Social Media Sites Use Intensity and Job Burnout Among the U.S. and Thai Employees

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ABSTRACT

This research explored the effect of social network sites (SNS) use intensity in the workplace on three aspects of job burnout. The data were collected from non-teaching employees from universities in the U.S. (N = 174) and in Thailand (N = 182). Results from partial least squares regression revealed some evidence of the u-curve relationship between SNS use intensity and depersonalization in both countries. However, the u-curve relationship between SNS use and lack of personal accomplishment is only supported in U.S. samples. This suggests that while a moderate degree of SNS use at work tends to lower burnout, a high degree of use appears to create more burnout. The results also reveal a strong positive linkage between SNS use intensity and emotional exhaustion in U.S. samples. Overall, these findings imply that allowing employees to use SNS can provide some benefits, but it is important that employees do not overuse SNS to avoid burnout.

KEYWORDS
Burnout, Culture, Facebook, Social Network Sites, Social Support, Stress, Work-Life Balance

1. INTRODUCTION

The recent advances in technology, especially the Internet, have changed the way people connect with each other (N. Ellison & Boyd, 2013). The Internet has led to the advent of several technological revolutions in the information age; one of which is social network sites (SNS) such as Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, and Google Plus (Moqbel, Nevo, & Kock, 2013). Use of SNS is not a recent phenomenon as it started in the mid-90s with the Classmates site (Moqbel, 2012), but it did not become popular until 2003 when LinkedIn and Friendster were introduced. By late 2016, Facebook alone had already exceeded 1.86 billion users.

SNS have been redefined by Ellison and Boyd (2013) as:

...a networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site (p. 158).
Research on the impact of SNS has gained more popularity in literature over the past years (Błachnio, Przepiórka, & Rudnicka, 2013; Brandtzæg, Luders, & Skjetne, 2010; Jang Hyun, Min-Sun, & Yoonjae, 2010; LaRose, Connolly, Lee, Li, & Hales, 2014; Sipior, Ward, Volonino, & MacGabhann, 2013; Yong Gu et al., 2010). However, it is essential to note that the use of SNS in the workplace has been controversial in academia and in the industry. Some argue that the use of SNS at work can contribute positively to the work-related outcomes (Moqbel et al., 2013), to customer relations (Acker, Grone, Akkad, Potcher, & Yazbek, 2011), to improved marketing strategies (Trusov, Bucklin, & Paulwels, 2009), and to improved access to knowledge enhancing innovative performance (Ali-Hassan, Nevo, Kim, & Perelgut, 2011). Others argue that the use of SNS in the workplace might expose organizations to various types of risks (Bernoff & Li, 2006; Koch, Gonzalez, & Leidner, 2012; Kucuk, 2010; Moqbel, 2012). Some of those claimed risks include privacy threats such as sensitive data leakage and security threats such as exposing organizations to malware and phishing scams (Moqbel, 2012). Another type of risk can be damage to the organization’s reputation from employees who post inappropriate statements on SNS (Aula, 2010). Another major argument against the use of SNS in the workplace is that it leads to loss of productivity as employees’ use of SNS wastes time by detracting their effective use of time on work-related activities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In order to mitigate the risks mentioned earlier, some organizations resorted to establishing social-media-use policies while others decided to prohibit the use of SNS entirely (Koch et al., 2012).

Although research about SNS has gained more popularity in literature over the past few years, very little has been conducted on the impact of SNS use by employees in the workplace from the organizational behavior aspect. In order to fill this research gap, the focus of this study is on investigating whether SNS use in the workplace can relate to the level of job burnout that employees experience. Job burnout is selected as the outcome factor in this study since it is the issue that organizations regard as one key problem that needs to be prevented (Singh, Suar, & Leiter, 2012; Sochos, Bowers, & Kinman, 2012). Generally, job burnout can be perceived in terms of the level of stress that people experience in the workplace. It is one of the major problems that not only reduces productivity and performance of employees (Hollet-Haudebert, Mulki, & Fournier, 2011; Hung, Fisher, Gapp, & Carter, 2012; Singh et al., 2012), but also causes employees to suffer from mental and physical health problems (Tourigny, Baba, & Xiaoyun, 2010; Zhong et al., 2009). Even though there is some prior evidence in literature about the effects of SNS usage on personalities and psychological outcomes of people (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011), to the knowledge of the authors, there is no study conducted to explore the nonlinear relationship between the SNS use in the workplace and the level of job burnout. In this research, the authors aim to provide evidence whether the effect of SNS use in the workplace on job burnout might present in terms of an u-curve relationship; this means it might be possible that a certain amount of SNS use can lower burnout, whereas too much SNS use can result in more burnout. Moreover, existing research was mainly conducted using single-country analysis; there is no research that compares whether the effects of SNS use in the workplace might differ between samples from two different nations. In the research, the authors aim to explore whether the effect of SNS use in the workplace might differ between the U.S. sample and the Thai sample. Overall, the results from the present study can make a contribution to SNS research by bridging these gaps. Understanding the role of SNS in the workplace might provide some benefits to organizations as it can help managers make decisions on whether to establish formal policy regarding the use of SNS in the workplace.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: The literature review section provides research background and key literature review on job burnout and SNS. The method section describes our research model and methods. The result section presents the empirical results of our survey study.
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