

Examining Factors that Influence Subordinates' Willingness to Connect with Supervisors on  
Facebook through the Lens of Communication Privacy Management Theory

by

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## **Abstract**

Over the last decade, people have been able to access and use the Internet quickly and easily through several types of advanced technologies. Social networking sites (SNS) have attracted millions of users from all over the world and have become a part of their social and work lives. As the most popular SNS, Facebook.com has been leading the SNS market with 1.86 billion monthly active users (Facebook, 2017). Facebook has also been adopted by workplaces. Individuals in the workplace use Facebook for several reasons, such as staying in touch with colleagues. This integration of SNSs into people's work life has led to personal and professional boundaries being blurred and created privacy dilemmas. This study examines factors that influence subordinate's willingness to accept a Facebook friend request from their supervisor, using the theoretical lens of communication privacy management (CPM). Overall, 231 individuals who have a Facebook account and work at either a full-time or part-time job completed an online survey. A positive relationship was found between subordinates' willingness to accept a Facebook friend request from a supervisor and subordinate communication satisfaction with a supervisor. This study's results indicate that alterations in Facebook content, and being more open through privacy management practices do not predict subordinates' willingness to accept supervisors' Facebook friend request. Further, subordinates' communication satisfaction with their supervisor did not influence subordinates' content alterations of Facebook, such as deleting previously posted media content, wall posts, modifying profile information, or removing status updates. This thesis ends with a discussion of the implications of Facebook connections between subordinates and supervisors. This study also provides insights on the intersections of use of SNS, workplace use of SNSs, workplace relationships, and communication privacy management theory.

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## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

Accessibility and use of the Internet have increased globally with several advancements in broadband technology in recent years. Internet access is cheaper, easier, faster, and more convenient for the majority of individuals (Ahmad, 2011). A product of the growth of Internet access has been the burgeoning of social networking sites (SNSs) or, communication platforms that allow registered participants to establish social networks, create and share content using various website-provided tools, and interact with other users (Ellison & boyd, 2013). Examples of SNSs include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. SNSs have attracted millions of users globally and have become part of people's daily and professional lives (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016; Olmstead, Lampe, & Ellison, 2016). Of the various SNSs, Facebook is the most popular SNS based on number of users, and has been since 2008 (Facebook, 2017). Every second, five new profiles are created (Zephoria, 2017), demonstrating Facebook's remarkable growth in this digital era.

While the technological features and characteristics of SNSs are similar, the dynamics, practices, and cultures of each site are varied (boyd & Ellison, 2008). There are several types of sites that appeal to users based on their shared interests (boyd & Ellison, 2007). For example, a SNS, which is designed for professionals, can develop its features based on professionals' common needs, interaction preferences or specific interests. Most SNSs provide an environment for the maintenance of existing social networks; however, other SNSs support people in establishing new and diverse relationships by connecting them (boyd, 2007). For example, people can use Facebook not only to stay in touch with family members but also to build new relationships with colleagues.



As the use of SNSs have increased, the kinds of social connections that individuals have on these sites has also grown. Along with the increased number of SNSs and increased numbers of users of SNSs, the types of reasons why individuals use SNSs also has increased. These include developing new friendships, expanding social networks, presenting self, entertainment, information sharing and seeking (Whiting & Williams, 2013).

Connection with co-workers through SNSs is one way to develop work relationships (Feeley, Hwang, & Barnett, 2008). The development of workplace relationships between employees can contribute to workers' job satisfaction and improve their morale (Feeley et al, 2008). Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson, and Seymour (2011) concluded that the use of social networking platforms can contribute to employees' productivity, creativity, and work-related interests, potentially improving organizational communication and the organization itself.

One concern surrounding Facebook use has revolved around privacy (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Although there are a variety of ways to modify privacy settings, such as altering how easy it is to be searched and deciding what information gets shared with what audiences (Ismail, Rahman, & Azad, 2016), the blend of friends, family members and co-workers with access to one's Facebook profile blurs the boundaries between these different relationships (Karl, & Peluchette, 2011). Even though users can allow some of their friends to access their information and Facebook activities to a certain extent, many users have the same access unless they change Facebook's standard privacy settings manually. Thus, people may experience uneasiness due to lack of boundaries between the multiple groups on Facebook (Peluchette, Karl, & Fertig, 2013).

The use of SNSs has become an essential part of people's working lives, influencing workplace routines, roles, and relationships (Del Bosque, 2013; Skeels & Grudin, 2009). As a SNS, Facebook offers a platform which can enable professionals to form friendships (Frampton

& Child, 2013). It also can enhance or change traditional ways of communicating in the workplace. Coworkers may choose to communicate through Facebook rather than or in addition to communicating face-to-face, by email or phone with colleagues. This ability to communicate with coworkers over Facebook has blurred personal and professional boundaries, making them difficult to manage (Skeels & Grudin, 2009).

One such difficulty involves the decision to accept a “friend request,” or request to connect, from a supervisor (Karl & Peluchette, 2011; Peluchette et al., 2013; Vitak, Lampe, Gray, & Ellison 2012). Much scholarly and non-scholarly research has examined how Facebook friendship requests from sources such as parents (Child & Westermann, 2013), colleagues (Frampton & Child, 2013), and supervisors (Adecco, 2010; Del Bosque, 2013; Karl, Peluchette, & Schaegele, 2010) are perceived and processed. Although people tend to accept Facebook friend request from parents and coworkers, this tendency is somewhat split when requests come from supervisors. On the one hand, people can feel uneasy about accepting a supervisor’s Facebook friend request due to privacy concerns (Peluchette et al., 2013). This can be particularly problematic because employers make hiring decisions, seek information, and check backgrounds of job applicants by utilizing Facebook (Smith & Kidder, 2010). On the other hand, people may perceive such requests as an opportunity to extend their professional network, find new jobs, advance in their career quickly, and build stronger or strengthen existing relationship with their supervisors (DiMicco & Millen, 2007; Peluchette et al., 2013; Rutledge, 2008). While researchers have primarily covered the use of Facebook within the interpersonal contexts, the use of Facebook in the workplace and the issue of supervisory Facebook friend requests deserves greater attention for better understanding how Facebook influences workplace relationships.

For these reasons, this study examines factors that influence subordinates' likelihood of accepting a Facebook friend request from their supervisor in the workplace, using the lens of communication privacy management theory (Petronio, 2002, 2013) as a theoretical framework. Moreover, this study offers both scholarly and practical benefits. First, it adds to limited research regarding privacy and organizational issues (Styocheff, Liu, Wibowo, & Nanni, 2017). Doing so enhances our comprehension and ability to identify factors that impact people's work/life tensions and decisions to use Facebook in the workplace. Second, this research contributes to work/life balance research and the blurring of boundaries by SNS use (DiMicco & Millen, 2007; Skeels & Grudin, 2009). Third, this research contributes to research on the development of superior-subordinate relationships, looking specifically at the consequences of communication satisfaction.

To preview the remainder of this thesis, chapter two reviews literature on SNSs, supervisor-subordinate communication in the workplace, and communication privacy management. Chapter three describes the method used for investigating the research questions and the hypothesis. Chapter four provides the results of the study. Chapter five discusses the results of the findings in relation to workplace communication, SNS use, and CPM theory, addressing the study's implications for research and practice as well as its limitations.

## Chapter 2 - Literature Review

It is necessary to conduct a review of the relevant literature concerning the role of SNSs in the workplace. This chapter reviews research related to SNSs, workplace communication and the influence of SNSs in the workplace. Also, this chapter covers communication privacy management theory as the framework of this study. Initially, this chapter begins with a discussion of the recent developments of SNSs.

### **Development of Social Networking Sites**

Ellison and boyd (2013) offer one of the most comprehensive definitions of social networking sites, defining them 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 other; and (3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site. (p. 158)

boyd (2007) distinguishes SNSs from face-to-face interaction based on four factors: persistence, searchability, replicability, and invisible audiences. Persistence means that, unlike short-lived everyday conversations, interactions on SNSs can be recorded, enabling partners to continue their interactions on the site (boyd, 2007). Searchability means that, because of SNSs record users' profile, information, and identity and provide such information to the public, people are able to look for other users who share the same view (boyd, 2007). Replicability refers to people being able to copy their expressions and use them in other interactions on SNSs (boyd, 2007). Invisible audiences refer to people having less control regarding who can overhear their conversations on a networking site compared to face-to-face interactions (boyd, 2007).

Regarding supervisor-subordinate interactions on a SNS, either supervisors or subordinates may want to maintain their face-to-face interactions through an online platform. SNSs can enable supervisors and subordinates to continue to communicate with each other on the site after work or when they become geographically distant. Moreover, supervisors or subordinates may search any type of information about one another by using their SNS and thus they get the chance to know each other. Lastly, both parties can use SNSs for private conversations with less concern about being overheard by others in the workplace.

While SNSs existed prior to the early 2000s, the number and popularity of these sites increased rapidly from 2002-2006 in the USA aimed primarily at young people (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Ellison et al., 2007). After 2001, in addition to profile-centric sites, new SNSs were formed based on users' passions, interests, identities, and activities. For example, Couchsurfing.com connected travelers, activists used Care2, MyChurch helped formulate religious communities, LinkedIn created a platform for business professionals, and local musicians connected and advertised their activities through MySpace (boyd & Ellison, 2007). By 2006, MySpace was the most popular SNS in the United States. Although these social networking platforms were open to anybody, they targeted specific demographics before reaching out to a broader audience – younger audience who were keener to interact with other individuals of their generation online.

Facebook, however, developed a closed network with a restriction regarding registration to the site when it was launched in 2004. Since Mark Zuckerberg was a Harvard student, Facebook's membership was limited to Harvard-only students at first; however, it was expanded to colleges in the Boston area, the Ivy League, all American and Canadian universities, and

corporations over a two-year period. Eventually, the site was accessible to everyone who was 13 years old and older with an email address in 2006 (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Brügger, 2013).

Many SNSs also have their own specific characteristics, offering new experiences of interaction to attract prospective Internet users. For example, on Instagram, users can post photos or videos instantly whereas, on Twitter, they exchange tweets which are short messages written within 140 characters. Snapchat allows users to send and receive photos and videos that expire after the receiver's viewing. Even though Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter have gained popularity by offering new features to users, they still fall behind Facebook based on the number of users (Alhabash & Ma, 2017).

### **The Rise of Facebook**

After 2008, with the development of mobile phones, Facebook's popularity as a mobile application dramatically increased (Brügger, 2013). As a result, Facebook reached 100 million mobile users in 2010 (Brügger, 2013). Since Facebook was accessible through mobile phones, the features 'Checking in' and 'Facebook Places' enabled users to share information about their locations, who they were with and which of their friends were nearby. In addition, 'live video streaming,' 'Community Pages,' 'Facebook Video Calling,' and 'Timeline' features were introduced in 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012 respectively (Brügger, 2013). In the year of 2012, Facebook was available on all continents and in more than 70 different languages and reached more than one billion users (Brügger, 2013).

Brügger (2013) stated that the above-mentioned major developments, functionalities, new initiatives, and changes led Facebook to consolidate its existing framework, grow and expand rapidly, and create new ways of interactions. In addition, it is likely that frequent upgrades, the addition of new and engaging features and other innovative efforts offered people new

experiences and motivated them to use Facebook more. This increased use helped Facebook to become a dominant SNS (Brügger, 2013)

### **Motivations for using SNSs**

Millions of people have integrated SNSs in general and Facebook in particular into their lives for various reasons. Several studies have found that individuals tend to involve, sustain, and enhance their relationships with their friends, family, acquaintances (Ellison et al., 2007), colleagues (Frampton & Child, 2013), and supervisors (DiMicco, & Millen, 2007; Peluchette et al., 2013) by using SNSs. Mäntymäki and Islam (2016) found that users were motivated by exhibitionism, interpersonal connectivity, voyeurism, and social enhancement. In addition, Belk (2013) argued using SNSs can satisfy self-disclosure in the maintenance of social relationships through these sites. Likewise, Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield (2008) found that individuals gain information about others by using SNSs.

Furthermore, social capital is another motive for using SNSs. This concept is defined by Bourdieu (1986) as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p. 248). Social capital develops in relationships at individual, group, and organizational levels (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2009). Social capital can be developed through the exchanges of opinions, ideas, knowledge or another type of information between two people through communication (Bohn, Buchta, Hornik, & Mair, 2014). Putnam (2000) presented two forms of social capital, which are bonding and bridging social capital. The former refers to benefits obtained from close relationships such as emotional support. The latter, bridging social capital, describes benefits from casual interactions such as acquaintances (Putnam, 2000). Network researchers associate bonding social capital with strong ties and

bridging social capital with weak ties (Ellison et al., 2007). Strong ties are those ties that are rooted in close relationships whereas weak ties are rooted in more distant or casual relationships. Social capital is important because it provides people with new information and tangible and emotional benefits based on weak or strong ties of individuals.

Steinfeld, DiMicco, Ellison, and Lampe (2009) indicated that SNS can provide larger networks that can generate more weak ties. These weak ties can provide new or different information or perspectives than the redundant information provided by strong ties (Granovetter, 1973). Since SNSs include users' weak ties, such as acquaintances, and other casual connections, users are more likely to have non-redundant information with diverse perspectives (Steinfeld et al., 2009). Thus, SNSs can be helpful regarding building and maintaining social capital because SNSs allow people to interact with each other through social and technical channels (Steinfeld et al., 2009). Previous studies found that there was a positive relationship between the use of Facebook and higher levels of social capital among students (Ellison et al., 2007; Steinfeld, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008). Considering this within a workplace context, having friends from the workplace through SNSs may help individuals create and maintain their social capital related to work (Skeels, & Grudin, 2009). Thus, having colleagues as Facebook friends can be practical in terms of social capital.

There are many professional reasons for using Facebook as well. Although Facebook was not developed specifically for its use in the workplace, it has penetrated professional settings (DiMicco & Millen, 2007; Skeels & Grudin, 2009). A recent survey of 2,003 American adults by the Pew Research Center shows that there are eight different ways that workers use social media while at work. The most common work-related reason why they use SNSs while on the job was



to establish or support professional connections (24%). Further, 17% of participants used social media platforms to learn about someone they worked with (Olmstead et al, 2016).

To sum up, people are driven by a wide range motives for using SNSs. SNSs can be tools for helping people connect both inside and outside the workplace as well as for accomplishing professional goals. These professional goals and connections are associated with supervisor-subordinate communication dynamics in the workplace.

### **Supervisor-Subordinate Communication in the Workplace**

Workplace communication can be described in terms of its content, direction, channel, and style (Miller, 2015). Content can focus on task-related topics, relationship maintenance, and idea innovation. The direction of communication can flow downward, upward, or laterally. Channel of communication can include written and oral communication, which can occur face-to-face or over some other medium. Style of communication differs in its formality, from the highly formal to the highly informal (Miller, 2015). Communication characteristics differ based on type of workplace relationships, task characteristics, and other organizational characteristics. These differences can create tensions or problems when relationships between employees or between superiors and subordinates are extended into SNSs, where rules and norms guiding communication likely differ.

Although there can be many different relationships in workplaces, one type of relationship that can be complex to manage is the superior-subordinate relationship. The subordinate-superior relationship is a type of relationship in which superiors have direct and formal authority over subordinates (Sias, 2009). Katz and Kahn (1978) identified several types of information that conventionally flow within superior-subordinate relationships. Supervisors tend to communicate information pertaining to instructions about the job, explanation of the job,

procedures and practices, feedback, and imbuing employees with organizational goals (Fix & Sias, 2006). On the other hand, subordinates' communication tends to be about themselves, their performance, their own problems or problems about co-workers, practices and policies of the organization, what needs to be completed and how it can be done (Katz & Kahn, 1978). These ways of communicating can take place face-to-face as well as through online platforms.

Miller (2015) argued that online technology has enough potential to change the patterns of organizational communication with the increased use of SNSs. Ellison et al. (2009) indicated that SNSs can influence the ways that larger groups communicate because these sites allow members to organize, easily, quickly, and with low cost as well as help them while arranging meetings, distributing the information and discussing and evaluating others' opinions.

Consequently, being connected on Facebook can be useful in performing organizational practices among members regardless of status differences.

Jablin (1979) characterized superior-subordinate communication as an exchange of information and impact among members of an organization, where the superior holds formal authority over subordinates, as well as instructs and evaluates the task performances of subordinates. Supervisor-subordinate communication is important for several reasons. The quality of superior-subordinate communication is positively correlated with job satisfaction (Goldhaber, Porter, Yates & Lesniak, 1978), performance evaluations (Nathan, Mohrman, & Milliman, 1991), organizational commitment (Schweiger & Denisi, 1991), and openness (Jablin, 1979). In addition, Redding (1972) reviewed literature regarding supervisor and subordinate communication and summarized the characteristics of good supervisors, such as communication minded, approachable, and open in communication information to subordinates. Also, Parsons, Herold and Leatherwood (1985) found that positive feedback from supervisors to employees was

negatively correlated to employees' turnover. Concerning quality of supervisor-subordinate relationships, Sias (2005) indicates that high-quality supervisor-subordinate relationships reduce turnover and create more positive organizational climate in a workplace. This suggests that superior-subordinate communication has meaningful individual, relational, and organizational consequences.

As with other types of relationships in organizations, superiors and subordinates attempt to manage several, and at times competing, social and organizational goals (Fix & Sias, 2006). What makes the superior-subordinate relationship unique is the power differential between the parties. In organizations where there is a clear hierarchy, power is distributed to superiors and subordinates unequally. This unequal distribution increases the complexities and the tensions of superior-subordinate relationships. Critical organization communication scholars have examined covert power, influence, and dominance as factors that influence superior-subordinate relationship (Mumby, 2001). The critical perspective argues that superiors and subordinates may work together, but they are unequal as the power, control, and work-related authority belong to supervisors more than subordinates. From this point, Sias (2009) posits that communication becomes a process which conveys control and power within an organizational hierarchy.

Regarding superior-subordinate connections over a SNS, Skeels and Grudin (2009) demonstrated that upon receiving a Facebook friendship invitation from a supervisor, employees felt apprehension because they were not sure how they should respond to invitations in an appropriate manner, as well as what the consequences of their response would be. This also can reflect how power dynamics may play a role subordinates' responses to such requests. Overall, these dynamics likely are important factors concerning how organizational members use SNSs in the workplace.

## **Implications of SNS Use in the Workplace**

Over the last decade, there have been growing numbers of SNS-based connections in the workplace (Agarwal & Mital, 2009). The impact and utilization of SNSs change the ways that organizational members interact with one another (Miller, 2015). DiMicco and Millen (2007) suggest that SNSs have increasingly seeped into workplace environments and thus have become a part of employees' workday practices and workplace life. Facebook in particular allows user to maintain and expand their social networks.

Del Bosque (2013) concluded that using SNSs in the workplace has changed employees' interactions with colleagues not only within the organization but also outside of the workplace. Relatedly, as user demographics of Facebook is changing and including more people from different age groups user (Peluchette et al., 2013), individuals share Facebook with other people they do not typically share personal information about their lives. Examples can include professors, work friends, and supervisors. Facebook can serve as a social venue for users and provides insights into users' personal lives and thus being friends on Facebook may be considered an opportunity by both subordinates and supervisors to improve non-work sides of their relationship.

Subordinates also may take power dynamics into consideration when they decide whether they use Facebook for interpersonal or workplace purposes and whether they accept or reject a Facebook friend request from a supervisor. For example, subordinates may consider accepting the friend request to enhance his/her own professional network or enhance their workplace image.

On the other hand, the subordinate may feel that they have no option rather than accepting the friend request (Del Bosque, 2013). Some working professionals prefer to set their

work life apart from their personal life and maintain this distinction. Others strive for building friendships with colleagues which can blur the line between personal and professional life (Skeels & Grudin, 2009), complicate workplace relationships and cause confusion when managing privacy (Frampton & Child, 2013).

Several studies suggest that using SNSs may improve workplace relationships, creativity, and morale among individuals, as well as improve employee interest in a workplace setting (Bennett, Owers, Pitt, & Tucker, 2009; Edosomwan et al., 2011). DiMicco and Millen (2007) concluded that employees can utilize SNSs to learn about newcomers or other members within an organization. As such, these sites enable workers to find common ground and improve interpersonal interactions with colleagues within an organization, which means using SNSs also could be beneficial for organizations (DiMicco & Millen, 2007). Skeels and Grudin, (2009) observed that Microsoft employees use Facebook in the workplace primarily to create rapport and strengthen relationships with work friends, obtain professional information, maintaining awareness, keeping in touch, and building both personal and professional social capital. Also, Del Bosque (2013) indicated that several librarians mentioned opportunities about expanding professional contacts, developing a reputation, and knowing current issues and trends about their professional interests. Since SNSs can help to build open communication between employees and management, using SNSs could be useful for places where subordinates share their work-related ideas and improve their teamwork skills (Edosomwan et al., 2011).

There are possible downsides to SNS use in the workplace. Using SNS at work can result in lower levels of employee professionalism, efficiency, and performance (Bennett et al., 2009). In a survey of 2003 American adults who use SNSs at work, 56% of participants agreed that social media is a distraction (Olmstead et al., 2016). Additionally, Del Bosque (2013) concluded

a decrease in face-to-face communication in the workplace, gossip emerging based on Facebook posts, and potential time-wasting during working hours while using SNSs were also disadvantages of using SNSs in the workplace. Peluchette et al. (2013) indicated that most of the participants reported they would have had different strategies when responding to a Facebook friend request from their bosses to avoid possible damage to their relationships or careers. The strategies that participants considered include limiting what their bosses can see by using privacy settings, unfriending bosses after a few weeks, carefully self-monitoring, or deleting one's Facebook profile altogether (Peluchette et al., 2013).

Additionally, there may be privacy concerns related to superiors and co-workers having access to personal information shared on SNS such as Facebook (Greysen, Kind, & Chretien, 2010). For example, organizations utilize Facebook to gather information about current employees or job applicants (Smith, & Kidder, 2010) and screen employees (Clark & Roberts, 2010; Davison, Maraist, & Bing, 2011; Levine, 2011). Vitak et al. (2012) revealed that participants were highly worried about keeping their work and life balance when using Facebook in the workplace. Having colleagues in one's Facebook network may lead professionals to feel vulnerable because their coworkers can easily gather information about them or their superiors may make employment decisions by looking at their Facebook profile (Smith & Kidder, 2010). Further, even though respondents limited what they shared on their profiles to overcome such tensions, they were still worried about their Facebook friends' postings which were sent to the original owner of the profile (Skeels & Grudin, 2009). In such a case, these postings may not be welcomed by the employers. These concerns suggest that privacy management is an important factor when deciding how and whether to develop connections in the workplace.

## **Managing Privacy in the Workplace**

Since around 2000, privacy concerns on SNSs have become a popular research topic (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Past research has identified several potential privacy threats on Facebook and concluded that users may be at risk regarding being stalked, harassed, hacked, and falling victim to online identity theft (Greiner, 2009; Mansfield-Devine, 2008; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008). Surendra and Peace (2009) argued that information disseminated about a group that the user once joined can harm the user's privacy. In all, previous studies regarding SNSs and privacy conclude that there is a lack of privacy on these sites and that existing privacy controls are not easy to use (Clark & Roberts, 2010; Davison et al., 2011; Levine, 2011).

This study employs communication privacy management theory as the theoretical framework. Petronio (2002) described communication privacy management theory (CPM) as “a privacy management system that identifies ways privacy boundaries are coordinated” (p. 3). She also describes privacy as “the feeling that one has the right to own private information, either personally or collectively” (Petronio, 2002, p. 6). CPM theory has been applied to interpersonal (McBride & Mason, 2008), family (Afifi, 2003), and health communication primarily (Petronio, 2013). It was also employed in research of online social media (Jin, 2013), work environments (Miller & Weckert, 2000), and privacy on SNSs (Frampton & Child, 2013).

CPM theory has five core principles regarding the management of disclosed or concealed private information (Petronio, 2002). These principles are (1) private information, (2) privacy boundaries, (3) control and ownership, (4) a rule-based system and (5) privacy dialectics.

The first principle of CPM theory essentially refers to the ownership of the information that an individual considers as private. Relatedly, people believe that they have their own private information and keep it to themselves (Petronio, 2002). As a result, they are free to decide

whether they reveal or conceal their private information to others. This principle may connect with Facebook friendship decisions. For example, a Facebook user who does not want others to see his/her information on Facebook, may not accept their friend request. Thus the user would keep the information to himself/herself.

Privacy boundaries refer to a self-determined level of separation between personal or public information. Petronio (1991) suggested that when individuals reveal information to their communication partners, they join their partners into a privacy boundary. After both parties become a part of this boundary, both parties expect that the information they shared with each other must be concealed. If the information is shared with larger groups, the boundary is named as a collective boundary, whereas the personal boundary is related to individually owned information. The permeability of personal or collective boundaries changes constantly and it can be either easy or difficult to cross (Petronio, 1991; 2002).

According to the third principle, since people own their private information and its boundaries, they have a right to decide whether they make their information accessible to others or maintain closed privacy boundaries. When a person discloses information, the receiver is assigned as the co-owner of that information and its boundaries (Petronio, Sargent, Andea, Reganis, & Cichocki, 2004). Co-owners are responsible for the decision of how, when, and if shared information can be distributed to others. People, as co-owners, can bear the responsibility in different degrees and their understanding of how information should be managed can be dissimilar (Petronio & Durham, 2008).

Principle four describes a system which allows people to make decisions about revealing and concealing private information. According to Petronio (2002), individuals control their private information based on rules that guide their actions. These rules enable individuals to



manage who accesses the private information, including how, how much of, when and where that information is shared, and how that information is concealed (Petronio, 2002). In this rule-based management system, there are three privacy rule processes that allow the regulation of concealing and revealing the private information on the personal and collective level. These processes are (1) privacy rule characteristics, (2) boundary coordination, and (3) boundary turbulence (Petronio, 2002).

Concerning the privacy rule characteristics as a part of the fourth principle, privacy rules have two facets: attributes and development. Attributes mean how individuals acquire privacy rules and perceive characteristics of those rules (Petronio, 1991). The developments of privacy rules refer to how people developed privacy rules and implemented those rules. Here, Petronio (2002) suggests five foundational criteria as the ways people develop their own privacy rules and that impact on the decision of revealing or concealing private information to others – culture, gender, motivation, context, and the risk-benefits ratio (Petronio, 1991; 2002). Culture refers to how perception of privacy values influence disclosure in a given culture (Petronio, 2002). In addition, the gender factor is related to how men and women perceive and form privacy boundaries differently (Petronio, 2002). The third factor, motivation, points out that individuals disclose or conceal their private information and establish their own privacy rules based on their needs or motivations (Petronio, 2002). Considering workplace relationships, a motivated subordinate can be more open when revealing private information to other in the workplace. Context refers to how people develop or modify privacy rules depending upon the circumstances or situations in which they engage (Petronio, 2002). Contextual criteria also include social environment and physical setting (Petronio, 2002). Since contextual criteria include the social environment and physical setting that influence individuals' privacy decisions, workplace

relationships, the workplace context and Facebook settings can impact peoples' decisions regarding privacy management and willingness to connect with others on Facebook. Lastly, the risk-benefit ratio means that people evaluate possible costs or benefits in case of revealing or protecting information and after that evaluation, they decide if they will disclose or conceal their information (Petronio, 1991; 2002). As such, employees can decide to whom they reveal their private information based on their own benefit-cost evaluations.

Secondly, boundary coordination refers to how people manage co-owned private information. Individuals decide and control what they disclose and conceal based on the existing or mutually agreed-upon rules. Petronio (2002) proposed that once private information is revealed, co-owners ought to coordinate privacy boundaries and negotiate on agreeable privacy rules. Petronio (2002) named this process mutual boundary coordination. In this negotiation process, co-owners of the private information take boundary linkage, boundary permeability, and boundary ownership rules into consideration (Child & Agyeman-Budu, 2010; Child, Pearson, & Petronio, 2009; Child & Petronio, 2011).

Boundary linkage is the process of moving from an individual boundary to a collective one as a result of linking others into the privacy boundary created by the original owner of the private information. These linkages tell how both communication partners are connected when they establish a boundary. Moreover, boundary permeability refers to the privacy rule boundaries that are perceived by individuals when deciding how much information can be shared and how private information is protected from the unwanted audience. For example, revealing private information to a larger group can result in an expansion of privacy information boundaries. Thus, it makes these boundaries more permeable because there is a higher possibility that many people can access this information (Petronio, 2004). Furthermore, boundary ownership explains that

each co-owner of a particular boundary have different degrees of responsibilities, rights, and privileges over the control of the distribution of the private information that they hold. Here, Petronio (1991) stated that each co-owner needs to be aware of how the private information is handled when mutually establishing the privacy boundaries.

As the third process of boundary management, boundary turbulence would be the likely result if a co-owner, willingly or unintentionally, acts in a way that disrupts the coordination of privacy boundaries or violates a co-owner's privacy rules (Petronio, 2002). As an example, if a subordinate (the co-owner of private information) shares private information with a manager without the permission of his/her co-worker (the original owner of that information) in the workplace, that co-worker would experience turbulence. This example illustrates that if the boundaries are not understood clearly or effectively negotiated by the co-owners, information may be over-shared. Although turbulence has undesirable outcome such as mistrust, anger, and uncertainty, co-owners can reduce or avoid turbulence by updating, correcting or reestablishing privacy rules (Child et al. 2011; Petronio, 2002; Petronio, Ellmers, Giles, & Gallois, 1998). Also, turbulence that is experienced within a relationship can result in a stronger and better relationship than before (McLaren, 2013).

### **Implications of CPM for Connecting with Supervisor on Facebook**

Increased use of electronic surveillance technologies by companies can lead employees to feel more privacy invasion and establish privacy boundaries in their relationships with the company (Allen, Coopman, Hart, & Walker, 2007). Research about the use of SNSs has revealed that people engage in various privacy management and disclosure practices (Child et al., 2009; Child & Petronio, 2011). In particular, working professionals make decisions regarding how they use Facebook and manage their privacy on the site (Child et al., 2011).

In their study on Facebook friendships in the workplace, DiMicco and Millen (2007) found that employees who have Facebook accounts were slightly concerned that their colleagues or supervisors might be looking at their Facebook profiles. One of their interviewees indicated that he had used Facebook for the purpose of entertainment and hoped his supervisor would view his profile and see that his profile did not include anything about his professional life. Other participants reported that before beginning to work in their new jobs, they intentionally altered their Facebook profile contents.

CPM theory postulates that understanding the collective privacy boundary management practices is an essential part of individuals' privacy management judgments and their resulting decisions on the matter of how they regulate their privacy (Petronio, 2002). This is especially the case in situations when supervisors attempt to connect with their employees on Facebook. As described earlier, there are meaningful power differences between supervisors and subordinates. Coupled with privacy concerns of connecting over SNS use, the result of receiving a friend request from a supervisor can be filled with tension as the employee decides whether to accept, reject, or take no action on the friend request (Skeels & Grudin, 2009).

This theory frames supervisor Facebook friend requests as causing potential privacy tensions for subordinates, like in other contexts (Petronio & Jones, 2006; Petronio et al., 2003). When receiving the friend request, employees may reevaluate whether their existing privacy management rules and disclosure practices are inadequate or not. Before responding to a supervisor's Facebook friend invitation, subordinates may feel that they need to revise their Facebook privacy rules in order for the greater protection of their information. Relatedly, they may prefer to remove previously posted information or other content that includes private information such as pictures, videos, and comments from their page. Also, they may limit the

accessibility of the information to their supervisor as another option privacy rule adjustment. DiMicco and Millen (2007) found that some of the respondents intentionally altered their Facebook contents by deleting some pictures to look better on their page. Potential content alterations can make subordinates less concerned regarding privacy and also how they would look their Facebook profile to their managers. On the other side, subordinates also may not find it necessary to alter their Facebook posts and feel content if they think that their current privacy rules are enough for protecting information. This leads to the first research question:

RQ<sub>1</sub>: How does the likelihood of altering content influence willingness to accept a Facebook friend request from one's supervisor?

One way that individuals exercise control over their privacy is by being careful about what they disclose on SNSs (Child & Agyeman- Budu, 2010; Child, Haridakis, & Petronio, 2012; Child et al., 2009; Child & Petronio, 2011). People may prefer to use Facebook either passively or actively, and/or publicly or privately (Child & Petronio, 2011; Child et al., 2011). Additionally, Child et al. (2009) illustrated that a high level of public and private self-consciousness leads people to be more public and open to others while enacting their own privacy management rules. Moreover, individuals who have greater self-monitoring skills are inclined to have more protective behaviors regarding their privacy on their site than people who are lower self-monitors (Child & Agyeman-Budu, 2010).

Working professionals' Facebook privacy management impacts their responses when they receive a coworker Facebook friend requests. Professionals who were open with disclosure and Facebook privacy management allowed coworker Facebook linkages (Frampton & Child, 2013). However, the connection between subordinates' Facebook privacy management practices and their decisions about accepting a supervisor Facebook friendship invitation has been

understudied. Yet, based on Frampton and Child's (2013) research, it may be reasonable to hypothesize that openness on Facebook will positively influence subordinates' willingness to accept a friend request from their supervisor.

H<sub>1</sub>: Employees who are more open with privacy management practices on Facebook are more willing to accept a Facebook friend request from their supervisor.

Previous research has shown that communication satisfaction plays a critical role in workplace relationships, work-related experiences, overall productivity, and job satisfaction (Madlock, 2008; Pincus, 1986). Frampton and Child (2013) found that coworkers who experienced a high level of communication satisfaction with others in the workplace mostly accepted coworkers' Facebook friendship requests. Given that a high level of communication satisfaction within a workplace setting influences decisions about Facebook friendship requests, satisfaction can also affect subordinates' willingness to accept a Facebook friendship request that comes from their supervisors. Additionally, CPM theory postulates that contextual criteria play an essential role in developing privacy rules (Petronio, 2002). Frampton and Child (2013) showed that communication satisfaction would serve as a contextual criterion for employees' decisions of whether to accept a coworker's Facebook friend request. With similar consideration of Frampton and Child's (2013) study, this thesis asks whether or not a higher level of communication satisfaction a subordinate experience in the relationship with their supervisor is an important contextual factor in determining whether the subordinate wishes to extend their interaction with the supervisor through Facebook or not:

RQ<sub>2</sub>: How does supervisor- subordinate communication satisfaction influence subordinates' willing to accept a supervisor's Facebook friend request?

In addition, the high level of subordinate communication satisfaction may make subordinates more comfortable in their interactions with a supervisor on Facebook and thus they may find altering Facebook content unnecessary. Also, as DiMicco and Millen (2007) observed before, people might change their Facebook content before they took the job. In such case, a high level of communication satisfaction with a supervisor may lead subordinates to think that they would not need to make revisions about further posts. Frampton and Child (2013) discussed that users may make revisions on their Facebook profile such as deleting old posts/media contents to readjust their current privacy rules while handling Facebook friend requests from coworkers. In addition, DiMicco and Millen (2007) indicated that respondents altered their profiles' content for managing self-presentation, and making their profile look better for professional and non-professional audiences. Examining whether or not subordinate-supervisor communication satisfaction influences subordinates' privacy adjustment practices can increase understanding of the influence of communication satisfaction on perceived need to readjust privacy practices on Facebook. Therefore, the third research question asks:

RQ<sub>3</sub>: How does subordinate-supervisor communication satisfaction influence likelihood of altering Facebook content?

## **Chapter 3 - Methodology**

The aim of this chapter is to describe the methodology used in the examination of the research questions and the hypothesis proposed in chapter two. This chapter elaborates on the sampling and the recruitment of the participants, data collection process, measurements, and the approach for analysis of the data.

### **Sampling and Participants**

Students with a full time or part time job and who had a Facebook account comprised the participants of this study. A convenience sampling technique was employed to obtain subjects for this study. College students are useful to study because younger generation are likely use Facebook to establish connections. For example, Perrin (2015) indicates that young adults between 18 and 29 years old have the highest rates (90%) of social media adoption. DiMicco and Millen (2007) also argue that young hires may use SNSs in the workplace to stay in touch with colleagues and maintain professional connections. Because of these reasons, college students were appropriate to sample and contributed to the study's external validity.

Students with a full time or part time job and who had a Facebook account comprised the participants of this study. The data was collected in two phases. In the first phase, 145 participants were recruited from a participant pool of the Department of Communication Studies at Kansas State University in 2015. In the second phase, an additional 86 participants were recruited in 2017 at the same university. The researcher was provided with a sample of course sections through the Department of Communication Studies research pool from which to recruit students enrolled in the basic course for this study. Participants completed an online survey. Those who completed the online survey were awarded 10 extra credit points towards their course grade. To be eligible for the study, participants were required to have full-time or part-time



employment of more than three months at the same organization. In addition to this, the study was limited to those who have a Facebook account. An alternative assignment was provided to those who did not meet the requirements to complete the survey for participation credits. The alternative assignment was to write a two-page essay about how Facebook use influences workplace relationships.

The average age of the study sample was approximately 19 years old ( $m = 19.77$ ;  $sd = 3.05$ ). Participants who did not complete the survey or indicated that they had never been employed were eliminated, which left 231 responses for analysis. Out of the 231 participants who completed the survey, 49.4% were female and 50.6% were male. The sample was predominantly Caucasian (82.8%), with less than 10% identifying as Asian (7.8%), Hispanic (5.2%), or African American (3.5%). Participants were also asked to indicate their current classification in college. The majority were freshmen (60.7%), while the lowest percentage of respondents were seniors (7.6%). The sophomore and junior classes were each 15% of the sample.

In this study, 133 participants out of 231 reported they worked for a business/for-profit type of organization (57.6%), while 58 (25.1%) worked at their university. Only 3.5% of participants indicated that they worked for non-profit organizations, and 13% selected the 'other' category.

Regarding Facebook use, the mean number of hours participants reported spending on Facebook per day was one hour. They reported logging in an average of 5.16 times per day. In terms of connecting via Facebook, 33.3% of participants marked that they were currently connected with their supervisors on Facebook; however, 66.7% of participants were not currently

connected with their supervisors on Facebook. Also, 67.1% of the participants reported that were currently connected with co-workers on Facebook.

In addition, 109 participants (47.2%) had been connected with their supervisors on Facebook in a previous place where they worked. Lastly, 171 participants (74%) had connected with their co-worker in a previous place they worked. When compared the percentages of connecting with their supervisors and co-workers on Facebook, participants mostly connected with their co-workers rather than their supervisors.

### **Design and Procedures**

This study employed an online cross-sectional survey design to gain feedback from respondents regarding how they handle and process Facebook friend requests that come from their supervisors. This type of survey technique was preferred because it allows for making inferences about a population of interest at one point in time. Because of its ability to include a wide range of topics among diverse samples, ease of management, and cost effectiveness, online questionnaires are considered practical and useful for research (Wrench, Maddox, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2008). Also, the anonymity of respondents can be protected and their privacy concerns can be eliminated by using Internet-based questionnaires (Joinson, 1999).

The survey was prefaced with an informed consent form that contained information about voluntary participation, the topic and objectives of the questionnaire, and a question regarding an agreement to participate in the survey. Before the data collection process, University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was given for this study. Qualtrics.com hosted the survey link, which was distributed to students via email, allowing students to take the survey at their preferred time and location. All participation was voluntary.

The survey instrument consisted of the following sections: (1) willingness to accept a Facebook friend request and tendency to change Facebook content, (2) Facebook privacy management, (3) communication satisfaction, and (4) background information (i.e., gender, age, current and previous Facebook connections, type of organization worked for, hours worked per week, current classification in college).

### **Measures**

The complete survey consisted of four measures: willingness to accept a Facebook friend request from a supervisor, tendency to change Facebook content, Facebook privacy management measure and subordinate communication satisfaction inventory.

**Willingness to accept a Facebook friend request and tendency to change Facebook content.** A three-item scale was developed and utilized to explore individuals' willingness to accept a supervisor's Facebook friend request. Responses to questions were on a 5-point-type scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Participants answered how they would react if their immediate supervisor sent them a friend request on Facebook. Sample statements include: "I would be likely to accept," "I would ignore the friend request," and "I would connect with my supervisor on Facebook," Then, in terms of privacy rule adjustments, participants were asked how they would react, such as deleting or altering postings, or if they were likely to keep their existing postings. For this 3-item inventory (questions 4, 5, and 6), statements included "If I know my supervisor could see my Facebook posts, I would change what I post," "I would keep posting what I normally post, regardless of whether my boss," and "Connecting with my supervisor on Facebook what makes me think twice about what I post could see it or not." The reliability of the scale concerning willingness to accept a supervisor's Facebook friend request ( $\alpha$

= 0.78) and the tendency to change Facebook posts in case of receiving Facebook friend request from a supervisor ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ) were reliable.

**Facebook privacy management.** Participants completed Frampton and Child's (2013) Facebook privacy management measure, which was adapted from Child et al.'s (2009) blogging privacy management inventory to fit the unique context of Facebook. Child et al. (2009) employed this measure to see how people manage their privacy on blogging sites. However, in this study, this scale was designed to measure how people manage their privacy on Facebook.

The measure is made up of three subscales: boundary permeability, boundary ownership, and boundary linkages. These subscales reflect an overall degree of openness on Facebook (Frampton & Child, 2013). The measure contains 18 items assessed on a 7-point Likert-type scale from "never true" to "always true." Examples of sample statements were "I often post intimate, personal things on Facebook without hesitation," "If I think that information I posted on Facebook really looks too private, I might delete it," and "I regularly share interesting posts on my Facebook to take attention." Previous studies utilizing this measure illustrated that the scale had sufficient reliability (Child et al., 2009; Child & Agyeman-Budu, 2010). Reliability also was sufficient in this study. The reliability of the boundary permeability subscale was 0.85. The reliability of the boundary ownerships was 0.72. Lastly, the reliability of the boundary linkages subscale was 0.81. Overall reliability was .75, which was similar to that found by Frampton and Child (2013).

**Subordinate communication satisfaction.** Participants completed the subordinate communication satisfaction inventory modified based on Hecht's (1978) 19-item unidimensional interpersonal communication satisfaction inventory. In this study, Hecht's (1978) inventory was adapted from the interpersonal context to an organizational context. This measures

communication satisfaction based on participants' recent conversations with their supervisors. Participants responded to the question on a 5-point Likert-type scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The example statements for this measure included "My immediate supervisor showed me that he/she understood what I said," "My immediate supervisor genuinely wanted to get to know me," "I felt that we could laugh easily together," and "I would like to have another conversation like this one." Past studies have demonstrated that the measure was valid and reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 (Frampton & Child, 2013) and 0.97 (Hecht, 1987). The Cronbach's alpha for this measure was excellent ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

### **Data Analysis**

A multiple linear regression test was run for hypothesis one to examine the influence of boundary permeability, boundary ownership, and boundary linkages on willingness to accept a supervisor's Facebook friend request. The three independent variables reflected degree of openness on Facebook.

Simple linear regression tests were run for the three research questions because all variables were continuous. Research question one examined the influence of altering Facebook content on willingness to accept a friend's request from one's supervisor. The second research question examined whether level of supervisor-subordinate communication satisfaction could predict willingness to accept a Facebook friend invitation. The third research question investigated the influence of superior-subordinate communication satisfaction on likelihood of altering Facebook content.

## Chapter 4 - Results

The purpose of this chapter is to identify and interpret the results of the data analysis described in chapter three. The chapter begins with the identification of the mean scores of each variable and then provides interpretations of these mean scores. Then, this chapter will discuss the results of testing the hypothesis and the research questions.

Mean scores of each variable were identified (see Table 1). For privacy management (openness on Facebook), both subscale and overall means were calculated. First, the mean score of boundary permeability was 1.90 ( $sd=.97$ ) out of 7. This illustrates that participants' boundaries were not permeable. In other words, participants highly controlled how much information they revealed to others on Facebook. Second, the mean score of boundary ownership was 4.67 ( $sd=1.13$ ) out of 7. Participants somewhat limited themselves when revealing information on Facebook to others and moderately controlled of the spread of their private information online. The mean score of boundary linkages was 2.62 ( $sd=1.21$ ) out of 7. Participants tended not to link others to their Facebook information, instead keeping private information within individually-owned boundaries. The overall mean for openness was 3.07 ( $sd=.67$ ), which reflected a moderately low degree of openness and moderately high degree of privacy.

Furthermore, the mean score for accepting a Facebook friend request from a supervisor was 3.30 ( $sd=.86$ ) out of 5. This means participants were unsure about how they would respond when receiving a Facebook friend request from their supervisor. Also, the mean score of content alterations on Facebook and subordinate communication satisfaction were 2.84 ( $sd=.98$ ) and 3.62 ( $sd=.57$ ) respectively, out of 5. In terms of content modification, it can be concluded that participants were not sure about whether or not they modify their Facebook content if connected

with a supervisor. Lastly, the mean score of subordinate communication satisfaction suggests that participants were satisfied with recent conversations with their supervisors. (see Table 1 )

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables**

<b>Variable</b>	<b><i>m</i></b>	<b><i>sd</i></b>
<b>Overall openness in Facebook</b>	3.07	.67
<b>Boundary permeability</b>	1.90	0.97
<b>Boundary ownership</b>	4.67	1.13
<b>Boundary linkages</b>	2.62	1.21
<b>Accepting a Facebook friend request from a supervisor</b>	3.30	0.86
<b>Content alterations on Facebook and subordinate communication satisfaction</b>	3.62	0.57

### **Research Question 1**

Research question 1 asked if the likelihood of altering content on Facebook influenced subordinates’ willingness to accept their supervisors’ Facebook friend requests. No significant influence was observed:  $F(1,229) = 2.608, p = .12, R^2 = .011$ . These results suggest that potential content modifications on Facebook by subordinates did not influence their willingness to accept a Facebook friend request from a supervisor.

### **Hypothesis 1**

Hypothesis one posited that subordinates who were more open on Facebook based on their Facebook privacy management behaviors were more willing to accept a Facebook friend invitation from their supervisor. Openness was measured with three independent variables:

boundary permeability, boundary ownership, and boundary linkages. The result of a multiple linear regression test revealed that there was not a statistically significant influence of the predictor variables on willingness to accept a superior's Facebook friend request,  $F(1,229) = 0.79, p = .37, R^2 = .003$ . This result means that none of the factors comprising openness influenced subordinates' willingness to accept Facebook friend requests from their supervisors.

### **Research Question 2**

Research question two asked if a high level of communication satisfaction with one's supervisor influenced participants' willingness to accept their supervisors' Facebook friendship requests. The result of a simple linear regression test revealed a statistically significant influence of the predictor variable on willingness to accept a superior's Facebook friend request,  $F(1,229) = 11.529, p < .01, R^2 = .048$ . Even though there was a positive correlation, it only accounted for roughly 5% of the variance in scores. This result illustrates that when there is a higher level of communication satisfaction with supervisors, subordinates are slightly more likely to accept their supervisors' Facebook friend requests.

### **Research Question 3**

Research question three investigated how subordinates' communication satisfaction affected their likelihood of altering their Facebook content before or after they receive the request. The results of the regression indicated that there is no significant influence of the predictor variables on alteration of Facebook content,  $F(1,229) = 1.863, p = .17, R^2 = .008$ . This result suggests that subordinates' communication satisfaction with their supervisors has no impact on potential content alterations on their Facebook.

To sum up the results, it has been found that a high level of communication satisfaction by subordinates with their supervisors impacts their willingness to accept a Facebook friend



request from their supervisors; however, communication satisfaction did not influence participants' content modifications that they might consider on Facebook. Additionally, being more open on Facebook through privacy management practices on the site and subordinates' prior content alterations on Facebook did not influence their willingness to accept a friend request from a supervisor.

## Chapter 5 - Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to look at the factors that influenced whether or not subordinates would accept the Facebook friend request from their supervisors in the workplace. In particular, this research investigated subordinate communication satisfaction, openness on Facebook through users' privacy management practices, and content alterations on Facebook as the three possible factors affecting how supervisor Facebook requests would be processed and handled by subordinates by utilizing CPM theory.

The research results extend and contribute to an area of SNS use, the impact of SNSs on workplace relationships and the role of Facebook in supervisor subordinate relationships within both organizational and privacy contexts. Reasons for conducting this study included better understanding of subordinates' privacy practices, workplace relationships and potential supervisor linkages over Facebook. Because workplace use of SNSs can result in work-life overlap and create privacy tensions, this project also focuses on subordinates' likelihood of being Facebook friends with their supervisor and informing how subordinates decide about such connections.

The general response of participants when receiving a Facebook request from a supervisor was general ambivalence about whether or not to connect with their supervisor. According to this study's results, only one-third of participants were connected with their supervisor. However, more than half were connected to their coworkers. Research on CPM and coworker Facebook friend requests suggests that privacy and openness could influence willingness to accept a friend request from a coworker (Frampton and Child, 2013); however, this study did not confirm relationship when supervisor friend request came into play. Since individuals are able to control their privacy and have greater privacy protection on SNSs (Child

& Agyeman-Budu, 2010), it was expected that subordinates might also set up their privacy carefully on the site as well as modify content with the purpose of having greater privacy protection. Thus, subordinates would eliminate potential tensions, leading them to accept the request from their supervisor. However, in this study subordinates' privacy management did not influence whether or not they would be willing to accept a Facebook friend request from a supervisor. In terms of openness on Facebook through privacy management, subordinates' level of openness did not influence acceptance of a supervisor's friend request. Thus, neither privacy nor openness seemed to be important factors influencing willingness to connect to a supervisor.

This study's result regarding content alterations is consistent with the existing literature. Similar to the result of this study, Frampton and Child (2013) found that people did not make privacy rule adjustments in the case of receiving a coworker Facebook friend request. This finding also can be extended to supervisor Facebook request because people may not find it necessary to adjust their content (DiMicco & Millen, 2007). It might be that subordinates modify their Facebook content, which eliminates privacy dilemmas. The typical user most likely makes alterations and deletions in their profile and activity content as an overall habit (Child et al., 2011; 2012) also illustrating why subordinates might not make further modification when having a friend request from a supervisor.

Furthermore, SNS users today have seen different cases of people who have been dismissed or penalized for using Facebook too openly. As a result, users may be more protective regarding their privacy and cautious about their potential Facebook linkages with others. In this study, subordinates might be aware of the potential risk of using Facebook, which might lead them to stay away from being Facebook friends with supervisors (Child & Petronio, 2011).

Although openness and privacy management practices did not influence willingness to accept a friend request, communication satisfaction did, but to a very small extent. Prior research has shown that communication perceptions and satisfaction of employees are important because they enhance socialization, develop collaboration, and support dialogue among colleagues within organizations (Madlock, 2008). It may be that experiencing rich and highly satisfying subordinate-supervisor interactions functions as a contextual factor which influences subordinates' willingness to continue to connect over Facebook, as Karl and Peluchette (2011) found. Individuals who were pleased with face-to-face interactions with their supervisors may not see any harm in interacting with them on Facebook. These results extend the prior research finding that communication satisfaction between coworkers influences employee decisions about allowing colleagues to create Facebook linkages (Frampton & Child, 2013).

Results of this study demonstrated that subordinates who might experience either high or low level of communication satisfaction with their supervisor did not feel that they needed to readjust their current Facebook rules regardless of before or after they receive the friend request.

### **Implications for Research**

The study's findings inform researchers and practitioners about how privacy and relational factors influence subordinates' decisions about connection with a supervisor on Facebook. The study's results demonstrated that subordinates were more likely to accept a supervisor Facebook request when they were satisfied with the communication with their supervisors. One implication for research is identifying additional research questions surrounding communication satisfaction. In this study, subordinates' communication satisfaction was measured based on a recent conversation that subordinates had with their supervisors. If subordinates were satisfied with their last interaction with their supervisors, subordinates were

more likely to accept supervisors' Facebook friend request. However, some of subordinates who might be likely to have tight control on what their supervisors access and others might be more open about managing privacy. Thus, it may be also useful to look at the relationship between openness and communication satisfaction to learn about their privacy management practices.

Other CPM criteria, such as individual motivation and risk benefit ratio, may play a role in subordinates' willingness to accept the request. For example, when subordinates receive a friend request, they evaluate possible risks and costs of accepting the request. If satisfaction is low, they may believe that the risk of connecting with a supervisor may be greater than the benefits of connecting, even if connecting may mean developing more social capital. Thus, they may be less willing to connect.

Moreover, the results of the study have implications for how researchers can understand privacy management in the workplace. Although the results suggest that privacy management does not influence willingness to connect with a supervisor, it may be that people already are sensitive to potential problems or issues that may occur with connecting with a supervisor. What could be informative is learning about how those privacy management beliefs and perceptions develop with regard to the workplace. These privacy management practices may extend both to SNSs and to face-to-face interactions. Overall, the study results indicate that communication satisfaction, not privacy dilemmas, was a significant factor influencing the decision to link with a supervisor on Facebook.

### **Limitations**

Although the study's findings provided support for people's willingness to connect with their supervisors on Facebook, there were some limitations. One of the limitations for this study is the demographics of the sample. In this study, participants consisted of college students with a

full-time or part time job the mean age was 19 years. They were most likely working for different types of temporary jobs to support themselves financially rather than people who intended to build a career. Thus, they may not be a representative sample of the professional population. College students may have limited working experience with less working hours in jobs, but they are also avid Facebook users. Therefore, although the fact that college students comprised the entire sample was a limitation, they are an important and informative group to study. Another limitation with the sample was its ethnicity. In this study, participants heavily consisted of White/Caucasian students, suggesting lower generalizability to diverse workplaces. It may be that people from other ethnic groups, might have different experiences and expectations.

A third limitation is one of the measures of the study. The measure of communication satisfaction evaluated this variable based on a single last conversation rather than comprehensive feelings about participants' supervisors. Thus, if participants' last conversation or recall was not good, it may distort the data. A fourth limitation was the study's focus on Facebook. There are other SNSs that could be considered by individuals for professional connection such as LinkedIn. In these SNSs, employees also can engage in interactions with their supervisors. Finally, lacking contextual data about the relationship participants' had with their supervisors is also a limitation. More information about the relationships between supervisors and subordinates would have been helpful to make more accurate predictions in this study.

### **Future Directions**

There are several directions for future research. Future research can employ other methods including interviews, experimental designs and content analysis other than surveys to collect data. Utilizations of other methods can extend our understanding of subordinate-superior

relationships through Facebook and other SNSs, workplace use of SNSs and Facebook, and privacy management. This study looked at likelihood of accepting a Facebook friend request; however, researchers also can examine how rejecting a Facebook friend request would impact individuals' workplace relationships. For example, future studies can look into the reason for rejection as well communication satisfaction by a mixed-method approach. Interviews and surveys can be helpful for identifying the benefits of workplace use of SNS by looking at why and how people reject or accept the Facebook friend request and how communication satisfaction influence their decisions.

Additionally, future studies should consider organizational factors and interpersonal factors that may influence professionals' decisions about Facebook friend request from their supervisors and workplace interactions that occur on SNSs in general. For example, although communication satisfaction significantly influenced willingness to accept a friend request, it accounted for a very small percentage of the variance. Other personal, relational, and organizational factors are also likely influential. These may include organizational climate, sense of belonging, self-monitoring, and other factors. Previous studies about coworkers' decisions about Facebook friend request from their colleagues concluded that organizational privacy norms had influenced coworker Facebook linkages (Frampton & Child, 2013). This would suggest that organizational privacy orientations may influence the types of decisions that subordinates make about supervisor linkages on Facebook.

In addition, CPM theory suggests that culture can have an impact on individuals' privacy management considerations (Petronio, 2002). Relatedly, organizational culture is also important to examine. Further investigation should include how cultural norms of organizations related to relationship closeness, style of communication, and professional expectations, influence

connection to supervisors on Facebook. Additionally, relational- and individual-level variables are important. For example, trust in one's supervisor might influence employees' decisions about whether or not to reveal or conceal their private information to others. In sum, privacy management and willingness to connect on Facebook are products of national, organizational, relational, and individual factors that need additional examination.

CPM theory also argues that gender influences individual's privacy rules and management decisions (Petronio, 2002). In a study of online interactions over blogging sites, Child (2007) found that women were more cautious about allowing others to link to their blog and more restrictive in regard to who can see their private information on their blogs by using more coded language than men. This shows that men and women are likely to respond to supervisors' Facebook friend invitations differently based on their different privacy management practices. Therefore, researchers should focus on gender differences to see if differences exist in privacy decision and friend request decisions in Facebook or other SNS settings.

Lastly, this thesis looked into the subordinate-superior relationship from subordinates' perspective; however, it would be also valuable to look at the issue from the supervisor perspective to study factors that influence Facebook use, workplace communication and privacy management. Learning reasons that subordinates send a Facebook friend request to a subordinate can be useful to identify reasons and help subordinates eliminate their concerns related to being connected with a supervisor on a SNS. Overall, to present more convincing results, future research should involve more organizational factors while examining subordinate-supervisor relationship on a SNS.



## **Conclusion**

Since many different types of SNSs have launched, they have attracted millions of people (Greenwood et al., 2016; Olmstead et al., 2016). Even though concerns and potential benefits are still being discovered, it is likely the use of SNSs at work will increase and will influence the relationships in the workplace in the upcoming years. Therefore, it is important that communication scholars comprehend the dynamics of SNS interactions as they spread into organizational relationships. Thus, this research focuses on the subordinate- superior relationship, as one of the unique types of relationship in the workplace, within the context of the use of SNSs.

This thesis contributes to literature about privacy, workplace relationship, and use of Facebook in the workplace. Also, this study extends the body of research on communication privacy management theory (Frampton & Child, 2013; Petronio, 2009) by adding how communication satisfaction assists in understanding subordinates' potential decisions about being Facebook friends with their supervisors and use of SNS within the context of subordinate-supervisor relationships. Finally, this research gives insight about how college-aged subordinates processed and handled supervisory Facebook requests, which can create privacy concerns for subordinates. Communication satisfaction has a positive relationship with workplace relationships, organizational effectiveness, job-related outcomes and work experiences (Madlock, 2008; Pincus, 1986). More specifically, communication satisfaction that subordinates experience with their supervisors in the workplace can lead subordinates to develop their relationships with supervisors over a SNS. This indicates that supervisors should aware of the importance of communication satisfaction and can use for the development of the relationships with their subordinates.

For many people all around the world, SNSs are great tools to communicate while maintaining current friendships, family members, colleagues, reconnecting old or distinct friends or developing new ones for business purposes. As SNSs continue to grow, workplace boundaries will continue to be blurred. It is important to be attentive to how workplace relationships and social dynamics will continue to evolve as SNSs become a greater part of people's workplace experiences.

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## **Appendix A - Willingness to Accept a Facebook Friend Request and Tendency to Change Facebook Content**

DIRECTIONS: Imagine how you would react if your immediate supervisor where you work sent you a friend request on Facebook. Answer the following questions:

1= Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Undecided; 4=Agree; 5= Strongly Agree

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 1) I would be likely to accept the friend request.   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2) I would ignore the friend request.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3) I would connect with my supervisor on Facebook.   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4) If I know my supervisor could see my Facebook posts, I would change what I post.              | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5) I would keep posting what I normally post, regardless of whether my boss could see it or not. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6) Connecting with my supervisor on Facebook what make me think twice about what I post.         | 1 2 3 4 5 |

## **Modified Facebook Privacy Management Measure (Child, 2013)**

DIRECTIONS: Please indicate your agreement/disagreement with the following statements.

1- Never True; 2- Rarely True; 3- Sometimes but infrequently True; 4- Neutral; 5- Sometimes True; 6- Usually True; 7- Always True

### **Section A**

- |  |               |
|--|---------------|
| 1. When I face challenges in my life, I feel comfortable talking about them on Facebook. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 2. I like my Facebook entries to be long and detailed.                                   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |

3. I like to discuss work concerns on Facebook. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. I often post intimate, personal things on Facebook without hesitation. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. I share information with people whom I don't know in my day-to-day life. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. I update my Facebook status frequently. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

### **Section B**

1. I have limited the personal information posted on my Facebook. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. I use shorthand (e.g., pseudonyms or limited details) when discussing sensitive information on Facebook so others have limited access to know my personal information. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. If I think that information I posted on Facebook really looks too private, I might delete it. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. I usually am slow to talk about recent events because people might talk. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. I don't post certain topics on Facebook because I worry who has access. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. Seeing intimate details about someone else on Facebook, makes me feel I should keep their information private. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

### **Section C**

1. I create a profile on Facebook so that other Facebook user can link to me with similar interests. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. I try to let people know my best interest on my Facebook so I can find friends. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. I allow people with a profile or picture I like to access my Facebook. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. I comment on Facebook to have others check out my Facebook. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. I allow access of my Facebook through any of these: directories, key word \searches, or weblog rings. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. I regularly share interesting posts on my Facebook to take attention. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

### **Modified Subordinate Communication Satisfaction (Hecht, 1978)**

DIRECTIONS: Below are a set of questions concerning communicating at work. For these questions think of the latest conversation that you had with your immediate supervisor. Use the scale below each statement to rate how you feel.

1- Strongly Disagree; 2- Disagree; 3- Undecided; 4- Agree; 5- Strongly Agree

1. My immediate supervisor let me know that I was communicating effectively. 1 2 3 4 5
2. Nothing was accomplished. 1 2 3 4 5
3. I would like to have another conversation like this one. 1 2 3 4 5
4. My immediate supervisor genuinely wanted to get to know me. 1 2 3 4 5
5. I was very dissatisfied with the conversation. 1 2 3 4 5
6. I had something else to do. 1 2 3 4 5
7. I felt that during the conversation I was able to present myself as I wanted my immediate supervisor to view me. 1 2 3 4 5
8. My immediate supervisor showed me that he/she understood what I said. 1 2 3 4 5
9. I was very satisfied with the conversation. 1 2 3 4 5
10. My immediate supervisor expressed a lot of interest in what I had to say. 1 2 3 4 5
11. I did NOT enjoy the conversation. 1 2 3 4 5
12. My immediate supervisor did NOT provide support for what he/she was saying. 1 2 3 4 5

13. I felt I could talk about anything with my immediate supervisor. 1 2 3 4 5
14. We each got to say what we wanted. 1 2 3 4 5
15. I felt that we could laugh easily together. 1 2 3 4 5
16. The conversation flowed smoothly. 1 2 3 4 5
17. My immediate supervisor changed the topic when his/her feelings were brought into the conversation. 1 2 3 4 5
18. My immediate supervisor frequently said things which added little to the conversation. 1 2 3 4 5
19. We talked about something I was NOT interested in. 1 2 3 4 5

## **Demographics and Descriptive Information**

What is your gender?

Male Female

What is your ethnicity? (Please check all that apply)

African-American/Black Caucasian/White Native American Asian Hispanic/Latino

(a) Other

What is your current classification in college?

Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Graduate Student

What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

How many hours per week do you work?

What type of organization do you work for?

For-profit / Business Non-profit organization K-State Other

Are you currently connected with your supervisor on Facebook? (Yes / No)

Are you currently connected with your co-workers on Facebook? (Yes / No)



Have you ever been connected with a supervisor on Facebook in a previous place you worked?

(Yes / No / N/A)

Have you ever been connected with your co-workers in a previous place you worked?

(Yes / No / N/A)

About how many times per day do you log into Facebook? \_\_\_\_\_

About how many hours per day do you spend on Facebook? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B - The Informed Consent Form

Subordinate`s Establishment of Relationship with Supervisors on Facebook within the Frame of  
Communication Privacy Management Theory

Kazim Yiğit AKIN

Questionnaire

### Informed Consent

**PROJECT TITLE:** Subordinate`s establishment of relationship with supervisors on Facebook within the frame of Communication Privacy Management theory.

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Dr. Gregory Paul, [gregpaul@ksu.edu](mailto:gregpaul@ksu.edu), (785) 532-6789

**CONTACT PERSON:** Kazim Yigit AKIN, [kyakin@ksu.edu](mailto:kyakin@ksu.edu)

#### IRB CHAIR CONTACT/PHONE INFORMATION:

- Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.
- Jerry Jaax, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance and University Veterinarian, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

**SPONSOR OF PROJECT:** This project is not being sponsored.

**PURPOSE OF RESEARCH:** The goal of the study is to discuss how supervisor Facebook friend requests would be handled and processed by subordinates.

**PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:** You are being asked to complete an online survey that will take about 10 minutes.

**RISK OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:** There are no foreseeable, physical risks. The study may cause minimal psychological discomfort, though this is not expected.

**BENEFITS ANTICIPATED:** In return for participating, you will receive course credit for your class. For the participants who choose not to complete the online survey will be given the alternative assignment of writing a one page paper explaining the advantages and disadvantages of social media.

**EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:** No personally identifying information will be linked to published reports of the study.

**TERMS OF PARTICIPATION:** I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

If you agree to participate in this study, please click “I agree.”