Sharing Political and Religious Information on Facebook: Coworker Reactions

Felicia O. Kaloydis, Erin M. Richard, & Erin M. Maas

Abstract

This study is the first to examine links between social media activity and workplace relationship outcomes. The study examines employees' perceptions of coworkers who share political and religious information on Facebook. Authors piloted a measure of political and religious information sharing on Facebook (the PRISM-F). Results indicate that employees who frequently post political information on Facebook are less liked by their coworkers. In turn, this reduced liking relates to being less trusted, receiving less help, and receiving lower job performance ratings from coworkers. Religious information sharing was unrelated to these outcomes. Political and religious belief

Dr. Felicia O. Kaloydis is the Founder & CEO of Pivot Exit Inc. Dr. Erin M. Richard is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Florida Institute of Technology. Erin M. Maas is a Test Validation Specialist at the City of Dallas, Texas. Correspondence can be directed to erichard@fit.edu.

similarity did not moderate the effects of information sharing. This study offers evidence that although engaging in political discourse on Facebook can be tempting, it is associated with potentially negative workplace consequences. Furthermore, organizations may be well served by developing social media policies that caution employees about the potentially negative effects of sharing political information on Facebook.

As social network sites continue to colonize cyberspace, coworkers in organizations have generally become more at ease with the idea of connecting with colleagues using this avenue (Frampton & Child, 2013; Pennington, Winfrey, Warner, & Kearney, 2015). However, very little research has examined the implications of these connections for employee relationships. Social network sites are defined as those websites that (1) allow the creation of personal profiles that range from public to semi-public at the user's discretion, (2) allow individuals to create a list of individuals that they are connected to or acquainted with, and (3) permit individuals to view their list of persons that they are linked to on the website and browse lists of others within the confines of the website (boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Facebook was chosen as the focal social network site of study for three reasons. Firstly, Facebook meets boyd and Ellison's (2007) criteria, as the website allows individuals to interact with their connections or "friends" synchronously (through web chat) or asynchronously (through message features and posts. Secondly, Facebook has been identified as the largest social network site in existence (Bright, Kleiser, & Grau, 2015). Lastly, Facebook

provides a forum for individuals to either passively or actively glean information about their coworkers outside the work environment.

Political and religious beliefs are seldom discussed freely in the work environment, due to the often contentious nature of topics surrounding those espoused beliefs. However, coworkers are increasingly connecting outside the workplace by becoming "friends" on Facebook. These connections create an interesting new phenomenon where Facebook provides a channel for employees to acquire information regarding the political and religious beliefs of their coworkers, which may be in direct concordance or conflict with their own beliefs. The availability of such potentially emotion-charged information may impact the interaction between coworkers and other workplace phenomena in presently unidentified ways. The current study begins to explore this phenomenon by examining the mediating role of coworker liking in the relationship between political and religious information sharing on Facebook and three outcomes: interpersonal trust, helping behaviors, and perceptions of job performance.

Hypothesis Development

Research in the communication domain purports that self-disclosure is a critical component of relationship building among individuals. Thus, social penetration theory and uncertainty reduction theory provide the theoretical basis for the exploration of relationships between Facebook information sharing and coworker relationship criteria (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Social penetration theory maintains that interpersonal relationships between individuals develop gradually, as a

function of information disclosure. In scenarios where persons disclose information concerning their personal lives or themselves in general, interpersonal relationships tend to progress (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Derlega Winstead, & Greene, 2008). It therefore stands to reason that the progression of interpersonal relationships between coworkers may become markedly accelerated when they become "friends" on Facebook because of the increased availability of personal information.

Facebook offers an environment that inherently expedites instant information disclosure once individuals become "friends" on the platform. Nevertheless, individuals differ on the extent to which they share their personal beliefs on Facebook. For example, some individuals choose to share their religious affiliations and political leanings, whereas others leave that information blank or use privacy settings that prevent anyone but their closest contacts from seeing such information. Additionally, individuals differ on the extent to which they post information that reveals their beliefs. For example, some individuals share political or religious articles or memes they find on the Internet whose content supports a particular political or religious stance.

Consequently, in the event that an employee becomes "friends" with a coworker on Facebook, and perceives that coworker's disclosure of personal beliefs to be high, the employee will possess a broader scope of information concerning that coworker on which to ground cognitive-based trust and engender affect-based trust. Hence, the steady progression of interpersonal relationships between coworkers that typically characterized the relationship development of yesteryears could be irretrievably al-

tered by Facebook. Facebook offers a forum for individuals to disclose a variety of personal belief information to their coworkers, which could serve to accelerate relationship development. Furthermore, individuals who perceive their coworkers to disclose personal information on Facebook may feel more familiar or connected to those coworkers. Such feelings of familiarity may make them more likely to provide help to those colleagues and may even positively bias job performance ratings they assign to those coworkers.

By the same token, uncertainty reduction theory offers theoretical support for the notion that perceived coworker information disclosure may enhance trust, increase helping behaviors, and positively bias performance ratings, due to the fact that information disclosure is a key aspect of coworker relationship development (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Uncertainty reduction theory contends that people are compelled to reduce their ambiguity about others by gaining information concerning those individuals (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Former research indicates that coworkers who are privy to personal information concerning each other's lives tend to display increased coworker satisfaction (Simon et al., 2010). Hence, in a scenario where employees perceive high levels of political and religious belief disclosure in their coworker's Facebook posts, they may be more likely to trust and provide help to those colleagues, and their perceptions of those colleagues' job performance may be upwardly biased.

> *Hypothesis 1:* A coworker's (a) political information sharing and (b) religious information sharing on Facebook will be positively related to trust for that coworker.

Hypothesis 2: A coworker's (a) political information sharing and (b) religious information sharing on Facebook will be positively related to helping that coworker.

Hypothesis 3: A coworker's (a) political information sharing and (b) religious information sharing on Facebook will be positively related to perceptions of that coworker's job performance.

Coworker Liking as a Mediator

The reasoning provided above suggests a large affective component to the link between Facebook information sharing and coworker relationship outcomes. Building on social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973), it is plausible to suggest that a coworker who shares more personal information on Facebook will be more liked. Liking for another individual inherently consists of an affective response directed at that individual (Sutton, Baldwin, Wood, & Hoffman, 2013) and typically denotes the extent of interpersonal attraction in a particular relationship (Linden, Wayne, & Stilwell, 1993). Theory suggests that individuals often construe self-disclosure as an indicator of increasing closeness, because choosing to disclose information conveys the target person's desire to start or sustain a deeper interpersonal relationship with the receiver of that information (Collins & Miller, 1994). Prior research findings suggest that people have a tendency to like those who disclose personal information to them (e.g., Archer, Berg, & Runge, 1980; Collins & Miller, 1994; Dalto, Ajzen, & Kaplan, 1979). More specifically, employees tend to like their colleagues who disclose personal information about themselves because they view them as

more friendly, trusting, and warm (Ajzen, 1977). Nevertheless, these effects have not been tested when such disclosure is done via social media posts.

> *Hypothesis 4:* A coworker's (a) political information sharing and (b) religious information sharing on Facebook is positively related to liking for that coworker.
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> *Hypothesis 5:* Liking for a coworker mediates the effects of the coworker's (a) political informational sharing and (b) religious information sharing on trust in that coworker.
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> *Hypothesis 6:* Liking for a coworker mediates the effects of the coworker's (a) political informational sharing and (b) religious information sharing on helping that coworker.
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> *Hypothesis 7:* Liking for a coworker mediates the effects of the coworker's (a) political informational sharing and (b) religious information sharing on perceptions of performance.

Belief Similarity as a Moderator

As a caveat to the above discussion, social penetration theory and uncertainty reduction theory may not adequately take into account the divisive nature of political and religious topics. By sharing political and religious beliefs on Facebook, employees also risk offending or at least alienating themselves from coworkers who disagree with their political or religious beliefs. Gaining more information about a coworker who has opposing political or religious views may actually have the opposite effects on coworker relationship outcomes.

Relational demography theory centers on the

amount of demographic similarity or dissimilarity that individuals share within the bounds of interpersonal relationships (Tsui, Egan & O'Reilly, 1992; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). Social identity and self-categorization comprise the theory of relational demography, in which persons recognize and classify themselves in relation to other individuals based on demographic features, so as to assess ingroup or out-group status (Harrison, Price, Gavin, & Florey, 2002; Riordan et al., 2005). Even though in-group members demonstrate their attraction to each other by exhibiting friendliness, and extolling each other's positive virtues (Tsui, Porter, & Egan, 2002), they withhold such goodwill from out-group members. Specifically, people in the out-group are considered by individuals in the in-group to possess negative attributes, and in-group members frequently relate with these out-group members in a terse manner (Riordan et al., 2005; Tsui, et al., 2002). Consequently, one could argue that the relationships between political and religious information sharing and coworker relationship outcomes are dependent upon the extent to which employees perceives similarity between themselves and the target coworker on those issues—that is, whether the employee construes that focal coworker as part of the in-group or the out-group. When perceived political and religious similarity is high, sharing should result in higher levels of liking, trust, helping and perceptions of performance. However, when perceived political and religious similarity is low, sharing may actually reduce coworker liking, trust and helping and negatively impact perceptions of performance.

Research shows that individuals are more likely to trust (Hurley, 2006) and help (Sturmer, Snyder, Kropp, &

Siem, 2006) those who they perceive as similar to themselves. Performance appraisal research also demonstrates a similar-to-me effect, such that raters' perceptions of performance are positively biased by perceptions of similarity to the ratee. We therefore expected that the effects of political and religious information sharing on Facebook would be moderated by perceptions of similarity regarding these beliefs.

> *Hypothesis 8:* Belief similarity moderates the indirect effects of coworker information sharing on (a) trust, (b) helping, and (c) perceptions of coworker performance; the indirect relationship (through liking) is positive under high levels of belief similarity and negative under low levels of belief similarity.

Pilot Study: Measure Development

Because there were no validated measures of political and/or religious information sharing on Facebook, we first developed the Political and Religious Information Sharing Measure for Facebook (PRISM-F) and began validating the measure in a pilot study. The goal of this effort was to develop a measure that would assess participants' perceptions of the degree to which a focal coworker shares political and religious information on Facebook. However, we also developed the scale with the goal that it could be easily adapted to a self-report format or to assess sharing on other social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, LinkedIn).

In the context of this scale development effort, the term "political" was operationalized as anything related to politics or political issues including but not limited to gun control, abortion, taxation and welfare and social programs. The term "religious" was operationalized as any-

Table 1

EFA Factor Loadings for Pilot Study PRISM-F

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2
My coworker often posts information about political events on Facebook.	**.90**	-.02
My coworker regularly "Shares" images about politics on Facebook.	**.87**	.03
My coworker frequently "Likes" political pages.	**.85**	-.03
My coworker often posts quotes from political figures on Facebook.	**.82**	.08
My coworker frequently comments on my statuses that express my political opinions.	**.79**	-.05
My coworker shares a lot of his/her political opinions on Facebook.	**.78**	.02
My coworker often "Likes" the statuses that I post about my political opinions.	**.74**	-.13
My coworker is often "Tagged" by people who "Share" political images on Facebook.	**.70**	.05
I can see my coworker's political party affiliation on his/her Facebook profile.	**.69**	.05
My coworker often shares his/her location when attending a political event.	**.65**	.01
I feel that my coworker hides his/her statuses about politics from me on Facebook.*	.30	.03
My coworker often posts religious quotes on Facebook.	-.11	**.98**
My coworker "Shares" religious images on Facebook.	.02	**.91**
My coworker frequently "Likes" religious pages.	.03	**.88**
My coworker often shares his/her location when they are at a religious gathering (e.g., church, mosque, or other worship center).	-.00	**.88**
My coworker shares a lot of his/her religious opinions on Facebook.	-.00	**.85**
My coworker frequently posts information about religious events.	-.03	**.85**
I can see my coworker's religious affiliation on their Facebook profile.	.10	**.64**
My coworker "Likes" the statuses that I post about my religious views.	.24	**.49**
I feel that my coworker does not hide his/her status updates about religious views from me.	-.06	**.45**
I feel that my coworker avoids commenting on my statuses that express my religious views.*	.15	.21

Note: * = items that were dropped from the final measure.

thing pertaining to spiritual beliefs, religion, convictions concerning a higher power or moral opinions based on spiritual ideology. Items were developed to be rated on a 5-point scale with anchors ranging from 1 (Rarely) to 5 (Very Frequently) and an additional "Not Applicable" option. Eleven items were written to assess political sharing (e.g., *My coworker shares a lot of his/her political opinions on Facebook*). Ten items were written to assess religious sharing (e.g., *My coworker often posts religious quotes on Facebook*). See Table 1 for the complete item set and factor loadings from the exploratory factor analysis.

Participant and Procedure

Respondents were recruited through a snowball sampling method (Facebook contacts of the research team were asked to recruit their own Facebook contacts and so on) and by recruiting other Facebook users via Amazon Mechanical Turk. To be eligible to participate, participants had to be employed for at least 20 hours per week, possess a Facebook account, and live in the United States. Attention check items were used to screen out random or careless responders.

Of the final sample of 155 respondents, 70.3% identified themselves as Caucasian ($n = 109$); 15.5% were African-American ($n = 24$); 3.2% were Hispanic ($n = 5$); 8.4% were Asian ($n = 13$); and 2.6% self-identified as being multi-racial (two or more races; $n = 4$). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 68 years old, with an average age of 31.41 years.

With regard to Facebook use, 41.9% of the respondents indicated that they used Facebook several times a day ($n = 65$), 31% used Facebook every day ($n = 48$), 18.1%

used Facebook a few times a week ($n = 28$), and 6.5% used Facebook several times a month ($n = 10$). The other 2.6% indicated that they rarely used Facebook, or they possessed a Facebook account but never checked it. After providing informed consent, participants were asked to log into their Facebook account, view their "friends list," and note the *first coworker* on the list. They were then asked to them complete the PRISM-F items with that particular coworker in mind.

To establish convergent validity evidence for the PRISM-F, objective measures of information sharing were also collected. After participants completed the PRISM-F, they were asked to use their Facebook accounts to report objective information from their target coworker's Facebook profile page. No identifying information was collected on the target coworker. For the political belief portion of this scale, participants were asked to respond to three items. Participants first responded to two dichotomous (Yes/No) items: *My coworker's political party affiliation is listed on his/her Facebook profile; Can you see any statuses of your coworker's political opinions that he or she posted on Facebook?* A third item required respondents to count the *total number of political posts* that the target coworker had made *over the past two months*. Political posts were defined to range from sharing political opinions on Facebook to information about political events on Facebook.

Similarly, three items were used to objectively measure the target coworkers' religious information sharing: *My coworker's religious affiliation is listed on his/her Facebook profile; Can you see any statuses of your coworker's religious opinions that he or she posted on Facebook?*

Participants also provided a count of the *total number of religious posts* by the focal coworker *over the past two months*. Coworker's religious posts were defined to include behaviors such as sharing religious images on Facebook, and posting information about religious events on Facebook.

PRISM-F Factor Structure

Principle axis factoring with direct oblimin rotation was used to assess the factor structure of the PRISM-F. The screeplot indicated two factors; the first factor explained 43.56% of the variance, and the second factor accounted for 17.41% of the variance. Item loadings suggested that these two factors were consistent with political and religious information sharing, respectively. Therefore, a second exploratory factor analysis was conducted specifying the extraction of a two-factor solution. The factor loadings for this analyses are displayed in Table 1.

Two items were dropped for having comparatively low factor loadings: "I feel that my coworker hides his/her statuses about politics from me on Facebook" and the reverse-coded item "I feel that my coworker avoids commenting on my statuses that express my religious views." Subsequent to the deletion of the two items, the variance explained by the first factor rose to 47.2%, and the variance accounted for by the second factor increased to 19.1%. Taken together, the two factors explained a total of 66.3% of the variance between the items in the measure. As expected, the first factor contained the perceived political information sharing items, with factor loadings ranging from .65 to .90, and the second factor consisted of perceived religious information sharing items, with factor

loadings between .45 and .98.

Reliability and Validity

The internal consistency of the final subscales was good: α = 0.94 for the 10-item political information sharing dimesion and α = 0.92 for the 9-item religious information sharing dimension. Initial construct validity evidence for the PRISM-F was collected by examining its relationship with the objective indicators of Facebook information sharing. Correlations between the PRISM-F subscales and objective indices of political and religious information sharing are provided in Table 2. In all cases, PRISM-F scores were significantly and positively related to objective indices of political and religious information sharing, providing some initial evidence for the measure's validity.

Focal Study
Participants

The focal sample consisted of 431 working adults located throughout United States. The Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) platform was used to recruit participants. Participants were at least 18 years of age and worked at least 20 hours per week. Respondents were required to possess an active (i.e., not deactivated) Facebook account and to have at least one current coworker with whom they are connected ("friends") on Facebook. The sample was composed of 50.6% male ($n = 218$) and 49.8% female ($n = 213$) respondents. With regard to race, 81.9% ($n = 353$) self-identified as Caucasian/White, 6.5% ($n = 28$) African-American/Black, 4.9% ($n = 21$) Hispanic, 3.9% ($n = 17$) Asian/Indian, 0.5% ($n = 2$) Pacific Islander, and 2.3% reported a multi-racial identity (two or more races; $n = 10$).

Table 2

Intercorrelations among PRISM-F and Objective Indicators of Facebook Information Sharing

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Political Facebook Information Sharing	-	.42**	.52**	.62**				
2. My coworker's political party affiliation is listed on his/her Facebook profile.		-	.51**	.35**				
3. Can you see any statuses of your coworker's political opinions that he or she posted on Facebook?			-	.41**				
4. What is the total number of political posts that your coworker has made on Facebook over the past two months?				-				
5. Religious Facebook Information Sharing					-	.33**	.43**	.46**
6. My coworker's religious affiliation is listed on his/her Facebook profile.						-	.58**	.32**
7. Can you see any statuses of your coworker's religious opinions that he or she posted on Facebook?							-	.46**
8. What is the total number of religious posts that your coworker has made on Facebook over the past two months?								-

Note: $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$. Yes/No items were coded as Yes = 1, and No = 0.

The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 73 years old, and the average age was found to be 32.57 years. Of the 431 respondents, 49.4% were between the ages of 18 and 30 ($n = 213$), 35.5% were between 31 and 43 years ($n = 153$), while 15.1% ($n = 65$) were above the age of 44. In terms of work hours, the respondents worked an average of 38.05 hours per week, with a range of 20 to 70 hours per week. The sample was 45.5% Christian ($n = 196$), 16% not religious ($n = 69$), 13.9% Agnostic ($n = 60$), and 13.7% Atheist ($n = 59$).

Procedure

Participants were asked to log into their Facebook account, click on their "friends list," note the *first coworker* that appears on the list, and type their initials. Participants also reported the target coworker's gender (60% female), relationship type (75.2% of the target coworkers were peers, 14.6% were supervisors, and 7% were subordinates), and relationship length (4.9% knew the selected coworker for < 1 year; 55.7% for 1-4 years, 25.8% for 5-9 years, and 13.7% for 10 or more years).

Next, participants reported their liking, trust, and helping behaviors toward this coworker and rated the coworker's job performance. These outcome measures were presented first, and participants were not allowed to return to these measures when they completed the PRISM-F; this sequence ensured that the outcome measures tapped into previously held attitudes about the target coworker and prevented any inflation in relationships that could have resulted from cuing participants to think about the coworker's political and religious posts right before they rated the outcome variables.

Two attention check items, which required partici-
pants to respond to items in a specified manner, were em-
bedded in the survey to ensure that participants carefully
completed the survey. Respondents who passed the atten-
tion checks and thoroughly completed the survey were
compensated with $0.75 for their participation in the
study.

Measures

Cronbach's α values for the focal variables are pre-
sented in Table 2. In particular, the PRISM-F displayed
strong reliability.

Coworker liking. Liking was measured using an
adaptation of Wayne and Ferris's (1990) four-item inter-
personal liking scale. The items were measured on a 5-
point scale. The anchors for the first item, "How much do
you like this coworker?" ranged from 1 (*I don't like this
person at all*) to 5 (*I like this coworker very much*). The
remaining three items were measured on a 5-point Likert
scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly
agree). An example of an item is *"I think this coworker
would make a good friend."*

Interpersonal trust. Interpersonal trust was meas-
ured with a slightly modified version of McAllister's (1995)
11-item trust measure using a Likert-type scale, compris-
ing of two dimensions – affect-based trust and cognition-
based trust. The anchors on the interpersonal trust scale
ranged from 1 (totally disagree) and 5 (totally agree). An
example of an item in the five-item affect-based trust sub-
scale is *"I can talk freely to this coworker about difficulties
I am having at work."* Examples of items in the six-item
cognition-based trust subscale include *"I see no reason to*

doubt my coworker's competence for the job," and *"My peers consider my coworker to be trustworthy."*

Helping behaviors. Helping behaviors were evaluated using a modified version of Podsakoff and colleagues' (1997) helping behavior item set. The seven helping behavior items were evaluated on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Sample items from the modified measure include *"I would help this coworker out if he/she fell behind in his/her work," "I am willing to share my expertise with this coworker," "I am willing to give of my time to help this coworker with work-related problems,"* and *"I encourage this coworker when he/she is down."*

Job performance ratings. Job performance was measured with the aid of a shortened performance rating scale derived from a university employee performance appraisal form. Participants were asked to rate their target coworker on eight performance dimensions. The target coworker's score on each of the eight dimensions was summed to yield an overall job performance score. Participants were asked to rate their target coworker on eight dimensions – team work, organizational skills, communication skills, leadership ability, interaction with coworkers, initiative, resourcefulness, and quality of work, on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (poor performance) to 5 (exceptional performance). A given target coworker's score on each of the seven dimensions was summed to yield an overall total job performance score.

Facebook information sharing. The final version of the PRISM-F from the pilot study was used to assess political (7 items) and religious (8 items) information sharing.

Results

  Descriptives and intercorrelations for the study variables are presented in Table 2. Pearson's correlations were evaluated to test hypotheses 1-4. Mediation analyses were conducted using the PROCESS macro (Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007) to test hypotheses 5-8.

  Hypothesis 1 purported that perceived (a) political belief and (b) religious belief sharing on Facebook would be positively related to trust. The findings from the correlation matrix indicated that in actuality, political belief information sharing was negatively related to trust ($r = -.17$, $p < .01$), while the negative relationship between religious information sharing and trust did not reach significance ($r = -.02$, $p > .05$). Therefore, hypothesis 1 was not supported.

  Hypothesis 2 stated that perceived (a) political belief and (b) religious belief information sharing on Facebook would be positively related to helping behaviors. The findings revealed that a significant negative relationship existed between political belief sharing and helping behaviors ($r = -.20$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, religious information sharing exhibited a rather small, non-significant negative relationship with helping behaviors ($r = -.05$, $p > .05$). Consequently, no evidence was found to support hypothesis 2.

  Contrary to expectations, hypothesis 3 was not supported, as job performance ratings were found to be negatively related to political belief information sharing ($r = -.15$, $p < .01$) and unrelated to religious belief information sharing ($r = -.05$, $p > .05$). Similarly, no support was found for hypothesis 4, given that coworker liking was negatively related to political belief information sharing ($r = -.20$, $p < .01$) and unrelated to religious belief information sharing

($r = $ -.04, $p > $.05).

Hypothesis 5a was supported; the indirect effect of perceived political information sharing on affect-based trust through coworker liking was negative (a^b^ = - .14) and statistically different from zero (95% BootCI [- .2326, -.0679]). The direct effect between perceived Facebook information sharing and affect-based trust was non-significant ($p > .05$), suggesting that the relationship was fully mediated by liking. Furthermore, the indirect effect of perceived political information sharing on cognition-based trust through coworker liking was negative (a^b^ = - .15), and statistically distinct from zero (95% BootCI [-.2432, -.0701]). No significant direct effect existed between perceived political information sharing and cognition-based trust ($p > .05$), suggesting that the relationship is fully mediated by liking. On the other hand, no support was found for hypothesis 5b, as the indirect effect of perceived religious information sharing on affect-based trust via coworker liking (a^b^ = - .04) was non-significant (95% BootCI [-.1179, .0310]). In addition, the indirect effect of perceived religious belief information sharing on cognition-based trust through coworker liking was not significant (a^b^ = - .04; 95% BootCI [-.1240, .0325]), thereby yielding no support for hypothesis 5b.

Hypothesis 6a was supported, as the indirect effect of perceived political information sharing on helping behaviors through coworker liking was negative and statistically different from zero (a^b^ = - .14; 95% BootCI [-.2343, -.0663]). The direct effect of perceived political information sharing and helping behaviors did not reach significance ($p > .05$), suggesting that the relationship was fully mediated by liking. Conversely, hypothesis 6b was not support-

ed, due to the fact that the indirect effect of perceived religious belief information sharing on helping behaviors was not significant (a^b^ = - .04; 95% BootCI [-.1211, .0304]).

Hypothesis 7a was supported; the indirect effect of perceived political information sharing on job performance ratings through coworker liking was negative, and statistically different from zero (a^b^ = - .13; 95% BootCI [-.2202, -.0640]). No significant direct effect was found for the relationship between perceived political information sharing and job performance ratings ($p > .05$), suggesting that the relationship was fully mediated by liking. On the other hand, no support was found for hypothesis 7b because perceived religious belief information sharing did not predict job performance via coworker liking (a^b^ = - .03; 95% BootCI [-.1127, .0293]).

It is important to note that participants' perceived similarity to the target employee on political and religious beliefs were both explored as potential moderators of the information sharing-liking relationship. Similarity (on either type of belief) was not a significant moderator of the effects of information sharing on Facebook. Therefore, hypothesis 8 was not supported.

Discussion

In an era characterized by rising social media use among employees in organizations, research has remained rather limited with respect to illuminating the influence of social network sites on workplace outcomes (Andreassen, Torsheim, & Pallesen, 2014; Piotrowski, 2012). Particularly in need of study are social media sites that blur the line between employees' personal and work lives. Connecting with coworkers on social media has become increasingly

common, and at the same time, social media is becoming more political (Pennington, et al., 2015; Schmidt, Lelchook, & Martin, 2016). The confluence of these trends calls for research aimed at understanding their implications for workplace relationships. This study therefore sought to examine employee political and religious information sharing on Facebook and its correlation with work relationship outcomes and perceptions of performance. To summarize the results, employees reported lower trust in and less helping behavior toward coworkers who shared more political information on Facebook. Coworkers' political information sharing also negatively related to perceptions of their job performance. These relationships were fully mediated by reduced liking for coworkers who shared more political information. Surprisingly, these effects were observed regardless of whether participants agreed with the focal coworkers' political beliefs. On the other hand, none of these effects were observed for religious information sharing.

The finding that perceived Facebook political information sharing was negatively related to coworker liking was interesting (hypothesis 1a), as the relationship directly contradicts previous research that has found that individuals tend to like those who disclose personal information to them (Archer et al., 1980; Collins & Miller, 1994). On the other hand, some social psychological research suggests that excessive self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships, particularly at the beginning, has been found to be linked to lower levels of liking afterward (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Berg, 1984); therefore, it is plausible that political information sharing on Facebook represents the high end of the self-sharing or "sharing" continu-

um. Hence, it is possible that disclosing too much political information on Facebook (i.e., oversharing) may have been off-putting for participants, which therefore negatively impacted coworker liking (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006). Consequently, future research could focus on ascertaining the level or topic(s) of sharing that individuals consider to be the norm or acceptable, with regard to Facebook information sharing, as well as the amount or subject (s) of disclosure that individuals generally deem to be excessive on Facebook and other social media platforms.

Although these findings are correlational and do not prove causation, it is important for individuals to be cautious about disclosing information concerning one's political beliefs on Facebook. Employees should be aware of the possibility that such disclosure could very well have a detrimental impact on coworker liking, which in turn may negatively impact criteria that employees and organizations have a vested interest in – interpersonal trust, helping behaviors, and perceptions of job performance.

Further research is needed into the lack of significant effects found for religious information sharing on Facebook. It is possible that religious Facebook posts (compared to political posts) may be more likely to be positive or uplifting, which may have counteracted the negative effects of over-disclosure. Thus, future research should examine evaluations of the posts themselves, such as the extent to which the information disclosed is uplifting versus negative, as these evaluations could moderate the effects of information sharing.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study could have implications

for coworkers and teams in terms of process losses due to communication issues, trust, the manifestation of backup behaviors, and job performance ratings. Since affect-based trust is characterized by mutual care and concern, and cognition-based trust is based on reliability and dependability, decreased interpersonal trust as a result of Facebook information sharing could potentially lead to a breakdown in communication within teams. Given that teams are typically characterized by the task interdependence and shared goals (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002), such a breakdown in communication could thwart the accomplishment of team goals. Moreover, coworkers who disclose a high amount of political information on Facebook may find that their colleagues are less likely to provide support to them in the workplace in the form of helping behaviors. This reduced helping may hinder team objectives from being achieved, particularly in circumstances where those coworkers or team members are unable to execute their job-related responsibilities. With respect to organizational development, companies could lose valuable resources in terms of employee social capital and expertise due to the unwillingness or reluctance of individuals to help their coworkers as a result of political information disclosed on Facebook.

In a performance appraisal context, individuals who share their political beliefs on Facebook should be aware that such information sharing could lead to their job performance ratings being adversely impacted if raters have been exposed to their Facebook posts. The fact that perceived Facebook political information sharing negatively related to perceptions of job performance through liking provides important evidence that Facebook behavior could

bias performance ratings. Given that 360 degree (multisource) feedback systems are used in various organizations to assign job performance ratings, which may be subsequently used to make administrative decisions, it is important for all employees – particularly managers and human resources personnel – to be cognizant of this potential source of bias in the job performance criterion.

Moreover, in cases where persons are awarded lower job performance ratings stemming from their political posts, if those individuals happen to be part of the minority group in terms of racial/religious composition within organizations, they may feel excluded or marginalized. Specifically, employees may experience feelings of exclusion and marginalization due to them inaccurately attributing their lower job performance ratings to their minority group status, which could negatively impact coworker interpersonal interactions and spur conflict in the workplace. Additionally, low job performance ratings could lead to a host of other unfavorable outcomes, such as poor job attitudes, higher withdrawal behaviors, and reduced engagement (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012).

In order to remedy the aforementioned issues, organizations need to establish clear, research-based social media training, which should be conducted during the employee onboarding process, and referred to as needed during the course of organizational life. Since organizations strive to acquire accurate job performance ratings, and reduce bias/rater error, the notion that political beliefs disclosed on Facebook could negatively influence job performance ratings should be addressed during rater training (e.g., frame-of reference training; Gorman & Rentsch, 2009) in organizations. Although social media have been

shown to promote coworker relationship maintenance and development, as well as professional information sharing (Frampton & Child, 2013; Smith & Kidder, 2010), employees need to have a cogent understanding regarding the risks to which they expose themselves when they send a "Friend" request to a coworker, or accept one from a coworker (Frampton & Child, 2013). Evidently, the results generally suggest that employees should refrain from sharing information concerning their political beliefs on Facebook, as doing so could have dire consequences for their work lives. Nevertheless, it may be beneficial for organizations to develop social media training consisting of research-based guidance concerning thorny or pervasive social media issues, including the perils of posting information concerning one's political beliefs on Facebook. The existence of such training could mitigate the negative impact of social network sites on workplace outcomes, and prevent organizations from being unprepared when employees engage in conduct on Facebook that adversely affect their workplace lives.

In some cases, it may be wise for employees to refrain from becoming 'Friends" with their coworkers on Facebook, in view of the fact sharing information concerning one's political beliefs may reduce the aforementioned valued workplace outcomes. Alternatively, individuals who choose to become "Friends" with their colleagues on Facebook should either desist from disclosing information concerning their political beliefs on Facebook, or endeavor to adjust their Facebook privacy settings so that such posts are only seen by a select few (close friends and family) and hidden from coworkers. It is anticipated that these actions would reduce the likelihood that the individuals' col-

leagues would be able to view such potentially detrimental information. Taken together, the results obtained in the present study are likely to generalize to other forms of social media, such as Twitter and LinkedIn; however, future research is warranted to confirm the research findings in the context of those social media platforms.

Limitations and Future Research

This research relied on cross-sectional data, and therefore causal relationships among the variables cannot be assumed. For example, other individual differences related to both political information sharing and workplace relationship outcomes could have inflated correlations between the variables. For example, individuals who disclose less information regarding their political beliefs may have also engaged in other types of self-monitoring to preserve harmony in their relationships with others on Facebook (Hall & Pennington, 2013; Snyder, 1987). Self-monitoring occurs when an individual regulates his or her expressive behavior in order to conform to the situational demands or customs of pertinent onlookers (Hall & Pennington, 2013). Thus, coworkers who disclosed less political information on Facebook may have been high self-monitors, and may therefore have been more attune to the potential negative consequences associated with divulging information related to their personal political beliefs on Facebook (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Barrick, Parks, & Mount, 2005). Future research should address this limitation in two ways. First, experimental research can be conducted where participants are presented with social media feeds from hypothetical coworkers, and political and/or religious information is manipulated. Doing so would allow

for causal inferences to be made regarding the effect of information sharing on observer perceptions. Second, more research should be conducted examining the relationship of political and religious information sharing with other constructs, such as individual differences in self-monitoring, impression management or personality. We expect that political and religious information sharing is likely one of many behavioral mediators of the effects of broader individual difference variables on work relationship outcomes. However, by focusing on this particular social media behavior, this research is able to provide some specific, practical suggestions for employees and organizations regarding best practices in social media use.

Finally, a new measure of political and religious information sharing, the PRISM-F was developed for this research. We hope that the existence of this measure will stimulate future research in this area. Although we began the validation process by examining the measure's factor structure and relationship with objective indicators of information sharing, future research should continue to examine the validity and utility of this measure. In addition to being used as a research tool, the measure may also be adapted for organizational purposes. For example, it may be a useful self-assessment for increasing employees' awareness of their social media presence.

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