In addition, the χ^2 statistic was reported. In order to estimate model parameters and corresponding confidence intervals, 5,000 bootstrap samples were extracted from the data.

In order to model the moderation effects, the procedure recommended by Jöreskog and Yang (1996) was followed. Hence, a single indicator moderator variable was

Variable	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Social media use	3.47 (1.42)	<i>0.93</i>									
2 Work/life conflict	2.43 (1.03)	0.17*	<i>0.90</i>								
3 Life/work conflict	2.28 (0.94)	0.25*	0.58*	<i>0.91</i>							
4 Social media policies	0.44 (0.39)	0.02	-0.06	-0.05	<i>0.73</i>						
5 Emotional exhaustion	2.47 (0.99)	0.09*	0.56*	0.49*	-0.01	<i>0.94</i>					
6 Gender	1.36 (0.48)	-0.04	-0.09*	-0.12*	-0.06	0.03	-				
7 Age	42.06 (11.33)	0.05	-0.09*	-0.12*	0.03	-0.16*	-0.15*	-			
8 Work experience	19.36 (11.46)	0.03	-0.12*	-0.13*	0.06	-0.17*	-0.17*	0.92*	-		
9 Hours a week	39.28 (9.95)	0.08	0.15*	0.05	0.04	-0.03	-0.27*	0.06	0.10*	-	
10 Managerial position	1.37 (0.48)	0.11*	0.16*	0.15*	0.07	0.11*	-0.17*	-0.13*	0.14*	0.27*	-

Table I. Correlations and descriptive statistics

Notes: N=575. Values on the diagonal in italics are reliabilities (α). The two dichotomous variables were anchored as follows: gender (1 = male, 2 = female) and managerial position (1 = yes, 2 = no). *Significance levels at $p < 0.05$

Item	R^2	St. factor loading	Unst. factor loading ^a	SE
<i>Work-related social media use</i>				
I use personal social media to get in touch with people who have expertise in specific fields	0.60	0.773	1.000 ^b	
I use personal social media to tell others about my work	0.63	0.791	1.022	0.05
I use personal social media to maintain professional relationships	0.67	0.819	1.059	0.05
I publish information about my profession on social media	0.77	0.876	1.133	0.05
I stay up to date with co-workers' and professional relations activities using personal social media	0.76	0.869	1.133	0.05
I share my organization's accomplishments on personal social media	0.67	0.816	1.124	0.05
<i>Work/life conflict</i>				
The demands of my work interfere with my personal life	0.61	0.783	1.000 ^b	
The amount of time my job takes up makes it difficult to fulfill personal responsibilities	0.83	0.912	1.175	0.05
Things I want to do at home do not get done because of the demands my job puts on me	0.85	0.920	1.212	0.05
Due to work-related duties, I have to make changes to my plans for personal activities	0.52	0.718	0.943	0.05
<i>Life/work conflict</i>				
The demands of my family or friends interfere with work-related activities	0.63	0.793	1.000 ^b	
I have to put off doing things at work because of demands on my time at home	0.62	0.787	1.041	0.05
Things I want to do at work don't get done because of the demands of my personal life	0.73	0.855	1.095	0.05
My personal life interferes with my responsibilities at work, such as getting to work on time, accomplishing daily tasks and working overtime	0.73	0.852	1.009	0.04
Family-related strain interferes with my ability to perform job-related duties	0.60	0.777	0.955	0.05
<i>Social media policies</i>				
My organization has social media policies in place	0.57	0.783	1.000 ^b	
In my job, specific guidelines for social media usage apply	0.81	0.897	1.193	0.11
My organization monitors employees' social media use	0.20	0.450	0.598	0.06
<i>Exhaustion</i>				
I feel mentally drained by my work	0.71	0.841	1.000 ^b	
A full day's work is a heavy burden for me	0.74	0.862	1.037	0.04
I feel exhausted by my work	0.84	0.918	1.087	0.04
At the end of the workday I feel empty	0.81	0.899	1.076	0.04
I feel tired when I get up in the morning with a full workday ahead of me	0.64	0.798	0.953	0.04

Notes: ^aAll factor loadings are significant at $p < 0.05$; ^bunit loading indicator constrained to 1

Table II.
Measurement model

modeled using the main effect indicators, with the largest factor loadings on their initial latent construct (Jöreskog and Yang, 1996).

Due to the cross-sectional nature of the data, potential common method bias was assessed. First, Harman's single-factor test was conducted, extracting a single factor in a principal component analysis for all the observed indicators in the model, which explains 34.05 percent of the variance. These results indicated that common

method variance was not a problem in the data. Subsequently, a common latent factor analysis test was conducted to determine the common method variance of the model, which was 11.56 percent.

Results

Measurement model

The measurement model indicates good model fit: $\chi^2(220) = 478.73$; CFI = 0.97; TLI = 0.97; SRMR = 0.03 and RMSEA = 0.045 (CI: 0.040, 0.051). Cross-factor correlations were examined to determine discriminant validity. The highest correlation was 0.58 between work to life conflict and life to work conflict, which is not surprising as these are distinct yet interrelated constructs (Netemeyer *et al.*, 1996). All other correlations between the latent constructs ranged from -0.06 to 0.56 (see Table I), which demonstrates the distinctiveness of the constructs in the model.

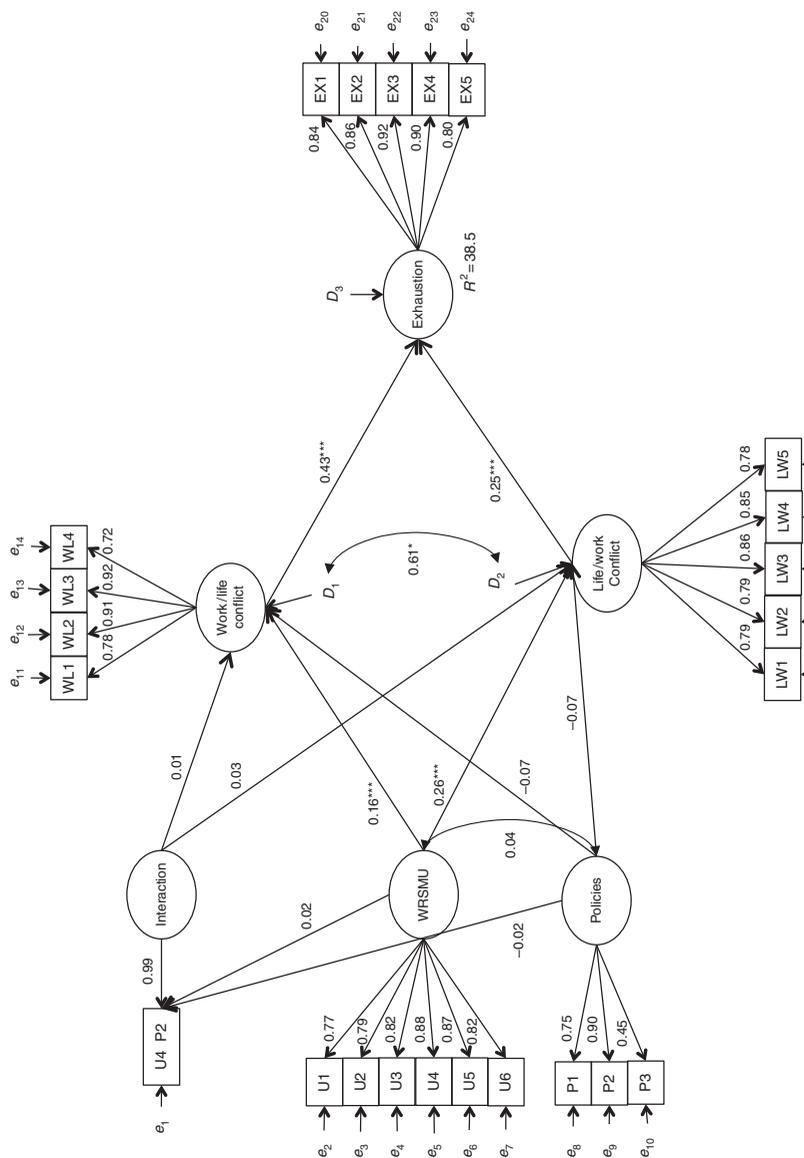
Convergent validity was assessed by examining the factor loadings and squared multiple correlations. Notably, one item of the social media policy scale, "My organizations monitors employees' social media use," yielded a relatively low-factor loading (0.450). However, this item was kept due to its conceptual importance. Additionally, it should be noted that binary variables tend to produce suppressed factor loadings. All other loadings on the intended latent constructs were significant and sizable, ranging from 0.72 to 0.92 (see Figure 1), indicating satisfactory convergent validity. Hence, the measurement model shows adequate measures of the latent constructs, and further examination of the structural model is justified.

An independent sample of Dutch workers ($n = 125$) was used to cross-validate the work-related social media use and social media policy scales. In this sample, 44 percent of the respondents were female. These participants worked an average of 39.29 hours per week (SD = 12.27); their average age was 30.14 years (SD = 8.43). The measurement model suggests good model fit: $\chi^2(25) = 49.09$; CFI = 0.97; TLI = 0.95; SRMR = 0.06 and RMSEA = 0.088 (CI: 0.51, 0.124). All the factor loadings ranged between 0.55 and 0.94 on the intended latent construct. The correlation between the latent factors was -0.12 . These results support the validity of the scales developed to measure the constructs: i.e. work-related social media use ($\alpha = 0.90$) and social media policies ($\alpha = 0.83$)[1].

Hypotheses testing

A structural model with indirect effects of work-related social media use on exhaustion through life to work conflict and work to life conflict was estimated. This model also included the moderation effect of work-related social media use and social media policies. The structural model fit the data: $\chi^2(241) = 503.93$; CFI = 0.97; TLI = 0.97; SRMR = 0.04 and RMSEA = 0.044 (CI: 0.038, 0.049). Figure 1 presents the structural model with standardized path coefficients. Table III provides the bootstrapping estimates for the indirect effects, including the confidence intervals. As Figure 1 portrays, work-related social media use is associated with emotional exhaustion through work to life conflict. The indirect effect, as reflected in *H1*, is significant: $b^* = 0.079$, BC95% [0.042; 0.122] $p = 0.002$. Similarly, in line with *H2*, the indirect effect of work-related social media use on emotional exhaustion through enhanced life to work conflict was significant: $b^* = 0.075$, BC95% [0.043; 0.108] $p = 0.002$.

Notably, the direct effect of work-related social media use on emotional exhaustion was not significant: $b^* = -0.071$, BC95% [-0.136; -0.002] $p = 0.095$. Moreover, in the model without the mediators there was no significant direct effect between work-related social media use and emotional exhaustion: $b^* = 0.089$, BC95% [0.009; 0.172]



Notes: $n = 575$. Standardized regression weights between latent constructs are flagged *** $p < 0.001$. All factor loadings were significant at $p < 0.001$

Figure 1. Structural model with standardized estimates

Table III.

Breakdown of effects

	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	<i>p</i>
<i>Indirect effect $x \rightarrow m \rightarrow y$</i>					
<i>H1</i> : WRSMU \rightarrow work/life \rightarrow exhaustion	0.079	0.024	0.042	0.122	0.002
<i>H2</i> : WRSMU \rightarrow life/work \rightarrow exhaustion	0.075	0.019	0.043	0.108	0.002
<i>Direct effect</i>					
<i>H1a</i> : WRSMU \rightarrow work/life	0.211	0.059	0.115	0.307	0.002
<i>H2a</i> : WRSMU \rightarrow life/work	0.280	0.052	0.193	0.366	0.002
<i>H1b</i> : Work/life \rightarrow exhaustion	0.375	0.043	0.306	0.448	0.002
<i>H2b</i> : Life/work \rightarrow exhaustion	0.267	0.052	0.183	0.356	0.002
<i>Moderation effects</i>					
<i>H3a</i> : Moderated by social media policies	0.010	0.047	-0.059	0.090	0.819
<i>H3b</i> : Moderated by social media policies	0.025	0.038	-0.034	0.087	0.535

Note: WRSMU, work-related social media use

$p = 0.095$. Thus, this reflects an indirect effect rather than a mediation effect (Hayes, 2009). These findings support the rationale reflected in *H1* and *H2*.

The third hypothesis entails a moderation effect of social media policies. The moderation effect was modeled with the observed indicators "I publish information about my profession on social media" and "In my job specific guidelines for social media usage apply," thereby following the procedure suggested by Jöreskog and Yang (1996). The moderation effect on work to life conflict was not significant ($b^* = 0.010$, BC95% [-0.063; 0.087] $p = 0.886$). Similarly, the moderation effect on life to work conflict was also not significant ($b^* = 0.025$, BC95% [-0.036; 0.085] $p = 0.571$). These results do not support *H3a* or *H3b*. Notably, social media policies also appeared to have no significant direct effects on work to life ($b^* = -0.096$, BC95% [-0.208; 0.013] $p = 0.148$) and life to work conflicts ($b^* = -0.082$, BC95% [-0.169; 0.010] $p = 0.143$).

The control variables gender, age, years of work experience, managerial position and working hours per week were consecutively modeled. All the parameters in the final model held true when controlling for these variables, indicating that the control variables had no influence on the overall findings.

Discussion

This study shows that work-related social media use is a source of boundary conflicts for employees, and that current social media policies in organizations are insufficient in addressing these detrimental effects. This in turn leads to the enhanced emotional exhaustion of employees, as managing these conflicts drains the resources they have available for other work and life demands. As such, the increased connectedness that results from social media use may come at the expense of employees' psychological well-being.

Theoretical implications

This study highlights an underlying mechanism that links work-related social media use to emotional exhaustion through increased boundary conflicts. Employees experience more boundary conflicts when they use personally owned social media for work. The findings suggest that social media use can trigger role pressures that produce negative spillover effects from one domain to another, leading to increased

emotional exhaustion. Based on an interview study, Vitak *et al.* (2012) argued that social media is related to a blurring of boundaries between users' personal and professional lives. This was further theorized in the conceptual work of Ollier-Malaterre *et al.* (2013). This study substantiates the notion that boundaries become increasingly blurred on social media by empirically showing that work-related social media use is related to boundary conflicts. Specifically, it suggests that the integration of work and personal domains on social media causes work demands to interfere with personal ones and personal demands to interfere with work ones.

Moreover, this study shows that social media is likely to induce time-, strain- and behavior-based role conflict. As conversations on social media never rest, the likelihood that personal conversations continue during work and work conversations continue beyond regular work hours increases. This reasoning is supported by research that shows that almost half of work-related Twitter messages are sent outside regular work hours and 52.1 percent are sent during regular office hours (van Zoonen *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, the processing of information on social media may distract individuals from current role demands, causing strain. Finally, information and online behaviors on social media cause role conflicts as professional and personal contacts are merged into one audience, which may complicate role transitions. In sum, the use of work-related social media requires psychological expenditure that may extract from the finite resources available, causing role conflicts. This suggests that the use of social media, like other communication technologies, induces time-, strain- and behavior-based work/life conflict, as it complicates, rather than aids, role transitions. This might have far-reaching consequences for employees and organizations, as these conflicts are associated with emotional exhaustion (Karatepe and Tekinkus, 2006).

Practical implications

Although the use of social media in organizations is evolving at a rapid pace, many organizations are still uncertain about how to deal with this phenomenon. The findings of this study suggest that current social media policies are insufficient to counteract the negative consequences of work-related social media use, as reflected by the negligible effect of social media policies on the relationship between work-related social media use and work/life conflicts. An explanation for this non-significant finding might be found in the work of Linke and Zerfass (2012). In a Delphi study, the authors concluded that the development of social media policies in organizations is still in its early stages. Moreover, these policies might be first and foremost directed at protecting the organization from misguided or unwarranted social media utterances, thus, focusing on a clear understanding of appropriate and lawful social media use, rather than protecting employees from the negative consequences of social media use on the individual level (Johnston, 2014).

Moreover, the rapid adoption of social media in the workplace may cause its use to outpace the formal regulations for social media use as reflected in companies' social media policies. This study therefore suggests contemporary organizations should pragmatically intensify their efforts in mitigating the impact of social media use on workers' well-being through boundary conflicts. Improving social media policies to better address the challenges employees face from using social media might be a worthy focus of future energy. Improved social media policies might help employees navigate between the increasing demands from different life domains that social media use inflicts upon them. These policies should also be flexible enough to be adjusted to the changing nature of social media.

Hence, the rules of conduct for employees need to become more fully developed, and include a focus on the individual consequences of social media use for work. One way of doing this with the least internal resistance is to engage employees in the development process (Johnston, 2014). The findings suggest that organizations or management should be mindful of consulting with employees about responsible management of the public-private divide. As described above, policies to date have inadequately protected employees from the negative consequences of social media use, and in fact have caused them to experience exhaustion as a result of increasing boundary conflicts.

Limitations and future research

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, in this study, the indirect pathways are assessed using cross-sectional data, which makes verifying causal relationships difficult. Additional longitudinal studies are necessary in order to make stronger causal claims.

Second, the measurements were based on self-reports taken the same day. Future studies might benefit from multiple-source data to reduce the effects of common method bias. For instance, research designs could include actual social media posts from employees to represent work-related social media use.

This study examined whether employees are aware of current social media policies and/or specific guidelines for social media use that are in place in their organization. However, it did not examine whether current policies are specifically aimed at reducing work/life conflicts and can thus be deemed ineffective, or whether they fail to recognize these consequences of social media use altogether. However, it can be concluded that these policies do not mitigate the negative consequences of social media use in terms of reducing work/life conflicts. Future research could conduct content analyses so as to provide a more detailed understanding of the issues addressed in social media policies.

This study revealed that external motivational processes (i.e. formal guidelines) do not reduce boundary conflicts as a result of social media use. Researchers have theorized about the use of intrinsic boundary management strategies that individuals might employ to avoid boundary conflicts (Ollier-Malaterre *et al.*, 2013). They have argued that employees can engage in several different strategies to alleviate potential role conflict in online environments, depending on their self-evaluation motives and preferences regarding the segmentation or integration of different life domains. For instance, employees with a greater desire to segment their life domains could educate their connections to recognize that some conversations are personal, and ask them to therefore refrain from commenting in ways that would be inconvenient. Future studies could empirically examine the effectiveness of such strategies in reducing boundary conflicts.

Conclusion

Although social media offers several advantages to employees, this study shows that there are important downsides to work-related social media use that are inadequately mitigated by current social media policies. Recently, scholars have addressed other potential negative effects of increased connectivity through social media, such as heightened stress levels (Bucher *et al.*, 2013). This study demonstrates that social media is a source of boundary conflicts, causing spillover effects across life domains, which in turn are associated with exhaustion.

Note

1. Factor loadings and AVE are available from the first author upon request.

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