Research Article

Exploring the negative impact of social media on employee mental health in Malaysia: A Delphi study

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Increasing reliance on social media in the workplace has transformed communication, collaboration, and networking. However, excessive social media use can negatively impact on employees' mental health (MH), contributing to stress, anxiety, work-life imbalance, and reduced productivity. This study systematically employed the Delphi method to examine and rank these adverse effects in Malaysia. A Delphi study was conducted with 43 experts specializing in social media and workplace MH. Key psychological stressors were identified and prioritized through two rounds of an iterative survey. Thematic analysis categorized expert insights, whereas Kendall's coefficient of concordance assessed consensus. Six major dimensions of social media's negative impact were identified: (1) digital overload and stress, (2) social comparison and MH, (3) work-life imbalance, (4) reduced productivity and focus, (5) negative impact on well-being and relationships, and (6) privacy and security concerns. Digital overload and stress have emerged as the most critical factors, highlighting the challenges of constant connectivity, information saturation, and workplace expectations. Social comparison-driven anxiety and blurred boundaries between personal and professional lives further exacerbate MH challenges. This study expands on the limited research on workplace social media use and employee MH in Malaysia. The Delphi method offers empirical insights into the most pressing social media-induced stressors, enabling organizations to develop actionable recommendations to balance digital connectivity with employee well-being. **Keywords:** social media, mental health, Delphi method, employee, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

The increasing integration of social media into workplace communication has fundamentally reshaped how employees interact, collaborate, and perform their professional roles. Digital platforms such as

WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and enterprise social networking systems are now deeply embedded in daily organizational practices, a trend that was further accelerated by the expansion of remote and hybrid work arrangements during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Cunha et al., 2024; Huang, 2024). While these platforms facilitate real-time communication and information exchange, their pervasive use has also raised growing concerns regarding potential adverse consequences for employee mental health (MH).

MH challenges among working populations have become a critical global issue, with substantial implications for employee well-being, organizational effectiveness, and productivity (The Lancet Global Health, 2020; World Health Organization, 2022). In digitally intensive work environments, employees are increasingly exposed to constant connectivity, rapid information flows, and blurred boundaries between professional and personal life. These conditions have been associated with heightened levels of stress, anxiety, burnout, sleep disruption, and work-life imbalance (Adisa et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2024; Dhir et al., 2019). The widespread adoption of social media in organizational settings has therefore intensified scholarly interest in its psychosocial implications for employees.

In the workplace, social media use has been linked to a range of stress-inducing mechanisms. Information overload, frequent interruptions, and expectations of continuous availability can deplete cognitive resources and undermine sustained attention, thereby impairing job performance and psychological well-being (Batabyal & Bhal, 2020; Tams et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2023). At the same time, social media platforms can amplify upward social comparison and fear of missing out (FOMO), exposing employees to constant evaluations of others' achievements and lifestyles, which may trigger feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and reduced self-esteem (Burnell et al., 2019; Gomez et al., 2022). Despite these emerging insights, much of the existing literature has concentrated on adolescents, students, or young adults, limiting its direct applicability to working professionals and organizational environments (Alonzo et al., 2021; Kaur et al., 2022).

From a theoretical perspective, research on workplace stress and employee well-being has frequently drawn on the stressor-strain-outcome (SSO) model and the job demands-resources (JD-R) model to explain how job-related demands translate into psychological strain and subsequent outcomes (Demerouti et al., 2001; Granger et al., 2024; Koeske & Koeske, 1993). These frameworks have also been applied to technology-related stress processes, including social media fatigue and digitally induced exhaustion in work settings (Dhir et al., 2019; Kasim et al., 2022). However, while the SSO and JD-R models provide robust explanatory mechanisms, they remain conceptually broad. In particular, they do not specify which dimensions of workplace social media use function as dominant stressors, nor do they clarify the relative importance of different negative impact domains in shaping employee MH.

This limitation highlights a conceptual rather than empirical research gap. Although prior studies have established that social media use can negatively affect employee well-being, there is insufficient conceptual clarity regarding how these negative effects should be systematically categorized and prioritized. Existing research often examines isolated constructs, such as information overload, social comparison, or digital fatigue, without integrating them into a coherent framework that captures the multidimensional nature of social media-related stress in the workplace (Jiang et al., 2022; Zheng & Ling, 2021). As a result, organizations lack a structured and theory-informed understanding of the most salient social media-induced MH risks faced by employees.

This conceptual gap is particularly relevant in the Malaysian context. Malaysia exhibits high levels of digital adoption alongside persistent workplace stress, limited MH awareness, and enduring stigma surrounding psychological well-being (Bernama, 2023; Murugesan, 2023; Samsudin et al., 2024; Yang, 2023). National reports indicate that a substantial proportion of Malaysian employees experience work-related stress and insufficient sleep, with notable implications for productivity and organizational sustainability (Murugesan, 2023; Subramaniam, 2024). These conditions underscore the importance of developing a clearer conceptual understanding of how workplace social media use contributes to employee MH challenges within this setting.

To address this conceptual deficiency, the present study employs the Delphi method to identify and prioritize the key dimensions through which social media negatively impacts employee MH in the workplace. The Delphi approach is particularly suitable for research domains that remain conceptually under-structured and require systematic elicitation and convergence of expert judgment (Clayton, 1997; Flostrand et al., 2020). By synthesizing expert insights across iterative rounds and assessing consensus, the Delphi method enables

the development of a coherent and context-sensitive framework that complements existing stress theories. Rather than testing causal relationships, this study aims to clarify and structure the domain of workplace social media-related MH risks, thereby providing a stronger conceptual foundation for future empirical research and organizational intervention.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a two-round Delphi approach to explore the negative impact of social media on employee MH. The Delphi method is a consensus-based research technique that gathers and synthesizes expert opinions through structured, iterative rounds while maintaining expert independence and anonymity (Jiang et al., 2024). This approach is particularly suitable for examining complex and under-structured workplace issues, as it facilitates the convergence of expert perspectives and enables a systematic understanding of social media-related challenges affecting employee MH.

Participants

A purposive sampling approach was employed to ensure that all participants possessed relevant expertise to evaluate the negative impacts of social media on employee MH. Experts were selected based on their professional roles and practical experience in management, human resources, psychological or counseling services, and social media-related positions.

In accordance with Delphi research conventions, the sample size was selected to emphasize expert knowledge and diversity rather than statistical representativeness. Participants were identified through professional networks and invited to participate voluntarily, with informed consent obtained prior to data collection. The first-round Delphi survey commenced on 30 September 2024 and was completed within 1 week, using an open-ended questionnaire that captured demographic information and open-ended responses on social media use and MH.

The study initially recruited 43 Malaysian experts with 5-10 years of professional experience in social media management and workplace MH to participate in the first round of the Delphi study. Of the initial panel, 40 experts completed the second-round ranking exercise, resulting in a response rate of 93.02%. A small degree of attrition between rounds is considered normal and expected in Delphi research, as participants may withdraw due to time constraints or reduced engagement across iterative survey rounds. Previous methodological reviews have highlighted that participant attrition is a common and manageable aspect of the Delphi process, rather than a threat to its validity, provided that an adequate level of expert diversity and response stability is maintained (Wider et al., 2025).

As summarized in **Table 1**, the expert panel represented diverse professional backgrounds (e.g., psychology, IT, engineering, economics, and HR). Most participants were aged 31-40, over 70% held bachelor's degrees and above, and many reported more than 10 years of work experience across multiple sectors.

Instrument Development (Round 1 Delphi)

The round 1 Delphi instrument was developed through a focused synthesis of theoretical and empirical literature on workplace social media use and employee MH, guided by the SSO (Koeske & Koeske, 1993) and JD-R models (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Both frameworks explain how psychosocial demands within the work environment produce psychological strain and subsequent outcomes. Within the SSO model, social media engagement acts as a stressor that triggers cognitive overload and emotional exhaustion. The JD-R model extends this view by framing constant connectivity and digital communication as job demands that deplete employees' cognitive, emotional, and recovery resources when not sufficiently supported by organizational or personal resources.

Table 1. Personal profile of the Delphi participants

No	Expert	Age	Working experience (year)	Highest academic qualification	Position at organization
1	E1	31-40	11-20	Bachelor's degree	Manager
2	E2	31-40	11-20	Diploma	Director
3	E3	31-40	< 10	Master's degree	QC assistant manager
4	E4	51-60	21-30	Bachelor's degree	Manager
5	E5	31-40	< 10	Bachelor's degree	Manager
6	E6	31-40	11-20	Bachelor's degree	Manager
7	E7	31-40	11-20	Master's degree	Manager
8	E8	31-40	< 10	Bachelor's degree	Product analyst
9	E9	31-40	11-20	Diploma	Senior manager
10	E10	31-40	< 10	Bachelor's degree	Manager
11	E11	21-30	< 10	Master's degree	Manager
12	E12	21-30	< 10	Bachelor's degree	Production engineer
13	E13	21-30	< 10	Bachelor's degree	Executive
14	E14	21-30	< 10	Bachelor's degree	SEO specialist
15	E15	51-60	21-30	Bachelor's degree	Director
16	E16	21-30	< 10	Bachelor's degree	Social media coordinator
17	E17	31-40	< 10	Master's degree	Executive
18	E18	31-40	11-20	Diploma	Executive
19	E19	31-40	11-20	Master's degree	Manager
20	E20	31-40	< 10	Master's degree	Purchasing buyer
21	E21	31-40	< 10	Master's degree	Manager
22	E22	21-30	11-20	Master's degree	Purchasing specialist
23	E23	21-30	< 10	Master's degree	Senior engineer
24	E24	51-60	21-30	Bachelor's degree	Manager
25	E25	31-40	11-20	Bachelor's degree	Senior executive
26	E26	21-30	< 10	Bachelor's degree	HR executive
27	E27	21-30	< 10	Bachelor's degree	System analyst
28	E28	31-40	11-20	Bachelor's degree	Executive
29	E29	31-40	11-20	Bachelor's degree	Staff engineer
30	E30	31-40	11-20	Bachelor's degree	Senior manager
31	E31	21-30	< 10	Master's degree	Psychologist
32	E32	21-30	< 10	Bachelor's degree	Executive
33	E33	31-40	< 10	Master's degree	Assistant manager
34	E34	31-40	< 10	Master's degree	Counsellor & co-founder
35	E35	21-30	< 10	Master's degree	Director
36	E36	21-30	< 10	Master's degree	Operation lead
37	E37	31-40	< 10	Bachelor's degree	FP&A analyst
38	E38	31-40	< 10	Master's degree	Business support professional
39	E39	21-30	< 10	Master's degree	Executive
40	E40	21-30	< 10	Master's degree	Manager
41	E41	31-40	11-20	Bachelor's degree	Design engineer
42	E42	41-50	21-30	Doctorate degree	Dean
43	E43	41-50	11-20	Master's degree	Manager

Building on these frameworks, the instrument incorporated empirical evidence aligned with the mechanisms of stress and resource depletion. Information overload, digital fatigue, and performance pressure have been shown to heighten cognitive load and emotional exhaustion, thereby increasing psychological strain and diminishing well-being (Dhir et al., 2019; Kasim et al., 2022). Social comparison and evaluative exposure in online contexts further intensify anxiety and emotional depletion, reflecting the stressor-strain dynamics articulated in the SSO model (An et al., 2023; Tandon et al., 2021). From a JD-R perspective, continuous connectivity, tele-pressure, and after-hours digital communication restrict opportunities for psychological recovery, thereby exacerbating work-life imbalance and burnout (Jian & Zhou, 2025; Semaan et al., 2025). Workplace cyberbullying facilitated through social media also operates as a psychosocial job demand that drains emotional resources and undermines psychological well-being and engagement (Anwar et al., 2022). Moreover, exposure to negative interactions or competitive climates in digital environments can deteriorate workplace culture and amplify performance-related anxiety. While organizational social media platforms may enhance collaboration and information exchange, sustained digital engagement can simultaneously foster distraction, reduced focus, and sleep disturbance (Oksa et al., 2023).

Drawing on these theoretically and empirically supported insights, nine guiding themes were developed to inform expert reflection: work-life balance disruption, cyberbullying and harassment, information overload, constant connectivity and availability, negative workplace culture, job performance anxiety, social comparison, distractibility and reduced focus, and sleep disruption. These themes functioned as flexible prompts rather than fixed analytical categories, allowing experts to refine, critique, or expand them based on professional experience. This theory-informed yet exploratory approach preserved the inductive nature of the Delphi process while ensuring conceptual coherence, methodological transparency, and content validity prior to data collection.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted using online questionnaires distributed via email. This approach was chosen for its efficiency and practicality, enabling experts from across Malaysia to participate without geographical constraints.

The Delphi questionnaire was designed to align with the study's exploratory purpose and facilitate the systematic elicitation of expert judgment. In the first round, data were collected using an open-ended questionnaire to capture experts' perceptions of how social media affects employee MH, following established Delphi practices that emphasize open exploration in the initial round (Chowdhury et al., 2022). The questionnaire comprised basic demographic items and a single open-ended question: "Based on your professional experience, what factors do you believe contribute to the negative ways in which social media influences workplace MH among employees?"

To support reflection during the first Delphi round, participants were provided with a list of nine guiding themes alongside the open-ended question. As described in the preceding subsection, these themes were derived from prior research and were presented solely as reference prompts. Experts were explicitly informed that the themes were not exhaustive and were encouraged to elaborate freely, critique the listed themes, and propose additional factors based on their professional experience.

The use of a single open-ended question minimized premature conceptual restriction and encouraged experts to articulate their views freely, thereby supporting comprehensive idea generation during the initial phase of the Delphi process. Responses were grounded in experts' professional experience, enabling the identification of a broad range of social media-related psychological challenges within workplace contexts.

In the second round, participation was restricted to experts who had completed the first round. This stage adopted a quantitative approach to refine and prioritize the factors identified through first-round thematic analysis. Each expert was provided with a consolidated list of dimensions derived from round 1, along with standardized instructions to rank them by relative importance.

The ranking exercise was administered via an online questionnaire to refine the initial qualitative findings and determine the relative importance of each dimension (Pamidimukkala & Kermanshachi, 2023). A numerical ranking scale was employed to enable systematic comparison across dimensions and to facilitate the assessment of consistency and convergence among expert judgments (Tan et al., 2024). By aggregating the rankings, the study assessed the level of agreement among experts and established consensus on the most influential factors through which social media negatively affects employee MH in the workplace. This quantitative stage strengthened the rigor of the Delphi process by enabling convergence analysis and enhancing the robustness of the findings (Flostrand et al., 2020).

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted across two Delphi rounds, integrating qualitative and quantitative techniques. In round 1, qualitative responses from the open-ended Delphi questionnaire were analyzed using thematic analysis guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. All responses were compiled by Microsoft Excel to facilitate systematic data management. Manual line-by-line coding was undertaken to identify meaning units and recurring patterns within the experts' accounts. The resulting codes were iteratively compared and consolidated into candidate themes, which were reviewed against the full dataset to ensure internal coherence, conceptual clarity, and

Table 2. Delphi first round results

No	Dimensions	Themes
1	Digital overload and stress	• Information overload • Overwhelming pace of digital change • Expectations to be constantly connected • Pressure to stay updated and relevant • Job performance anxiety and validation via social media
2	Work-life imbalance	• Work-life balance disruption • Blurred boundaries between work and personal life • Pressure to monitor client messages accurately • Addictive behavior and compulsive checking • Sleep disruption
3	Social comparison and MH	• Social comparison and feelings of inadequacy • Job insecurity due to social media updates • Comparison with competitors (salary/benefits) • FOMO
4	Reduced productivity and focus	• Reduced attention span and focus • Interruptions and distractions from social media notifications • Digital fatigue and mental exhaustion • Reduced opportunity for physical activity
5	Privacy and security concerns	• Perceived security concern • Perceived invasion of privacy • Pressure to maintain a polished online persona
6	Negative impact on well-being and relationships	• Social isolation and lack of genuine connection • Isolation from overreliance on online communication • Exposure to negative news and crisis • Inaccurate information/misinformation spread • Negative workplace culture and interactions (cyberbullying, public criticism, and gossip)

clear thematic boundaries. Through this iterative refinement process, overlapping codes were merged and ambiguous labels were clarified, resulting in a set of higher-order dimensions representing the principal domains through which workplace social media use negatively affects employee MH.

To enhance analytical rigor and credibility, the first author conducted the initial coding and theme development, after which the research team reviewed the coded extracts and the preliminary thematic structure. Divergent interpretations were discussed and resolved through collective deliberation until consensus was reached. The finalized dimensions from round 1 served as the basis for the round 2 ranking exercise.

In round 2, quantitative analysis was performed using experts' rankings of the identified dimensions. Kendall's coefficient of concordance (W) was employed to assess the degree of agreement among experts regarding the relative importance of each dimension (Tee et al., 2022). Kendall's W measures ranking consistency across multiple raters, with values closer to 1 indicating stronger agreement and values closer to 0 indicating weaker agreement (Ng et al., 2024). Statistical significance was evaluated using a p-value threshold of 0.05 (Tang et al., 2024). The resulting W value indicated a statistically significant level of consensus, and therefore, no additional Delphi rounds were required. When consensus is insufficient, further Delphi iterations may be conducted to refine and stabilize expert judgments (Subramaniam et al., 2024).

RESULTS

First Round of the Delphi Method

In the first round of the Delphi study, thematic analysis of experts' open-ended responses identified 26 distinct themes. Through iterative coding and consolidation, these themes were grouped into six overarching dimensions representing the perceived negative impacts of workplace social media use on employee MH, as presented in **Table 2**.

The six dimensions reflect a broad range of impact domains. Several dimensions are primarily cognitive and emotional in nature, such as digital overload and stress and social comparison and MH, which capture issues related to information processing, emotional pressure, and psychological strain. Other dimensions

reflect behavioral and functional consequences, including work-life imbalance and reduced productivity and focus, which relate to boundary management, attention regulation, and daily work functioning. In addition, negative impact on well-being and relationships highlights relational and interpersonal concerns arising from workplace social media use, while privacy and security concerns capture risks associated with increased visibility, surveillance, and identity management in digital work environments.

Overall, the first-round findings indicate that the negative effects of workplace social media use on employee MH are multidimensional and extend beyond a single strain domain. The identified dimensions provide a structured representation of the primary stressor categories identified by experts and serve as the basis for subsequent prioritization in the second Delphi round.

Second Round of the Delphi Method

The second round of the Delphi study commenced on 7 October 2024 and focused on prioritizing the six dimensions identified in round 1. Experts who completed the first round were invited to rank the dimensions according to their perceived impact on employee MH. A total of 40 experts participated in round 2, representing a response rate of 93.02%. Reminder emails were sent to ensure a high completion rate, consistent with recommended Delphi procedures (Tee et al., 2022).

The ranking results revealed clear differences in perceived importance among the six dimensions (Table 3). Digital overload and stress received the highest priority, with the lowest mean ranking score (mean [M] = 2.03), indicating that experts viewed it as the most significant negative impact of workplace social media use. This was followed by social comparison and MH (M = 3.00) and work-life imbalance (M = 3.28), which were also consistently ranked among the higher-impact dimensions. Reduced productivity and focus occupied a mid-range position (M = 3.38), suggesting moderate perceived importance relative to the other dimensions. Negative impact on well-being and relationships ranked fifth (M = 4.03), while privacy and security concerns ranked lowest (M = 5.30).

To assess the level of agreement among experts, Kendall's W was calculated. The analysis yielded a Kendall's W value of 0.343, which was statistically significant (p < 0.001), indicating a meaningful level of consensus among the experts' rankings. Given that the agreement threshold was met, no additional Delphi rounds were required. Table 3 summarizes the individual rankings, mean scores, and final rank order of the six dimensions identified in the study.

DISCUSSION

Although the SSO model and the JD-R model have been widely applied to explain occupational stress and technology-related strain, both frameworks remain relatively broad and do not explicitly delineate the dominant stressor domains associated with workplace social media use. Rather than rejecting these theoretical perspectives, the present study adopts them as foundational explanatory lenses and extends their applicability by identifying and prioritizing social media-specific stressor dimensions through expert consensus. In this respect, the six dimensions derived from the Delphi analysis may be understood as a contextual refinement of the stressor component within SSO and JD-R, thereby enhancing their relevance to contemporary digitally mediated work environments.

Digital Overload and Stress

Digital overload and stress emerged as the most prominent dimension influencing employee MH, indicating that excessive workplace social media use constitutes a central source of psychological strain. This dimension reflects a concentration of stressors, including information overload, constant connectivity, rapid digital change, and heightened performance visibility, which collectively contribute to elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. These conditions place sustained cognitive and emotional demands on employees, increasing vulnerability to burnout when opportunities for recovery are limited.

Table 3. Second round of Delphi survey

Expert	Digital overload and stress	Work-life imbalance	Social comparison and MH	Reduced productivity and focus	Privacy and security concerns	Negative impact on well-being and relationships
E1	2	1	3	6	5	4
E2	3	4	6	5	1	2
E3	2	6	1	3	5	4
E4	1	3	2	4	5	6
E5	2	1	3	6	5	4
E6	1	2	4	3	6	5
E7	2	3	1	5	6	4
E8	4	3	2	1	6	5
E9	3	2	1	4	6	5
E10	1	2	4	3	6	5
E11	1	2	4	5	6	3
E12	2	5	3	1	6	4
E13	4	6	1	3	5	2
E14	1	4	2	3	6	5
E15	1	5	4	2	6	3
E16	2	5	1	4	6	3
E17	3	4	2	1	6	5
E18	4	3	1	2	6	5
E19	1	3	4	2	6	5
E20	3	5	2	1	6	4
E21	1	5	3	2	6	4
E22	4	5	1	3	6	2
E23	1	2	6	5	3	4
E24	2	1	5	4	6	3
E25	3	6	2	1	5	4
E26	1	3	5	2	6	4
E27	1	2	6	3	5	4
E28	1	2	4	5	3	6
E29	2	5	4	3	6	1
E30	3	6	5	4	2	1
E31	2	1	3	6	5	4
E32	3	5	2	6	4	1
E33	1	2	4	5	3	6
E34	1	3	4	2	6	5
E35	1	2	3	4	6	5
E36	2	4	1	3	6	5
E37	2	3	1	4	6	5
E38	2	1	4	3	6	5
E39	3	1	2	5	6	4
E40	2	3	4	1	6	5
M	2.03	3.28	3.00	3.38	5.30	4.03
Rank	1	3	2	4	6	5

Prior research has demonstrated that exposure to excessive digital information elevates cognitive load and psychological strain, particularly in work settings characterized by continuous online communication (Necho et al., 2021). Information overload associated with social media use requires constant attention switching and prioritization, which can impair decision-making quality and reduce creative performance (Ahmed et al., 2019). Moreover, the simultaneous use of multiple communication platforms may further exacerbate mental exhaustion by fragmenting attention and undermining sustained focus (Kaufhold et al., 2020). Rapid digital change intensifies these effects by increasing perceived job insecurity and anxiety about technological competence, both of which have been linked to heightened stress and increased risk of burnout (Goetz & Boehm, 2020; Kwon et al., 2020). Collectively, these findings suggest that digital overload operates as a dominant stressor pathway through which workplace social media undermines employee MH.

Social Comparison and Mental Health

Social comparison represents the second most salient pathway through which workplace-related social media use affects employee MH. In organizational contexts characterized by heightened performance visibility and continuous exposure to others' professional achievements and lifestyles, social media platforms intensify self-evaluative processes. From the SSO perspective, such comparison dynamics operate as psychosocial stressors that generate strain responses, including anxiety, insecurity, and diminished self-worth. Viewed through the JD-R framework, these pressures can be understood as implicit job demands, in which employees are confronted with elevated expectations to meet perceived professional standards without necessarily receiving the corresponding psychological or organizational resources.

Existing research consistently demonstrates that upward social comparison in social media environments is associated with adverse MH outcomes, particularly depressive symptoms, envy, and reduced subjective well-being (Burnell et al., 2019; Gomez et al., 2022). These effects are further intensified by FOMO, which encourages persistent monitoring of social information and amplifies concerns about falling behind professionally or socially (Tandon et al., 2021). Collectively, these findings suggest that social media-enabled comparison processes extend beyond individual cognitive appraisals and become structurally embedded sources of psychological strain within organizational settings, progressively depleting employees' emotional resources and increasing vulnerability to MH risks.

Work-Life Imbalance

Work-life imbalance represents the third critical dimension through which workplace social media use influences employee MH. This dimension captures the progressive erosion of boundaries between professional and personal domains, primarily driven by expectations of constant availability and the continuous monitoring of work-related communication. Within the JD-R framework, such boundary permeability constitutes a persistent job demand that constrains psychological recovery and weakens work-life balance as a key personal resource supporting employee well-being.

Prior research has consistently demonstrated that blurred work-nonwork boundaries are associated with elevated stress, emotional exhaustion, and diminished job satisfaction (Borowiec & Drygas, 2023; Kossek et al., 2023). Sustained digital connectivity may further disrupt sleep patterns and recovery processes, thereby intensifying strain and increasing vulnerability to anxiety and depressive symptoms (Kolhar et al., 2021). Interpreted through the SSO framework, these ongoing demands function as chronic stressors that accumulate over time, underscoring boundary management as a central protective mechanism for safeguarding employee MH.

Reduced Productivity and Focus

Reduced productivity and focus constitute a fourth key dimension through which workplace social media use affects employee MH. This dimension captures cognitive strain arising from fragmented attention, frequent interruptions, digital fatigue, and reduced physical activity. The design logic of social media platforms, characterized by rapid content turnover and continuous stimulation, encourages habitual checking behaviors that disrupt sustained concentration and impair task performance (Bulut, 2023). Frequent notifications and pop-up alerts further interrupt workflow continuity, intensifying attentional fragmentation and undermining cognitive efficiency (Schnauber-Stockmann & Naab, 2019).

Repeated interruptions and task switching deplete cognitive resources and generate psychological strain, including frustration, mental fatigue, and heightened anxiety. Empirical evidence suggests that such disruptions increase cognitive load and reduce employees' capacity for deep, focused work, thereby diminishing productivity and contributing to emotional exhaustion (Tams et al., 2020). Prolonged screen exposure further intensifies these effects by inducing digital fatigue, which has been associated with reduced concentration, elevated stress, and lower work engagement (Dhir et al., 2019).

In addition, extensive reliance on digital communication may reduce opportunities for physical movement during the workday, reinforcing sedentary behavior. Reduced physical activity has been linked to poorer MH outcomes, including increased risks of depression and anxiety, which can further impair work performance and psychological well-being (Falk et al., 2022; Herman, 2024). Together, these conditions impose elevated

cognitive and emotional demands while limiting recovery opportunities, thereby increasing vulnerability to burnout in digitally intensive work environments.

Negative Impact on Well-Being and Relationships

Negative impacts on well-being and workplace relationships constitute the fifth dimension identified in this study, encompassing social isolation, superficial interpersonal connections, sleep disruption, exposure to negative or misleading information, and harmful online interactions. Although social media platforms are often promoted as tools for enhancing connectivity, excessive reliance on mediated communication may paradoxically weaken social bonds and diminish the quality of interpersonal relationships.

Prior research indicates that reduced face-to-face interaction is associated with heightened loneliness, anxiety, and impaired interpersonal communication, which may undermine trust and collaboration in the workplace (Okruszek et al., 2020; Primack et al., 2017). Prolonged engagement with digital platforms, particularly beyond working hours, can also disrupt sleep quality by interfering with circadian rhythms, contributing to emotional dysregulation and increased interpersonal conflict (Barnes & Watson, 2019; Silvani et al., 2022).

Exposure to negative news and misinformation through social media further amplifies psychological distress, including fear, insecurity, and emotional exhaustion, which may spill over into workplace interactions and social climates (Mertens et al., 2020). Moreover, social media can facilitate toxic organizational dynamics, such as cyberbullying, public criticism, and gossip, eroding psychological safety and contributing to hostile work environments. Collectively, these relational stressors impose sustained emotional demands that constrain recovery and increase vulnerability to anxiety, diminished trust, and relational breakdowns.

Privacy and Security Concerns

Privacy and security concerns constitute the sixth dimension identified in this study, reflecting employees' psychological responses to perceived surveillance, boundary intrusion, and pressures associated with online self-presentation in work-related social media environments. While organizational transparency and digital visibility may enhance coordination and communication, they also heighten concerns about data misuse, reputational risk, and the loss of control over personal information (Bagger, 2021; Gierlich-Joas et al., 2022; Nicol et al., 2022).

Perceived invasion of privacy represents a salient source of strain in digitally mediated workplaces. When employees are required or implicitly expected to engage with social media for work purposes, the extension of organizational presence into personal digital spaces may generate discomfort, stress, and resentment (Zheng & Ling, 2021). Such concerns may be particularly pronounced among individuals with concealable identities or personal circumstances, for whom increased visibility amplifies perceived risks of judgment or discrimination (Lauriano & Coacci, 2023).

Beyond privacy intrusion, the pressure to maintain a professionally acceptable online persona constitutes an additional emotional demand. Continuous self-monitoring and impression management require sustained cognitive and emotional effort, potentially restricting authentic self-expression and contributing to emotional exhaustion. Moreover, excessive information disclosure increases vulnerability to cybersecurity threats, reinforcing feelings of insecurity and diminished personal control (Bhattacharya et al., 2023). Without adequate organizational safeguards, these cumulative demands may erode psychological resources and adversely affect employee MH, underscoring the importance of privacy protection, role clarity, and digital governance in contemporary work environments.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH

This study, grounded in the SSO and JD-R models, identified six key dimensions through which social media negatively affects employee MH in Malaysia. Digital overload and stress emerged as the most critical factors, as constant connectivity depletes cognitive resources, elevates anxiety, and disrupts work-life boundaries. Issues such as social comparison, work-life imbalance, and productivity loss further exacerbate psychological strain. These findings call for organizations to set clear digital boundaries, implement robust MH support, and develop policies that balance professional demands with personal well-being.

However, this study had several limitations. The sample was limited to a specific geographical and cultural context, which might have affected the generalizability of the results. Additionally, reliance on expert opinions via the Delphi method may introduce biases, particularly in the absence of in-person discussions. Rapidly evolving social media trends and variations in employees' technology literacy also influence the relevance of findings over time.

Future research should broaden the diversity of experts across industries and cultural backgrounds, incorporate longitudinal studies to track evolving impacts, and explore the role of technological literacy. Case studies from multinational organizations could further refine strategies for mitigating the adverse effects of social media on employees' mental health.

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