

COMMENTARY

Gaps in research and practice in social media-facilitated practices at work

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One of the most significant information and communication technologies (ICTs) affecting society today is online social media (Wharton, 2019). Yet, as is the case with most ICT research (Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2016), empirical work on social media within the workplace often lags behind the fast pace of the business world. In addition, as social media research is conducted across a wide array of scientific disciplines (Wilson et al., 2012), research fragmentation is likely. As social media plays a key role in a number of distinct organizational practices that can affect both organizations and individuals (SHRM, 2016), the purpose of this paper is to build on Hu et al.'s (2021) work not only by considering other ways that social media use is relevant to the workplace beyond its role in contributing to counterproductive behavior but also, more specifically, by discussing how two ICT perspectives (i.e., the technology behavior and technology experience perspectives) have produced research fragmentation and gaps between science and practice within this domain.

Adapting Hu et al.'s (2021) taxonomy to organization-level practices, we define the technology behavior perspective as the consideration of how technology can be used within organizational practices to predict individual behavior, whereas the technology experience perspective refers to the examination of the psychological experiences resulting from technology-facilitated organizational practices. Using the technology perspective framework, the current paper highlights challenges and opportunities for both researchers and practitioners related to three distinct social-media-facilitated organizational practices—job candidate vetting, employee monitoring, and brand management—each practice of which is designed to focus on a select group of individuals—job candidates, incumbents, or customers and online freelancers, respectively.

Social media-facilitated job candidate vetting

Social media has influenced the way in which some organizations screen job candidates, as cyber-vetting approaches (i.e., web-based job applicant screening) are becoming increasingly common (SHRM, 2016). Related to the technology behavior perspective, cybervetting studies that examine whether social media-based assessments can predict individual characteristics or future behaviors often use either (a) subjective human assessment techniques in which raters form holistic judgments or (b) data-mining approaches where specific social media content is linked to human attributes or behaviors. Human assessment techniques have often been the focus of research in industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology. Some studies have suggested that rater-derived

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cybervetting assessments can be used to determine candidates' personality profiles and predict job performance (Kluemper et al., 2012), whereas other research has suggested the opposite (Van Iddekinge et al., 2016). Data-mining approaches (e.g., machine learning) for predicting individual attributes are more commonly seen within computer science research (Kosinski et al., 2013) and may be more effective than human-based techniques (Youyou et al., 2015).

Although cybervetting research that focuses on the technology experience perspective is more limited, several studies have indicated that job applicants may perceive cybervetting to be a privacy invasion, which can produce stress and injustice perceptions and adversely affect outcomes such as organizational attraction and intentions to litigate (Stoughton et al., 2015). Notably, applicant and employer perspectives on cybervetting often diverge (i.e., applicant opinions are generally more negative; Berkelaar, 2014), thereby highlighting the importance of considering all relevant stakeholder attitudes. Additionally, research has indicated that data mining-based cybervetting approaches may have the potential to produce discriminatory hiring decisions (Weissmann, 2018), as such techniques can rely on seemingly job-irrelevant information to maximize predictive potential (e.g., social media content indicating one's appreciation for curly fries has been linked to intelligence, Kosinski et al., 2013). Thus, more integrative approaches that incorporate both human judgment and algorithmic techniques into cybervetting practices are warranted (Willford, 2019).

Social media-facilitated employee monitoring

Organizations also use social media to monitor employees' online behavior. Notably, as there is limited research that is specifically focused on social media-facilitated monitoring, we can extrapolate from research on electronic performance monitoring (ePM) in general to draw links to the technology behavior perspective. Namely, ePM is often used to incentivize performance, protect organizations from liability, and enhance organizational surveillance mechanisms (Ravid et al., 2020). Looking specifically at ePM of social media, there have been many publicized job terminations resulting from social media activity (see, e.g., Toropin & Asmelash, 2020). Practitioners have argued that monitoring social media is part of an organization's responsibility (Bell, 2018), as nonwork behavior can damage an organization's reputation (Umphress et al., 2013).

From the technology experience perspective, studies have highlighted that employees view social media monitoring as an invasion of privacy (Sayre & Dahling, 2016) and that it may be an infringement on employee rights that can result in legal consequences (Lam, 2016). Social media-facilitated employee monitoring has been underinvestigated by academics, and we lack knowledge regarding how employees react to it or how it is carried out in practice (e.g., are automated data extraction techniques used to flag content, or are human resource professionals monitoring employee activity manually?). Although organizations have been favored in the majority of the federal cases that have been related to terminations that involved social media (Schroeder & Lile, 2016), the legal boundaries surrounding social media-facilitated ePM are unclear, creating a somewhat gray territory (Lam, 2016), and there is a lack of understanding regarding fair and effective policies. Thus, although organizations may practically be able to monitor employees' social media activity, the adverse employee reactions that this practice produces could result in greater negative consequences downstream (e.g., intentions to litigate; Stoughton et al., 2015).

Social media-facilitated brand management

In addition, it is important to consider organizational use of social media to facilitate brand management. As social media marketing has been identified as a modern brand management tactic (Godey et al., 2016), organizations are facing increasing pressure to use social media in digital marketing practices. From a technology behavior perspective, organizations are turning to social

media marketing for a number of purposes, such as enhancing a brand's reputation (Godey *et al.*, 2016) and promoting products or services to customers via social media influencers (SMIs; *i.e.*, individuals who shape audience opinions via strategic social media posts; Freberg *et al.*, 2011). Customers are becoming increasingly averse to traditional marketing efforts (*e.g.*, advertisements), and they instead often turn to recommendations that are made by a trusted individual, such as an SMI. Notably, SMIs can significantly influence consumer purchasing decisions (Chatterjee, 2011), and organizational use of a popular, trusted SMI can greatly benefit the brand (De Veirman *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, organizations' use of SMIs for marketing purposes is a unique application of ICT behavior that is used to predict or influence consumer behavior.

Despite the benefits that are offered by organizations' use of SMIs in marketing efforts, the work experiences of online freelancers, such as SMIs, can be less than ideal. More specifically, examining SMIs through a technology experience lens reveals that there are significant challenges for this sector of the workforce, including job precarity (Sutherland *et al.*, 2020) and competition to secure work (Dunn *et al.*, 2020). Further, number of hours worked has been negatively linked to work–life balance and life satisfaction among online freelancers (Davis *et al.*, 2014), demonstrating that the lack of standard work hours in such roles may be detrimental. Taken together, the technology experience perspective offers important insight into the work experiences of online freelancers (*e.g.*, SMIs).

Conclusion

The majority of what is known about social media-facilitated organizational practices can be categorized into Hu *et al.*'s (2021) technology behavior and technology experience perspectives. Yet, in doing so, a number of gaps between research disciplines as well as between science and practice are brought to light. For example, disjointed cybervetting research efforts in line with the technology behavior perspective have resulted in calls for increased interdisciplinary research and scientist–practitioner collaborations that investigate the combined efforts of data mining and human judgment techniques (Willford, 2019). For example, organizations could use data mining techniques to extract attribute-relevant content, thereby eliminating human raters' exposure to irrelevant social media content (*e.g.*, religious posts). In addition, many scholars caution the use of cybervetting as a selection device (Van Iddekinge *et al.*, 2016), yet cybervetting is commonly used in preemployment screening, thereby further highlighting the gap between science and practice.

There is a lack of research that considers the technology behavior perspective with respect to social media-facilitated ePM. Moreover, science and practice in this area are not well integrated and a substantial gap between the technology behavior and experience perspectives warrants more attention. Future research should attempt to identify an appropriate balance between managing fairness and protecting the organization from liability, thereby reducing conflicting perspectives among employers and employees. Notably, as organizations increase their monitoring activities, employees are likely to engage in more online privacy management behaviors to conceal themselves from employer scrutiny (Roulin & Levashina, 2016). Employers may then perceive the need to take more extreme measures for employee monitoring, which could exacerbate perceptions of trust violation.

Regarding brand management, there has been a primary focus on the technology behavior perspective, which has contributed to a science–practitioner gap, as well as a predominantly marketing-driven perspective in considering how social media affects stakeholders who are external to the organization. Thus, there are many opportunities for the field of I-O psychology to address technology experiences that are related to SMIs who are essential for company brand management as well as customer reactions to organizations that maintain a social media presence. For example, just as social media marketing efforts can influence customer perceptions of the

brand (Godey et al., 2016), the way in which organizations present themselves and interact with customers is also likely to affect other important business functions, such as talent acquisition.

Taken together, it is important that organizations acknowledge the advantages that social media provides to facilitate organizational practices while being cognizant of the potential disadvantages that accompany it. We caution organizations to avoid implementing ICT practices without considering the downstream effects related to how employees and relevant stakeholders experience the technology and extend the sentiments of Hu et al. (2021) by calling on researchers and practitioners alike to engage in efforts that contribute to the “defragging” of our knowledge of social media-facilitated organizational practices.

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