

When are Social Network Sites Connections with Coworkers Beneficial? The Roles of Age Difference and Preferences for Segmentation between Work and Life

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Abstract

Individuals are increasingly connected with their coworkers on personal and professional social network sites (SNS) (e.g., Facebook), with consequences for workplace relationships. Drawing on SNS research and on social identity and boundary management theory, we surveyed 202 employees and found that coworkers' friendship acts (e.g., liking, commenting) were positively associated with closeness to coworkers when coworkers were similar in age to or older than the respondent and were positively associated with organizational citizenship behaviors towards coworkers (OCBI) when coworkers were similar in age. Conversely, harmful behaviors from coworkers (e.g., disparaging comments) were negatively associated with closeness when coworkers were older than the respondent, and with OCBI when coworkers were older than the respondent and coworkers' friendship acts were high. Preferences for work-life segmentation moderated the relationship between coworkers' friendship acts and OCBI (but not closeness) such that the positive relationship was stronger when the respondent had low (vs. high) preferences for segmentation. We discuss the theoretical and practical implications of this study and propose an agenda for future research.

Keywords: Social Media, Social Networking, Workplace, Closeness to Coworkers, Organizational Citizenship Behaviors, Age, Work-Life Segmentation

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1 Introduction

Posts and interactions on social network sites (SNS) — web-based services on which individuals create public or semipublic profiles, connect with other users and view their profiles and connections (boyd & Ellison, 2007)— have consequences for teams' effectiveness (Sarkis, 2019). With the rise in teleworking and virtual teams, SNS have become crucial for relationship development (Neeley & Leonardi, 2018; Phua et al., 2017) and reputation building (Drouin et al., 2015; Ollier-Malaterre & Rothbard, 2015), with consequences for team cohesion (Marlow et al., 2018) and performance (Chung et al., 2018). In this study, we focus on SNS that mix work and life (hereinafter “mixed work-life SNS”) and

investigate how these blended interactions may shape relationships between coworkers.

Two separate streams of SNS research focus on work-related and personal use, respectively (Cristea et al., 2019). However, a few scholars have begun to explore how the blurring of the boundaries on SNS may affect interpersonal relationships at work. This line of research points out that a key driver of social media use in the workplace is the social and personal nature of SNS interactions, through which coworkers disclose personal lifestyles and information. For instance, social use (e.g., using SNS to make friends at work), but not work use, was found to be positively associated with the socialization and commitment of new hires (Gonzalez et al., 2013). SNS affordances such as visibility, association, and persistence (Treem & Leonardi, 2013) enable such

disclosure. Limited empirical research (Batenburg & Bartels, 2017; Kaloydis et al., 2017; Ollier-Malaterre & Luneau-de Serre, 2018; Smith, 2010) has begun to analyze the impacts of mixed work-life SNS on interpersonal relationships at work. None of this research, to the best of our knowledge, has examined potential moderators of the relationship between these blurred interactions and workplace outcomes.

Our paper contributes to further bridging the work and personal streams of SNS research. Specifically, we analyze how coworkers' friendship acts on SNS (e.g., likes and comments by coworkers; Kordoutis & Kourti, 2016) and harmful behaviors (e.g., posting an offensive comment; Landers & Callan, 2014) affect two central constructs: feelings of closeness to one's coworkers (Kelley et al., 1983) and the interpersonal component of organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBI) (Organ, 1988). We build on social psychology and organizational behavior theory to identify two important moderators of these relationships. First, social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) suggests that coworkers' age (dis)similarity (Bacharach et al., 2005) may moderate these relationships because age is a salient characteristic facilitating group identification. Second, boundary management theory (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996) suggests the moderating role of individual preferences for segmentation or integration of work and life roles (Rothbard et al., 2005). We chose Facebook because it is widely used by working adults and is recognized as a relationship accelerator and a "forum for individuals to either passively or actively glean information about their coworkers outside the work environment" (Kaloydis et al., 2017, p. 241). Up to 58% of US employees are connected on Facebook with coworkers and 40.5% with bosses (Duggan et al., 2015). We tested our model on a sample of 202 employees in a wide range of professional settings.

Our study contributes to the information systems literature, particularly the SNS literature (Ali-Hassan, Nevo, & Wade, 2015; boyd & Ellison, 2007; Ou, Pavlou, & Davison, 2014; Schmidt, Lelchook, & Martin, 2016; Treem & Leonardi, 2013; Utz, 2015), by providing theoretical rationales and empirical evidence showing that SNS interactions that mix work and life are associated with closeness and OCBI. In other words, the agentic decisions that users make regarding SNS affordances (Leonardi & Vaast, 2017) have very real workplace impacts online and offline. Furthermore, we identify as moderators demographic fault lines such as age (dis)similarity (Bacharach et al., 2005) and personal factors such as preferences for the segmentation of work and life (Rothbard et al., 2005). Our study also contributes to social psychology (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and organizational behavior (Ashforth et al., 2000; Rothbard et al., 2005) theory by providing evidence that interactions on SNS are highly consequential in the workplace.

2 Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

Most SNS research to date has focused on either work or personal use purposes. The first stream has established that SNS can foster communication quality (Ou et al., 2014) and shared understanding and trust (Shao & Pan, 2019). At the group level, SNS broaden employees' social networks (Weber & Shi, 2016), strengthening instrumental and expressive ties (Chen et al., 2020). As such, they facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing (Cristea et al., 2019; Leonardi & Vaast, 2017), learning (van Puijenbroek et al., 2014), and the socialization of new hires (Koch et al., 2012). At the individual level, SNS at work may enhance employees' perceptions of organizational support (Schmidt et al., 2016), affective commitment towards the organization (Gonzalez et al., 2013), and job performance (Ali-Hassan et al., 2014). On the negative side, work-related use of SNS can heighten employees' mental load (Bucher et al., 2013) and work-family conflict (Berkowsky, 2013; van Zoonen et al., 2016).

The second stream, regarding personal use of SNS, has generated abundant knowledge on privacy loss and apathy (Alsarkal et al., 2018; Frampton & Child, 2013; Hargittai & Marwick, 2016; Hoffmann et al., 2016; Madden, 2012). Research on the relationships costs and benefits of using SNS is mixed, with use being linked to closeness to friends (Ledbetter et al., 2011), relationship intimacy (Park et al., 2011), receiving social support (Li et al., 2015), face-to-face communication, and life satisfaction (Dienlin et al., 2017) but also envy (Wallace et al., 2018) and surveillance (Tandoc et al., 2015). Regarding mental health, SNS use for personal purposes has been linked to stress reduction (Coates et al., 2019) but also dependence (Griffiths, 2012) and decreased sleep quality (Xanidis & Brignell, 2016).

While these two streams developed separately, what makes some SNS particularly interesting is the "enchanted affordance" (Miller & Munday, 2015) by which people can interact at both the professional and the personal level, getting to know each other as whole persons (Del Bosque, 2013; Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard, & Berg, 2013). Below, we discuss existing research on this issue and why it matters.

2.1 Benefits of Connecting with Coworkers on Mixed Work-Life SNS

Blended work and life interactions unfold on sites such as Facebook, which were initially geared towards friends and family and moved from leisure to work (Leonardi & Vaast, 2017), as well as on enterprise social media (ESM) where employees may also interact on a more personal level (Gibbs et al., 2014). Mixing personal with work use makes a notable

difference to users: a longitudinal qualitative study drawing on 166 interviews and archival data found that nonwork-related content attracts users to social media, in a cycle of curiosity and “passable trust” that is beneficial to knowledge sharing but also creates intraorganizational tensions (Neeley & Leonardi, 2018). The blurring of the work-life boundary also matters for organizations seeking to elaborate social media policies (Vaast & Kaganer, 2013), as well as for many professionals pondering the image consequences of integrating their professional and personal identities (Fieseler et al., 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013).

In this study, we focus on two key constructs of relationships in the workplace. First, closeness at work refers to a sense of connection and bonding with coworkers that goes beyond mere work interactions (Bacharach et al., 2005; Dumas et al., 2013). Second, OBCI refers to discretionary extra-role behaviors that are not prescribed by the job and that benefit coworkers (e.g., taking on additional work or offering other assistance to help a coworker) (Organ, 1988).

Several mechanisms suggest a positive relationship between connecting with coworkers on mixed work-life SNS and closeness. First, personal disclosures of information are a key driver of relationship building (Collins & Miller, 1994) and thus may affect warmth and competence judgments by coworkers, leading to liking and respect (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). Indeed, one experiment found that openness to integrating one’s professional and personal life on SNS garnered higher respect and likability ratings from participants (Batenburg & Bartels, 2017). Second, employees who share details about their personal lives, thoughts, and desires with coworkers on SNS indicate trust (Chauhan, 2017; Neeley & Leonardi, 2018). Indeed, a survey of 235 students found a modest correlation between the use of social media to learn about the lives of other employees and coworker trust (Smith, 2010). Third, employees who expose their whole (vs. only professional) personae may build more authentic and richer relationships with coworkers (Haythornthwaite, 2001), enabling the discovery of common perspectives (Kelley et al., 1983; Ledbetter et al., 2011; Utz, 2015). Humor on SNS, for instance, increases feelings of connection between users (Utz, 2015). Thus, mixing work and life on SNS may be the online equivalent of going out for drinks after a long workday (Berkowsky, 2013).

Hypothesis 1: Coworkers’ friendship acts on mixed work-life SNS are positively associated with closeness at work.

Likewise, affordances such as “Like” buttons and the ability to comment on posts may enhance OCBI, because they are clear markers of coworkers’ attention and willingness to interact. As such, they may nurture relationships by conveying feelings of appreciation

and fostering positive emotions (Koch et al., 2012). Employees who feel appreciated by their coworkers are more likely to make extra efforts to understand and help with their coworkers’ problems (Organ, 1988). Moreover, connecting on SNS that display personal information may be particularly helpful for getting to know new coworkers and jumpstarting new relationships. The Facebook “timeline” affordance, for instance, gives access to an archive of chronologically displayed information (boyd, 2007) that may help identify topics of mutual interest (Dimicco & Millen, 2007). As social identity theory has demonstrated, mutual interests with coworkers form the foundation of homophily and liking (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; McPherson et al., 1987). Employees who consider themselves to be more similar to their coworkers may therefore be more motivated to help them. Along these lines, a diary study of 91 individuals found that respondents exhibited higher OCBI on days that they used social media for private and professional reasons more than average (Chauhan, 2017).

Hypothesis 2: Coworkers’ friendship acts on mixed work-life SNS are positively associated with OCBI.

2.2 Dangers of Connecting with Coworkers on Mixed Work-Life SNS

Despite their benefits, not all interactions on SNS are positive. A qualitative study reported that connecting with coworkers on Facebook fostered liking, closeness, respect, and OCBI but also disliking, loss of respect, and envy (Ollier-Malaterre & Luneau-de Serre, 2018). Therefore, while coworkers’ general friendship acts foster closeness and OCBI, other SNS behaviors may undermine closeness and OCBI, as discussed below.

Mixed work-life SNS pose two opposite challenges: sharing too little and sharing too much. Sharing too little may send signals that undermine closeness between coworkers. Some employees ignore (or accept only with access restrictions) connection requests that make them uncomfortable, because of fears related to privacy invasion (boyd, 2007; Lewis et al., 2008), interpersonal surveillance (Marder et al., 2016; Trottier, 2012), discrimination (Miller & Munday, 2015), and even harassment by certain coworkers (Chauhan, 2017). However, refusing to connect can create relational distance (Landers & Callan, 2014). Likewise, sharing too little can create awkwardness and diminish closeness if an employee shares more with some coworkers than with others (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013).

On the other hand, employees may conversely harm closeness with coworkers by sharing too much on SNS. For instance, they may share facts and opinions about other employees, the workplace, or customers

that a coworker views as undermining their or their workplace's reputation (Landers & Callan, 2014). Such indelicacies occur when SNS posters have an "imagined" (Litt, 2012) or "intended" (Utz, 2015) audience that is narrower than the broad "invisible" audience of coworkers with whom they are connected but do not frequently interact (boyd, 2007). For this reason, some employees even post critical comments on SNS about supervisors who can see the comments. Such accidents also occur because negative relationships and negativity tend to be heightened on SNS (Leonardi et al., 2013). Employees who witness these posts are likely to feel less close to and less appreciative of the offender and thus less willing to develop a more intimate relationship with them (Haythornthwaite, 2001).

Hypothesis 3: Harmful behaviors from coworkers on mixed work-life SNS are negatively associated with closeness at work.

Harmful behaviors on SNS also threaten OCBI. An employee who is the direct target of disparaging SNS posts by a coworker is likely to resent, and thus to be less willing to help, the posts' author (Landers & Callan, 2014; McGrath, 2018). Even indirect comments that are perceived to harm the workplace's reputation may reduce an employee's willingness to help a coworker who seems to be undermining the team, the brand, or the employer. Moreover, the hyper-intimacy in computer-mediated communication may lead employees to comment on a coworker's post in a more familiar way than they would in other contexts (Walther, 1996). Such familiar interactions may be perceived as a violation of workplace norms (McLaughlin & Vitak, 2011), work-life boundaries (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013), and privacy (Bucher et al., 2013). Employees who feel that their values or boundaries have not been respected by a particular coworker are less likely to be attentive to that coworker's needs at work.

Hypothesis 4: Harmful behaviors from coworkers on mixed work-life SNS are negatively associated with OCBI.

The coexistence of benefits and dangers to connecting with coworkers on mixed work-life SNS suggests the presence of moderators in the relationships between these connections, closeness, and OCBI. To unpack these dynamics, we turn to social psychology and organizational behavior theory and identify age (dis)similarity and individual preferences for work-life segmentation as important moderators.

2.3 Age (Dis)Similarity

Demographic (dis)similarity plays an important role in interpersonal relationships. Age, in particular, consistently segregates individuals into different groups (Feld, 1982; Riordan & Shore, 1997). There is

evidence that, even in face-to-face interactions (e.g., office parties), disclosure may make (dis)similarity with other employees more salient (Dumas et al., 2013). We believe that the effect of disclosure is heightened in SNS, where coworkers share a wide range of personal information. Therefore, we argue that connections on mixed work-life SNS are likely to increase (decrease) closeness and OCBI when coworkers are similar (dissimilar).

Social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) regarding, in particular, social identification with homophilous groups (McPherson et al., 1987) explains that the more demographically similar coworkers perceive themselves to be, the closer their relationship will be (Bacharach et al., 2005; Riordan & Shore, 1997). People identify with social groups that share salient characteristics with them (e.g., age, gender, and ethnicity), and these social identities come with scripts that guide our cognitions and behaviors (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social identification with groups of similar individuals enables people to know who they are relative to other individuals and creates friendship ties, communication, and group cohesiveness (Byrne, 1971; Chattopadhyay et al., 2004).

We argue that age (dis)similarity is a powerful source of in-group vs. out-group homophilous identification on SNS because existing fault lines between older and younger coworkers in terms of values, lifestyles, and political views (Cogin, 2012; Pfeil et al., 2009; Twenge et al., 2010) are more salient on SNS. SNS, therefore, make it easier to identify one's in-group.

Hypothesis 5: Age (dis)similarity moderates the relationship between coworkers' friendship acts on mixed work-life SNS and closeness such that this relationship is positive when most of an employee's coworkers are similar in age to or older than the employee, and nonsignificant when they are younger than the employee.

Turning to OCBI, we contend that coworkers' friendship acts foster citizenship behaviors only when one's coworkers are similar in age to or older than rather than younger than the employee, because norms regarding disclosure and the use of humor differ across generations and life stages (Martin & Ford, 2018; Pfeil et al., 2009). Older employees use social media at work less (Chauhan, 2017) and are more concerned with privacy (Archer-Brown et al., 2018) than younger employees. By contrast, younger employees have a more personal and expressive view of social media (Treem et al., 2015). Thus, an older employee might not approve of a younger coworker sharing large numbers of personal photos on SNS, while the younger coworker might see the older coworker's profile as stodgy or boring. In other words, older coworkers may think that front-stage workplace norms (Goffman,

1959) should be upheld in SNS interactions, whereas younger coworkers may think that authentic backstage behaviors (e.g., casual language, dress, and behaviors) are appropriate. In particular, humor and jokes, which contribute greatly to relationship development between coworkers on SNS (Gibbs et al., 2014), are slippery terrain when coworkers belong to different age groups. For instance, younger employees are more likely to use humor to ridicule others (Martin & Ford, 2018), which may be hurtful to older coworkers. Therefore, we predict that harmful behaviors will hurt an employee's closeness with coworkers who are similar in age to or older than the employee is.

Hypothesis 6: Age (dis)similarity moderates the relationship between coworkers' friendship acts on mixed work-life SNS and OCBI such that this relationship is positive when most of an employee's coworkers are similar in age to or older than the employee, and nonsignificant when they are younger than the employee.

In the case of harmful behaviors on SNS, which may be directly targeted at an individual person (e.g., disparaging someone's reputation), we argue that harmful behaviors from coworkers who are younger (vs. older) than the focal employee are likely to be less resented. This is because older (vs. younger) employees, while generally more sensitive to social norms and appropriate use of humor as we explained above, are also likely to be more secure in their identity, sense of competence, and dignity, and will therefore tend to feel less threatened than younger persons by antisocial behaviors directed at them (Aquino & Douglas, 2003). Older (vs. younger) individuals also report lower emotional responses in tense situations (Birditt et al., 2005) and have a greater ability to express their affection for others, even in conflict situations (Carstensen, 1992). Therefore, we predict that, in general, harmful behaviors are only damaging to employees' closeness with coworkers who are older than they are.

Hypothesis 7: Age (dis)similarity moderates the relationship between harmful behaviors from coworkers on mixed work-life SNS and closeness such that this relationship is negative when most of an employee's coworkers are older than the employee, and nonsignificant when they are younger than or similar in age to the employee.

Regarding OCBI, younger employees tend to be more vulnerable in the workplace than older employees who have attained higher tenure and control over resources (Brimeyer et al., 2010). Younger employees also tend to have less developed social networks within and outside the workplace to buffer them from reputational attacks and other drawbacks at work (Brimeyer et al., 2010). Because younger coworkers depend on older

coworkers to access resources and maintain a good standing at work, we argue that harmful behaviors on SNS are likely to be experienced as a threat at work, thus impacting employees' OCBI, only when coworkers are older than they are.

Hypothesis 8: Age (dis)similarity moderates the relationship between harmful behaviors from coworkers on mixed work-life SNS and OCBI such that this relationship is negative when most of an employee's coworkers are older than the employee, and nonsignificant when they are younger than or similar in age to the employee.

2.4 Boundary Management Preferences

In addition to social identities, personal preferences can affect how employees perceive being connected with coworkers on mixed work-life SNS. We argue that coworkers' friendship acts on these SNS are more likely to increase closeness and OCBI for individuals with low (vs. high) preferences for the segmentation of work and life roles. Boundaries between work and life roles serve as mental fences that organize and simplify the environment (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). Individuals vary in the extent to which they prefer to integrate work and life (e.g., mixing friends and coworkers in family events, displaying family pictures at work) or keep them separate (Kreiner, 2006).

Such preferences are also enacted on SNS. Integrators are likely to be comfortable with boundary-spanning behaviors and motivated to connect with coworkers (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). Segmentors, however, may feel pressured to accept coworkers' requests despite their segmentation preferences; in this case, they may censor the information they share (Skeels & Grudin, 2009), adjust their profile visibility (Tufekci, 2008), use privacy settings and nicknames (Donath & Boyd, 2004; Trottier, 2012), or create multiple profiles (Stutzman & Hartzog, 2012). In fact, 58% of Facebook users restrict access to their profiles and 44% remove content that others publish on them (Madden, 2012). In short, segmentors may accept connection requests from coworkers to avoid offending them but may not be receptive to their coworkers' comments and acknowledgments on SNS. Therefore, they may be less likely to feel close to coworkers with whom they connect on SNS.

Hypothesis 9: Preferences for work-life segmentation moderate the relationship between coworkers' friendship acts on mixed work-life SNS and closeness such that this positive relationship is stronger for integrators (vs. segmentors).

Moreover, connecting with coworkers on SNS where one also shares about one's personal life implies a loss of control over work-life boundaries. While integrators may not mind this loss of control, segmentors may

resent it because it means they cannot act according to their personal preferences (Foucreault et al., 2016). Therefore, segmentors may be less inclined to engage in OCBI towards these coworkers.

Hypothesis 10: Preferences for work-life segmentation moderate the relationship between coworkers' friendship acts on mixed work-life SNS and OCBI such that this positive relationship is stronger for integrators (vs. segmentors).

3 Method

3.1 Sample

We used the snowball and network sampling method (Goodman, 1961) to collect our data, in line with our research objective of understanding the influence of SNS interactions on relationships at work (Landers & Behrend, 2015). We distributed an online questionnaire to respondents recruited on Facebook, starting with authors' networks, and also to open groups to leverage the representativeness of the Facebook population as a sample source (Kosinski et al., 2015). Inclusion criteria were being over 18 years of age, being connected on Facebook with at least two coworkers, and working 20 hours or more per week. A total of 299 participants volunteered, of whom 252 met all the inclusion criteria. Forty-eight were removed because of missing data, and two were removed because of multivariate extreme values. In the final sample ($n = 202$), there was a majority of women (63.9%), participants were 34.34 years old on average ($SD = 11.3$) and 50.2% had completed at least a bachelor's degree. They worked in various industry sectors in Quebec, including health and social services (15.8%), educational services (12.4%), and professional, scientific, and technical services (9.9%). Mean professional tenure was 6.68 years ($SD = 7.88$). Participants reported having had a Facebook account for 6.87 years on average ($SD = 1.6$). A majority (65.8%) were not connected with their coworkers on Facebook before they began working together; 42.1% of respondents were connected on Facebook with their supervisors. Among respondents, 26.2% were supervisors, and 20.8% of these supervisors were connected with some of their subordinates.

3.2 Measures

Coworkers' friendship acts: The two coauthors, in consultation with two other experts in the field, developed a scale for this study. Participants were asked to indicate how frequently their coworkers performed a given action on Facebook (4 items: "comment on your status, photos or videos," "like your status, photos or videos," "share your status, photos or videos," and "send you private messages"; factor loadings were 0.91, 0.88, 0.83, and 0.73,

respectively) on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 8 (*every hour*). This scale was validated in French with an independent sample of 243 workers. The Cronbach's alphas obtained in the independent sample ($\alpha = 0.92$) and in the present study ($\alpha = 0.85$) were both satisfactory.

Coworkers' harmful behaviors: We used three subscales of the Work-Related Social Media Questionnaire from Landers and Callan (2014) that specifically capture harmful behaviors. We retained the 5 items that relate to coworkers (as opposed to customers) and adapted them to refer to coworkers' behaviors on Facebook. These subscales were: disparaging others (2 items: "My coworkers have posted negative opinions about me on Facebook"; "My coworkers have discussed negative feelings towards me on Facebook"; $\alpha = 0.91$), diminishing personal reputation (1 item: "My coworkers have posted photos, videos or content about me on Facebook that harmed my professional reputation") and relationship refusal (2 items: "It has felt awkward at work after I refused a connection on Facebook with someone at work"; "I've created an uncomfortable situation by refusing connections with coworkers"; $\alpha = 0.79$). The internal consistency of the overall scale translated into French was satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.86$).

Closeness: A subscale of psychological closeness (Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997) was adapted by replacing "relation" with "coworkers." The 7 items of the scale (e.g., "I am close to my coworkers"; "I appreciate my coworkers") were translated into French and revised by the two coauthors, who added three items capturing closeness outside work for the purpose of this study, in consultation with two other scholars (e.g., "I discuss topics other than work with my coworkers"). Responses ranged from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*). The internal consistency of the adapted and translated scale ($\alpha = 0.91$) was similar to that of the original study ($\alpha = 0.93$).

OCBI: Four items (e.g., "I show concern and courtesy toward my coworkers, even under the most trying business situations", "I make an extra effort to understand the problems faced by coworkers") of the OCBI subscale (Settoon & Mossholder, 2002) were used. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The scale was translated by one of the authors and revised by two experts; its internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.83$) was similar to that of the original study ($\alpha = 0.93$).

Age (dis)similarity was measured by asking participants if their coworkers were predominantly similar in age to (1), younger than (2) or older than (3) them.

Preferences for segmentation: Kreiner's scale (2006; Segmentation Preference Scale) translated into French by Foucreault et al. (2016) was used. For each item (four items; e.g., "I don't like work issues creeping into my home life", "I don't like to have to think about work while I'm at home"), participants indicated their level of agreement on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.89$) was consistent with the one obtained in the anonymized reference (2016).

Control variables. We assessed potential confounding variables, which may influence closeness to coworkers and OCBI: age, gender, education, industry sector, tenure, neuroticism (Donahue et al., 2012; four items; e.g., "I have frequent mood swings"; $\alpha = 0.76$), subjective fit perceptions (Cable & DeRue, 2002, adapted to coworkers; three items; e.g., "My personal values match my coworkers' values and ideals"; $\alpha = 0.92$), years on Facebook and proportion of coworkers who were personal friends with the respondent before they worked together.

4 Results

4.1 Preliminary Analyses

Table 1 shows average variance extracted (AVE), descriptive statistics, and bivariate correlations. AVEs were all above 0.50, providing evidence of convergent validity within the items of a variable (Chin, 1998). Each latent variable correlation was also less than the square root of the AVE on the same row and column, supporting discriminant validity between study variables. Since age ($r = -0.20, p = 0.005$), neuroticism ($r = -0.14, p = 0.048$), subjective fit perceptions ($r = 0.40, p < 0.001$) and personal friends ($r = 0.16, p = 0.024$) were related to closeness, we controlled for the effect of these variables on closeness. The effect of subjective fit perceptions on OCBI was also controlled, since the two variables were significantly correlated ($r = 0.26, p < 0.001$).

Using *Mplus* 7.2 software (Muthén & Muthén, 2012), we verified that the proposed model had five independent factors (i.e., coworkers' friendship acts on SNS, coworkers' harmful behaviors on SNS, closeness, OCBI, and preferences for segmentation) with a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). For each latent variable, we fixed an item at 1.0 (Wang & Wang, 2012). The fit indices from the CFA show that the five-factor model fits the data sufficiently well ($\chi^2(341) = 634.59, p < 0.001, RMSEA = 0.07 [0.06; 0.07], CFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.90, SRMR = 0.06$) and that this model is superior to a four-factor model in which the four items of OCBI were combined with those of closeness ($\chi^2(345) = 879.71, p < 0.001, RMSEA = 0.09 [0.08; 0.10], CFI = 0.83, TLI = 0.82, SRMR = 0.07, \Delta\chi^2(4) = 245.12, p < 0.001$).

4.2 Path Analyses

We also conducted path analyses using *Mplus* 7.2 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). Independent variables were standardized, and three models were verified. To address the issue of normality, we examined the skewness and kurtosis values of each variable included in the model. They were all within the +1 to -1 range (Meyers et al., 2006), except for coworkers' harmful behaviors on SNS (skewness = 2.91; kurtosis = 8.88). Similar variables assessing counterproductive online work behaviors (e.g., cyberharassment; Mercado, 2017) or workplace incivility (Penney & Spector, 2005) tend to be not normally distributed (positive skewness). As the ML chi-square is robust to nonnormality (Savalei, 2008), it was used as the estimation and testing method.

Hypotheses 1 to 4 were verified in the first model. Coworkers' friendship acts and harmful behaviors were entered as independent variables, while closeness and OCBI were entered as dependent variables. Fit indices were good ($\chi^2(3) = 3.99, p = 0.263, RMSEA = 0.04 [0.00; 0.13], CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.97, SRMR = 0.02$). The upper bound of the confidence interval for the RMSEA was above the recommended value of 0.10; this is a common statistical artifact in models with few parameters (Kenny et al., 2014). As presented in Table 2, coworkers' friendship acts were positively related to closeness ($\beta = 0.25, p < 0.001$) and OCBI ($\beta = 0.18, p = 0.007$), supporting Hypotheses 1 and 2. Consistent with Hypothesis 3, harmful behaviors were negatively related to closeness ($\beta = -0.13, p = 0.027$). The negative relationship between harmful behaviors and OCBI proposed in Hypothesis 4 was not supported, as the relationship was only marginally significant ($\beta = -0.12, p = 0.072$).

Hypotheses 5 to 8 were verified in the second model using a multiple group analysis with age (dis)similarity as the grouping variable ($n = 89$ for similar age; $n = 37$ for younger, $n = 76$ for older). Coworkers' friendship acts and harmful behaviors were entered as independent variables, and closeness and OCBI were entered as dependent variables. Fit indices were acceptable ($\chi^2(39) = 171.88, p < 0.001, RMSEA = 0.00 [0.00; 0.14], CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.01, SRMR = 0.03$). As presented in Table 2, coworkers' friendship acts were positively associated with closeness for employees whose coworkers were predominantly similar in age to ($\beta = 0.34, p < 0.001$) or older than them ($\beta = 0.21, p = 0.044$) but not predominantly younger than them ($\beta = 0.10, p = 0.461$), supporting Hypothesis 5. Coworkers' friendship acts were positively associated with OCBI for employees whose coworkers were predominantly similar in age to them ($\beta = 0.22, p = 0.020$) but not for employees whose coworkers were predominantly younger ($\beta = 0.11, p = 0.517$) or older than them ($\beta = 0.15, p = 0.200$), in partial support of Hypothesis 6.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-Order Correlations for All Study Variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Gender	1.64	.48	–														
2. Age	34.34	11.30	.10	–													
3. Education	5.43	1.22	.00	-.27	–												
4. Industry	12.26	6.60	.03	-.02	.01	–											
5. Tenure	6.68	7.88	.04	.63	-.25	.01	–										
6. Years on Facebook	7.87	1.60	.17	-.23	-.01	.00	-.19	–									
7. Personal friends	1.44	.56	-.10	.08	.11	-.04	.19	-.07	–								
8. Fit perceptions	3.46	.76	.12	-.05	.18	-.06	.02	.00	.17	–							
9. Neuroticism	3.06	1.18	.10	-.24	.04	.03	-.13	.09	-.10	-.12	–						
10. Closeness	5.26	.97	.06	-.20	.13	.03	-.04	.12	.16	.49	-.14	.73					
11. OCBI	4.38	.48	.05	-.03	.08	.03	-.04	.07	.00	.26	-.12	.47	.71				
12. Coworkers' friendship acts	3.59	1.24	.05	.14	-.12	-.02	.15	.05	.21	.18	.03	.30	.21	.82			
13. Coworkers' harmful acts	1.18	.41	-.01	.01	-.07	-.03	.02	-.09	.07	-.19	.12	-.21	-.16	.01	.81		
14. Age (dis)similarity	1.94	.90	-.19	-.37	.08	-.02	-.18	-.01	-.15	-.04	.04	-.02	-.06	-.16	-.08	–	
15. Pref. for segmentation	5.29	1.23	.01	.12	-.07	.01	-.01	-.13	-.10	-.21	.07	-.21	.02	-.13	.09	-.06	.86
AVE												.54	.51	.67	.66	–	.74

Note: *n* = 202; Spearman's correlation coefficients were used for ordinal and categorical data, and Pearson's correlation coefficients were employed for continuous variables. The bold items on the diagonal are square roots of the average variances extracted (AVEs) for discriminant validity testing. Gender = male (1), female (2); Level of education = no diploma (1) to doctorate (8); Industry sector = 22 industry sectors according to the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) Canada 2012; Years on Facebook = years on Facebook; Personal friends = the proportion of coworkers with whom participants had been personal friends before they worked together on a scale from none (1) to all (4); OCBI = interpersonal component of organizational citizenship behaviors; Coworkers' harmful acts = coworkers' harmful behaviors on Facebook; Age (dis)similarity = coworkers were predominantly similar in age to (1), younger than (2), or older than (3) the participant; Coefficients > 0.14 significant at *p* < 0.05.; Coefficients > 0.19 significant at *p* < 0.01.

Table 2. Path Analysis Model Results For Age (Dis)Similarity (standardized coefficients)

	Whole sample				Age (dis)similarity											
					Similar age coworkers				Younger coworkers				Older coworkers			
	Closeness		OCBI		Closeness		OCBI		Closeness		OCBI		Closeness		OCBI	
	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.
Control variables																
Age	-.23**	.06			-.29***	.08			-.06	.18			-.08	.08		
Personal friends	.08	.06			-.02	.07			.11	.18			.10	.08		
Neuroticism	-.10	.06			-.22*	.08			-.01	.12			-.06	.10		
Fit	.39***	.06	.20**	.07	.40***	.08	.15	.10	.37*	.18	.36**	.14	.38***	.11	.19	.13
Model variables																
Coworkers' friendship acts	.25*	.06	.18**	.07	.34***	.08	.22*	.10	.10	.12	.11	.15	.21*	.10	.15	.12
Coworkers' harmful behaviors	-.13**	.06	-.12	.07	-.00	.08	-.15	.10	-.05	.21	-.15	.15	-.31***	.10	-.07	.11

Note. *n* = 202; OCBI = interpersonal component of organizational citizenship behaviors; Fit = subjective fit perception; Personal friends = the proportion of coworkers with whom participants had been personal friends before they worked together. * = *p* < 0.05; ** = *p* < 0.01; *** = *p* < 0.001.

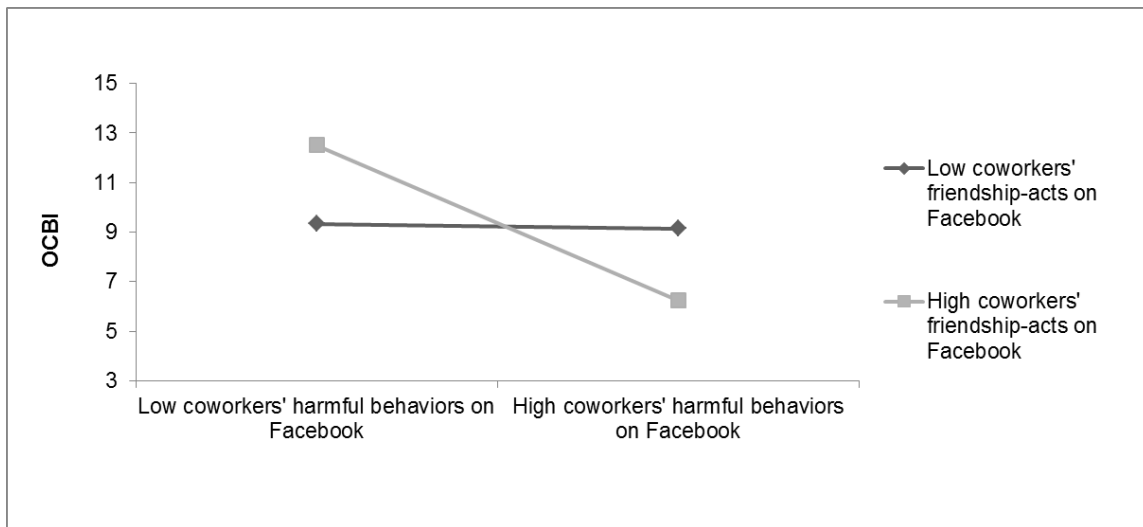


Figure 1. Interaction between Coworkers' Harmful Behaviors and Coworkers' Friendship Acts on Facebook in Predicting OCBI When Most Coworkers Are Older than the Respondent

Table 3. Path Analysis Model Results for Preferences for Segmentation (standardized coefficients)

	Closeness		OCBI	
	β	S.E.	β	S.E.
Control variables				
Age	-.22***	.06		
Personal friends	.07	.06		
Neuroticism	-.10	.06		
Subjective fit perceptions	.40***	.06	.25***	.06
Model variables				
Coworkers' friendship acts on Facebook	.24***	.06	.19**	.06
Preferences for segmentation	-.05	.07	.13	.06
Interaction terms				
Coworkers' friendship acts on Facebook X preferences for segmentation	-.06	.05	-.15*	.07

Note. $n = 202$; OCBI = interpersonal component of organizational citizenship behaviors; Personal friends = the proportion of coworkers with whom participants had been personal friends before they worked together; * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$.

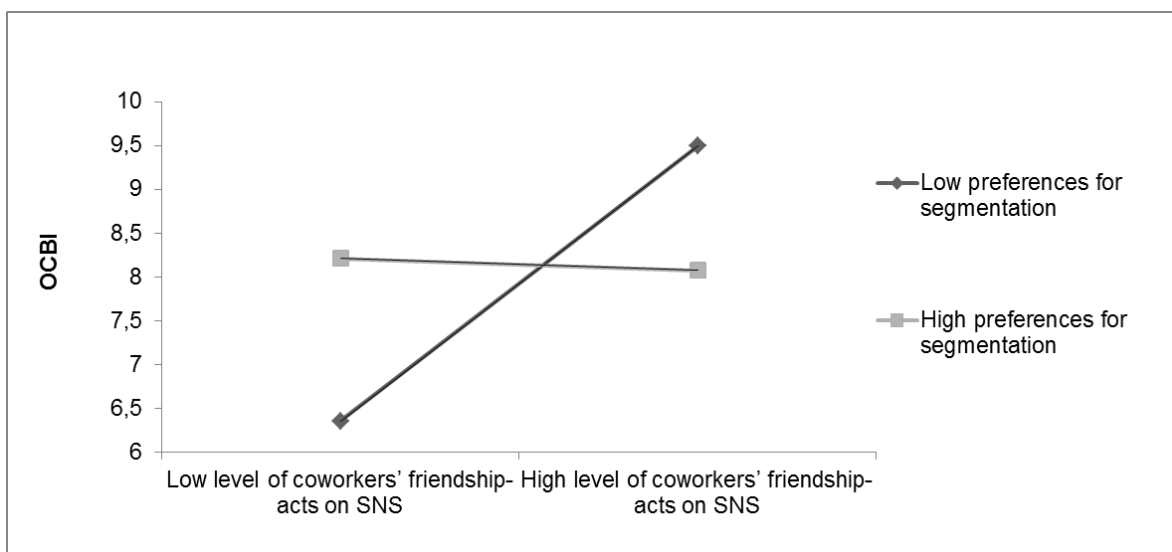


Figure 2. Interaction between Coworkers' Friendship Acts and Preferences for Segmentation on OCBI

Coworkers' harmful behaviors were negatively associated with closeness for employees whose coworkers were predominantly older than them ($\beta = -0.31, p = 0.002$) but not for employees whose coworkers were predominantly similar in age to ($\beta = -0.00, p = 0.978$) or younger than them ($\beta = -0.05, p = 0.826$), supporting Hypothesis 7. We did not find support for Hypothesis 8, as the relationship with coworkers' harmful behaviors and OCBI was not moderated by age (dis)similarity (similar age: $\beta = -0.15, p = .119$; younger: $\beta = -0.15, p = 0.286$; older: $\beta = -0.07, p = 0.535$). A post hoc analysis was conducted in Mplus to verify whether an interaction between coworkers' friendship acts and coworkers' harmful behaviors better explains OCBI for employees whose coworkers are predominantly older than them. We found that the relationship between coworkers' harmful behaviors and OCBI was significantly moderated by coworkers' friendship acts only among employees whose coworkers were older than them ($\beta = -0.31, p = 0.007$). This post hoc model fits the data well ($\chi^2(9) = 9.05, p < 0.001, RMSEA = 0.01 [0.00; 0.14], CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, SRMR = 0.03$). Figure 1 shows that, among employees whose coworkers were older than them, the relationship between coworkers' harmful behaviors and OCBI is significant and negative when coworkers' friendship acts are high ($\beta = -1.55, p < 0.001$) and is not significant when coworkers' friendship acts are low ($\beta = -0.05, p = 0.267$).

Hypotheses 9 and 10 were verified in a third model. Standardized values of coworkers' friendship acts and preferences for segmentation as well as the interaction term were entered in the model as independent variables, and closeness and OCBI were entered as dependent variables. Fit indices indicated a sufficiently fitting model ($\chi^2(3) = 5.99, p = 0.112, RMSEA = 0.07 [0.00; 0.15], CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.89, SRMR = 0.02$). As shown in Figure 2 and Table 3, preferences for segmentation only moderated the relationship between coworkers' friendship acts and OCBI ($\beta = -0.15, p < 0.016$). The simple effects indicate that coworkers' friendship acts significantly and positively predicted OCBI for integrators ($\beta = 0.31, p < 0.001$) but not segmentors ($\beta = -0.01, p = 0.907$). These results invalidate Hypothesis 9 and support Hypothesis 10.

5 Discussion

An increasing number of individuals are connected with their coworkers on SNS, where they share a substantial amount of information about their lifestyles and personal values (e.g., Facebook, some ESM). The present study investigated the relationship between connections with coworkers on Facebook, closeness to coworkers, and interpersonal organizational citizenship behaviors in a sample of 202 employees from a wide range of professional settings.

We found coworkers' friendship acts on Facebook to be positively associated with feeling close to one's coworkers and OCBI. Age (dis)similarity moderated these relationships such that friendship acts were positively associated with closeness when most coworkers were similar in age to or older than the respondent, and with OCBI only when most coworkers were similar in age to the respondent. The closeness result is in line with social identity theory and, specifically, homophilous identification to in-groups (McPherson et al., 1987; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The OCBI result, however, suggests that a lack of liking or commenting on the part of older coworkers does not influence younger employees' OCBI. This may be explained by employees' dependence on older coworkers who generally enjoy greater control over resources in the workplace (e.g., knowledge and expertise; Brimeyer et al., 2010). In other words, employees may be helping older coworkers for instrumental reasons (i.e., to gain access to these resources) (Chattopadhyay et al., 2004), rather than because of interactions with them on SNS.

Second, we found harmful behaviors by coworkers on Facebook to be negatively associated with closeness and OCBI. Age (dis)similarity moderated these relationships such that harmful behaviors were negatively associated with closeness when most coworkers were older than the respondent but not when they were younger than or similar in age to the respondent. This is in line with our reasoning that younger (vs. older) coworkers are likely to feel more vulnerable at work and be more sensitive to conflicts (Aquino & Douglas, 2003). The pattern regarding harmful behaviors on SNS and OCBI was more complex. Age (dis)similarity did not moderate the relationship between harmful behaviors and OCBI. However, a post hoc analysis showed that for employees whose coworkers were older than them, harmful behaviors were only negatively associated with OCBI when coworkers' friendship acts were high. Although we cannot assume causality based on cross-sectional data, this pattern suggests that employees whose coworkers are older than them might only reduce their helping behaviors towards these colleagues when they otherwise have active interactions with coworkers on SNS; coworkers' friendship acts may serve as a positive reference point in comparison to which harmful behaviors stand out.

Third, we found that coworkers' friendship acts on Facebook were more positively associated with OCBI for integrators (vs. segmentors). In other words, integrators demonstrated more citizenship behaviors towards coworkers who interacted with them on SNS, while segmentors' OCBI was not associated with such connections. This concurs with prior work suggesting that segmentors may accept coworkers on SNS so as not to offend them but use privacy settings and limit

interactions with them (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). The finding that coworkers' friendship acts were positively associated with closeness regardless of individuals' preferences for segmentation is intriguing: It suggests that the mere disclosure of information on SNS may increase the sense of connection with coworkers, in line with social psychology findings (Collins & Miller, 1994; Kashian et al., 2017).

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

Our study makes two main contributions. First, we contribute to the information systems literature and, in particular, the SNS literature (Ali-Hassan et al., 2015; Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Ou et al., 2014; Schmidt et al., 2016; Treem & Leonardi, 2013; Utz, 2015), by bridging the mostly disconnected streams of research on work and personal use of SNS. We provide theoretical explanations and empirical evidence showing that interactions on SNS such as Facebook may not only span the offline-online boundary but also the work-life boundary. We also show that these blended interactions are associated with a central workplace attitude, i.e., closeness, and a central workplace behavior, i.e., OCBI. In addition, to the best of our knowledge, our study pioneers the investigation of the moderators of these relationships. We unpack these relationships by identifying two moderators: the demographic characteristic of age (dis)similarity and personal preferences for work-life segmentation.

Second, our study contributes to the social psychology (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and organizational behavior (Ashforth et al., 2000; Rothbard, et al., 2005) literatures by providing solid evidence that interactions on SNS are highly consequential in the workplace. Our findings have important theoretical implications for the study of interpersonal dynamics in the workplace (e.g., work on team cohesion, team performance, leader-member dyads, work engagement), as they point out that important antecedents of these constructs are located outside the spatial and temporal scope of organizations, in a virtual network of interactions that also has offline repercussions.

5.2 Practical implications

Newspaper articles and practitioners' reports document the benefits and risks to employees and organizations of using SNS (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) to post or comment about work-related issues and to interact with coworkers (McGrath, 2018; Nagele-Piazza, 2019; Sarkis, 2019; Workopolis, 2017). Thus, executives and managers are increasingly aware of the importance of managing virtual interactions. However, many organizations avoid issuing policies about the use of public SNS because they fear intruding in their employees' private sphere. Our findings on Facebook

imply that connections with coworkers on any mixed work-life SNS (whether internal to the organization or public) potentially matter for closeness to coworkers and helping behaviors in the workplace, which in turn impact team cohesion (Marlow et al., 2018) and performance (Chung et al., 2018). Thus, our findings imply that organizations should consider public SNS in their organizational development and human resources programs. While respecting their employees' privacy and rights, they could train employees and managers in social media strategies likely to foster respect, liking, and OCBI (Ollier-Malaterre & Luneau-de Serre, 2018; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013) and point out the potential benefits and pitfalls of using SNS with coworkers. Such training would develop employees' technology management skills, which is an increasingly important set of social skills online (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2019). In addition, training could explain that younger vs. older employees and work-life segmentors vs. integrators have differing expectations regarding SNS interactions with coworkers, thus fostering employees' sensitivity when connecting with dissimilar coworkers. Furthermore, team activities that increase the perception of deep-level similarities between coworkers (i.e., values, attitudes, and beliefs homophily) enhance team cohesion (Lu, 2015). Thus, encouraging pleasant social interactions such as team-building activities with coworkers of different ages might help to bridge the gap.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

While the present study contributes novel findings, it also has several limitations. The data are cross-sectional; therefore, causal relationships cannot be assumed. For this reason, a cross-lagged multilevel model assessing coworkers' SNS behaviors before measuring closeness and OCBI would yield additional insights. Moreover, the data were collected from a convenience snowball sample and a unique source, increasing the risk of common method variance biases such as social desirability (Podsakoff et al., 2003). However, the risk associated with such biases is less likely to be an issue in complex and nonlinear models such as the ones tested in this study because the respondents are unlikely to visualize the interactions (Chang et al., 2010). To decrease concerns about common method bias, future research should strive to collect multisource data and survey the respondents' coworkers regarding SNS behaviors and OCBI. Access to organizational samples would enable such designs. Moreover, our measures for coworkers' friendship acts and age (dis)similarity were exploratory; future research should submit them to a strict construct development process. Lastly, future research would benefit from including other variables that may correlate with closeness and OCBI, such as openness to self-disclose online.

Our study opens new avenues for research. First, we have focused on closeness and OCBI to demonstrate that SNS interactions affect important attitudes and behaviors at work. However, other attitudes and behaviors could be studied at the team, dyadic, and individual levels, such as team cohesion, team performance, perceived coworker support, perceived supervisor support, leader-member exchange, work engagement, and absenteeism.

Second, our study is one of the first to point out age dynamics pertaining to SNS use among coworkers. It would be fruitful to further unpack these dynamics by examining the suggested mechanisms behind age fault lines regarding SNS. To what extent do attitudes towards social norms, humor, privacy, and boundary management between work and life differ among younger and older coworkers, and how do these differences affect closeness, OCBI, and other outcomes? What types of personal disclosures may make a coworker of a different age feel less close to and less able to work with the discloser? Since some contents are more sensitive than others (Kaloydis et al., 2017), what types of posts (e.g., family-related, work-related, political/religious) undermine interpersonal relationships at work? Does it make a difference whether harmful behaviors directed at a younger/older coworker occur on public SNS versus ESM? Other important questions that warrant investigation pertain to other factors that may play a role on SNS; for instance, does it matter more to older or younger employees whether coworkers reciprocate online friendship acts such as “liking” and commenting? Might the frequency of face-to-face interactions attenuate age fault lines on SNS? Moreover, we have pointed out that the power differential between younger and older adults might explain differences in

the behaviors between these two groups. Another variable of interest capturing power dynamics is hierarchical level (Brimeyer et al., 2010): How do connections with coworkers on mixed work-life SNS impact closeness, OCBI, and other workplace outcomes in subordinate-supervisor dyads that may mimic or differ from the younger-older configurations we have examined?

Third, we focused on age (dis)similarity because age is a salient fault line in society and the workplace. However, social identity theory and relational demography theory suggest that gender and ethnicity (dis)similarity are also important variables to examine (Chattopadhyay et al., 2016). It would be fruitful to further examine the age dynamics we identified at the intersection of these other (dis)similarities.

6 Conclusion

The present study points out positive and negative attitudes and behaviors associated with connecting with coworkers on SNS that mix work and life. It also delves into the moderating roles played by age (dis)similarity and preferences for work-life segmentation. We hope that our findings inspire future research integrating information systems, organizational behavior, and social psychology literature to further examine how SNS are transforming the workplace.

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