

Social Media Never Sleeps: Antecedents and Consequences of Social Media Fatigue among Professional Content Creators

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Social media use among private, nonprofit, and public sector organizations is on the rise with budgets for communicating in this space growing annually. Professional social media content creators use their specialized skills in public relations, advertising, and marketing to grow consumer demand and maintain relationships. Although social media content creators serve as crucial connectors for organizations and stakeholders, the evidence is mounting that professional content creators are experiencing social media fatigue. While general social media users can withdraw from social media when feeling overwhelmed, what happens to those who work daily

in the social media environment and rely on these platforms for their livelihood? To examine this issue, we conducted focus groups and in-depth interviews with 21 professional content creators in the private and public sectors. Findings outline the antecedents and consequences of social media fatigue among content creators. We also discuss practical implications and offer suggestions to improve the work experience of these strategic communicators.

Keywords: Social media fatigue, content creators, Digital strategy, Stressor-strain-outcome framework, Brand strategy and management

Social media use among private, nonprofit, and public sector organizations is on the rise, and budgets for communicating in this space continue to grow with an estimated \$31 billion in advertising expenditures by 2021 (Mortensen, 2016). In 2019, 3.5 billion people actively engaged on social media platforms globally, which was a 9% increase over the previous year (WeAreSocial, 2019). Meaning, in 2019, roughly 288 million people around the world became newly active on social media. As a result of the abundant usage of social media today, strategic communicators must consider social channels in their efforts to communicate with clients, customers, citizens, influencers, and a variety of other stakeholder groups. Social media content creators use their professional skills in public relations, advertising, and marketing to interact with

these stakeholders. While social media usage continues to escalate, academic researchers have devoted little attention to the workers who are creating branded content in these virtual spaces and the policies that guide their efforts.

Although social media content creators can facilitate positive interactions with brands, build an organizational reputation among consumers, and engage in issues management through social media channels, the evidence is mounting that the platforms create unintended, negative consequences. The prevalence of social media fatigue is one such manifestation. Social media fatigue occurs among social media users “when they become overwhelmed with too many sites, too many pieces of content, too many friends and contacts, and too much time spent keeping up with these connections” (Technopedia, 2011).

Interdisciplinary research investigating the presence and impact of social media fatigue in fields such as advertising, psychology, information technology, health science, and other disciplines, primarily focuses on a general social media consumer. For example, researchers give considerable interest to understanding the impact of frequent social media use on adolescent brain development, information processing, and overall mental health (Boehm, 2019; Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2012; O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Tandoc, Ferrucci, & Duffy, 2015; Woods & Scott, 2016). Additionally, scholars have devoted attention to understanding the impact of technology use on worker productivity. However, those studies usually concentrate on internal communication between co-workers, work teams, or supervisors and subordinates. While this line of inquiry is significant, social media content creators are boundary spanners. These communicators must manage both internal and external communication, while also building brands and fostering engagement with various stakeholder groups – in essence, they are brand managers, public relations representatives, and customer service experts all at once. Academic researchers rarely focus on this subset of social media users who work on these platforms full time. While general social media users have the option to withdraw from social media when feeling fatigued, what happens to those who work daily in the social media environment and rely on these platforms for their livelihood? This research addresses a critical gap in the literature.

This study used a qualitative multimethod approach involving focus groups and in-depth interviews with 21 professional social media content creators from the public and private sectors to address the following research questions: What are the antecedents and consequences of social media fatigue among professional content creators? What policies, if any, are in place to prevent professional content creators from experiencing cognitive and emotional fatigue?

Professional content creators are responsible for communicating with consumers and other stakeholders as an essential job function. In this role, professional content creators engage in digital conversations with consumers to further business goals and improve consumer relations. They respond to negative comments, implement communication crisis strategies, and manage a variety of service requests on social media platforms. To what degree do these communication professionals experience social media fatigue, and why, and are policies in place to protect them from burnout?

Overall, findings from this study reveal that while professional social media content creators value the creative expression embedded in their social media management responsibilities as well as the ability to cultivate a community around their organizational brands, these communicators do experience social media fatigue. The sources of these feelings, along with their consequences, are outlined in this study. To systematically explore the stated research findings, this paper is structured as follows. First, the literature review outlines the antecedents and consequences of social media fatigue based on previous research from both general users and those using social media for work-related purposes. Then research questions are presented, followed by an outline of the methodology used to explore said questions. Next, findings are explored, followed by a discussion of the implications of this research. The paper concludes with summary comments and highlights opportunities for future research on social media fatigue among this unique segment of social media users – professional content creators.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media fatigue refers to a subjective and self-evaluated feeling of tiredness from social media usage (Lee, Son, & Kim, 2016). While social media fatigue is expressly tied to social media use, the concept of media fatigue is not inherently new. In 1984, clinical psychologist Craig Brod coined the term technostress to describe one's inability to

manage the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in a healthy manner (Ayyagari, Grover, & Purvis, 2011). Both terms emphasize the challenges that emerge from communication using information technology. Mobile devices give users unprecedented and unlimited access to information at all hours; however, these devices do not often give users a mechanism for preventing overload. Social media fatigue can be especially pronounced when creating and managing content is an essential part of your job function due to the constant flow of information. In addition to overload and fatigue, information anxiety can also become part of the social media experience. As noted by Wurman (2001), “Information anxiety can have many forms, only the first of which is the frustration with the inability to ‘keep up’ with the amount of data present in our life. What makes this worse is that the data is not just passive, but actively inserting itself into our environment, our attention” (p. 15). Whether the experience is operationalized as overload, fatigue, technostress, or anxiety, it can have a substantial impact on job performance and mental health for professional social media content managers (Dwoskin, Whalen, & Cabato, 2019).

Within the context of social media fatigue, the stress-strain-outcome framework provides an explanatory avenue for the relationship between information overload, social media usage, and the fatigue created from constantly managing social channels (Koeske & Koeske, 1993). Using this model, stressors are linked with organizational outcomes, and this relationship is often mediated by the level of strain experienced by the employee. For the purposes of this study, information overload or technostress could be considered a stressor, while proper social media management would be the desirable organizational outcome that professional content managers work toward. The strain component would be the feelings of social media fatigue that professional content managers experience as they go about their work as brand managers – especially in cases where policies or guidelines are not in place.

Antecedents and Consequences for Social Media Fatigue

While information and communications technology (ICT) presents challenges due to the limited capacity of human beings to process information (Lang, 2000), there are factors embedded in social media platforms that facilitate social media fatigue as well. Previous research identifies the following factors as antecedents, or factors that lead to social media

fatigue: 1) user confidence, 2) privacy concerns, and 3) information overload (Bright & Logan, 2018; Bright, Kleiser, & Grau, 2015; Zhang, Zhao, Lu, & Yang, 2016). User confidence is related to the level of confidence that consumers have when using social media channels and could also be operationalized as self-efficacy. Privacy concerns largely center on consumers' ability to control their information on social channels and who gets to see said content. Information overload aligns with the reality that human beings have limited capacity to process information. While the technological advances of social media platforms, or Web 2.0 communication platforms, are significant, the challenges of processing recorded information are not new (Bawden & Robinson, 2009).

Because professional content creators maintain full-time employment that requires consistent engagement and interaction on social media platforms, they are susceptible to a unique consequence – excessive use. The term excessive use uniquely applied to the work setting is defined as “the degree to which an individual feels that she or he spends too much time and energy seeking information, communicating and socializing on social media in the workplace” (Yu, Cao, Liu, & Wang, 2018, p. 1095).

The specific issues related to excessive use found in previous research are largely connected to the concept of preoccupation, which is linked to addictive behavior. Excessive mobile use crowds out other behaviors and priorities because the user becomes preoccupied with watching for updates which leads to compulsive checking behavior (Zheng & Lee, 2016). Prior studies provide evidence that users of social networking sites can become excessively preoccupied or almost “addicted” to these sites at the expense of their health and social relationship (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). Cao, Masood, Luqman, and Ahmed (2018) argue that the impact of excessive use is an understudied area of academic research. Yet, considering the increasing amount of time users are spending on social media platforms, especially those who use these platforms as a communication tool for work purposes, it is important to understand the psychological and cognitive impact of excessive social media use.

While this study is among the first to investigate the issue of social media fatigue among professional content creators, researchers have taken an interest in the consequences of excessive social media use in work settings. In their study of 661 full-time employees working in information and communications technology across a range of

industries, Ayyagari, Grover, and Purvis (2011) found that role ambiguity caused much of the stress experienced by workers engaged in ICTs. Specifically, the rapidly changing technology and constant connectivity bred conflicting demands for establishing work priorities. Additionally, employees felt stress associated with the possibility of being replaced by technology if they failed to remain proficient in technology use. Finally, employees in the study felt constant connectivity to work due to the invasive nature of ICTs. Too much information can lead to cognitive overload, which can be particularly problematic in a work environment where individuals are expected to appropriately comprehend problems and identify solutions based on effective cognitive systems for filtering information (Bolsani, Scarso, & Padova, 2018). In another study by Tarafdar, Tu, Ragu-Nathan, and Ragu-Nathan (2007), technostress was found to inversely impact worker productivity which reinforces the idea that “failure to manage the effects of ICT-induced stress can offset expected increases in productivity” (p. 322).

While previous research indicates specific causes and consequences of social media fatigue, scholars are also interested in ways to mitigate the negative impacts of this phenomenon. One of the consistent strategies to limit negative outcomes of social media use is control (Bawden & Robinson, 2009, p. 187). When social media users set boundaries around social media engagement, psychological and emotional well-being improves. This includes better time management, increased productivity, and improved mood. In one of the few studies about social media workers and social media policies, Lambiase and Bright (2016) discovered that public sector communicators rarely operated with clear social media policies to guide their social media management efforts, which negatively impacted job performance. Social media policies could serve as one means of setting boundaries and improving organizational outcomes generated by professional content creators.

In summary, previous research points to specific antecedents and consequences of social media fatigue. In general, levels of confidence when using social media, privacy concerns, information overload, and excessive use led to social media fatigue. Excessive use of social media is largely unavoidable when these channels are used to facilitate communication at work. When using social media for work purposes, studies indicate that workers receive conflicting demands through social media communication, which make it difficult to identify priorities. Additionally, workers receive too much information, causing

information overload. This reduces the ability to make decisions, thereby hindering work performance. While scholars are starting to examine social media use in professional settings, there are no current studies that focus specifically on professional content creators. Based on these findings, this research offers the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the antecedents and consequences of social media fatigue among professional content creators?

RQ 2: What policies, if any, are in place to prevent professional content creators from experiencing cognitive and emotional fatigue?

METHODS

This study used a qualitative multimethod approach involving focus groups and in-depth interviews to address the research questions. The focus groups encouraged participants to talk to one another, exchange stories, ask questions, and comment on each other's opinions (Kitzinger, 1995; Zikmund, 2003). While the focus group method was useful for navigating participants' experiences and knowledge of the research topic, in-depth interviews provided much more detailed information and elaboration of the issue (Boyce & Neale, 2006; Cooper & Schindler, 2006). Also, using a multimethod approach is useful and effective in social media research where new concepts and ideas often emerge (Kelly, Kerr, & Drennan, 2010; McLaughlin & Vitak, 2012). To achieve saturation, three focus groups and five in-depth interviews were scheduled.

Sample

A total of 21 professional social media content creators were recruited from two sectors: 10 participants from the public sector (e.g., cities, public school districts, government organizations) and 11 from the private sector (e.g., advertising agencies, community management agencies, retail). All of the participants use multiple social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Out of 21 participants, 13 participants were women and 8 were men. Eleven participants said that they spend more than 50% of their work time on social media daily, and 10 participants said they spend more than 25% of their work time on social media daily. Three participants have 1-2 years of work experience as content creators, 10 participants have 3-5 years of work experience as content creators, and 8 participants have been working as a content creator for more than 6 years.

Data collection and analysis

This research utilized focus groups and in-depth interviews and was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants were recruited by using multiple methods. To increase the validity of research, all participants were recruited based on their primary job duties. All participants were in charge of managing social media accounts daily for clients or for their employer. Additionally, participants had to have at least one year of experience working as a professional content creator.

First, focus group participants from the public sector were recruited from a list of conference attendees, which was held at a southwest university. Ten people were asked to join the focus group because of their social media management responsibilities. Eight people agreed to participate in a focus group, which was conducted on July 25, 2018. During the focus group session, lunch was provided to the participants as a small token of appreciation for their participation. Second, focus group participants who work for private sector companies were recruited through a snowball sampling method. Fifteen people were contacted through emails and direct messages on LinkedIn to share insights about their experiences with managing social media for organizations and brands. Seven participants agreed to join focus groups which were conducted from August 15 to August 23, 2018. Focus group participants were provided monetary compensation. Third, in-depth interview participants from both public and private sectors were recruited through a snowball sampling method. Six people were contacted through emails, and a total of six participants agreed to join in-depth interviews which were conducted from September 15, 2018, to October 30, 2018.

Next, each focus group was facilitated by a researcher who has an extensive experience in focus group research. After the participants completed consent forms, the facilitator offered a brief introduction about the purpose of the focus group session. Each focus group session was videotaped, and participants agreed to be recorded. Next, the researcher asked a series of aggregated and open-ended questions about participants' daily responsibilities when managing social media, positive and negative aspects of managing social media, and organizational policies for social media management. Additionally, two researchers conducted in-depth interviews separately where participants were asked the same questions posed to focus group participants. Two researchers used

the same topic guide which included the list of questions. Each in-depth interview was audio recorded with the consent of the participants.

Lastly, focus groups and in-depth interviews were transcribed and any identifiable information was deleted. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. Additionally, three participants were contacted via email to verify the researchers' interpretation of the data regarding the impact of social media fatigue on work and the ideal policy of social media management. Constant comparison analysis approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to capture the participants' experience of managing social media accounts for work. Two researchers independently reviewed all transcripts and generated categories. The initial categories, including the number of categories and general themes, were significantly consistent between the two researchers. The researchers reviewed the data again to resolve any disagreements on categories and themes and to reach a consensus. Four themes were identified using Nvivo software program for data analysis. Nvivo software program enables editing, coding, and places themes in a non-hierarchical structure (Davis et al., 2003).

RESULTS

The results based on both focus groups and in-depth interviews show that the majority of participants experience social media fatigue due to their work requirements. Participants were asked to write down three words to describe how they feel about managing social media. The word cloud in Figure 1 illustrates their responses with the larger words being words that occurred more often. Participants expressed that managing social media accounts leads to emotional, physical, and cognitive fatigue.



Figure 1. Words that describe professional social media content creators' feeling about managing social media.

Based on data analysis, four antecedents have been found of social media fatigue for professional content creators (see Figure 2). First, working as a social media content creator requires constant attention to social media. Second, social media management requires constant learning and information gathering of new features or algorithm of social media sites. Third, a lack of understanding from executives, clients, and colleagues regarding social media management leads to social media fatigue. Last, a lack of policies or guidelines for managing social media leads to social media fatigue. While many of the organizations have social media policies, only two of 21 participants (9.5%) stated their organizations have specific policy language that addresses boundaries for monitoring social media platforms. This is consistent with prior research by Lambiase and Bright (2016) that found very few protections in place for social media workers in the public

sector, especially related to how to manage interactions online and the appropriate periods to do so.

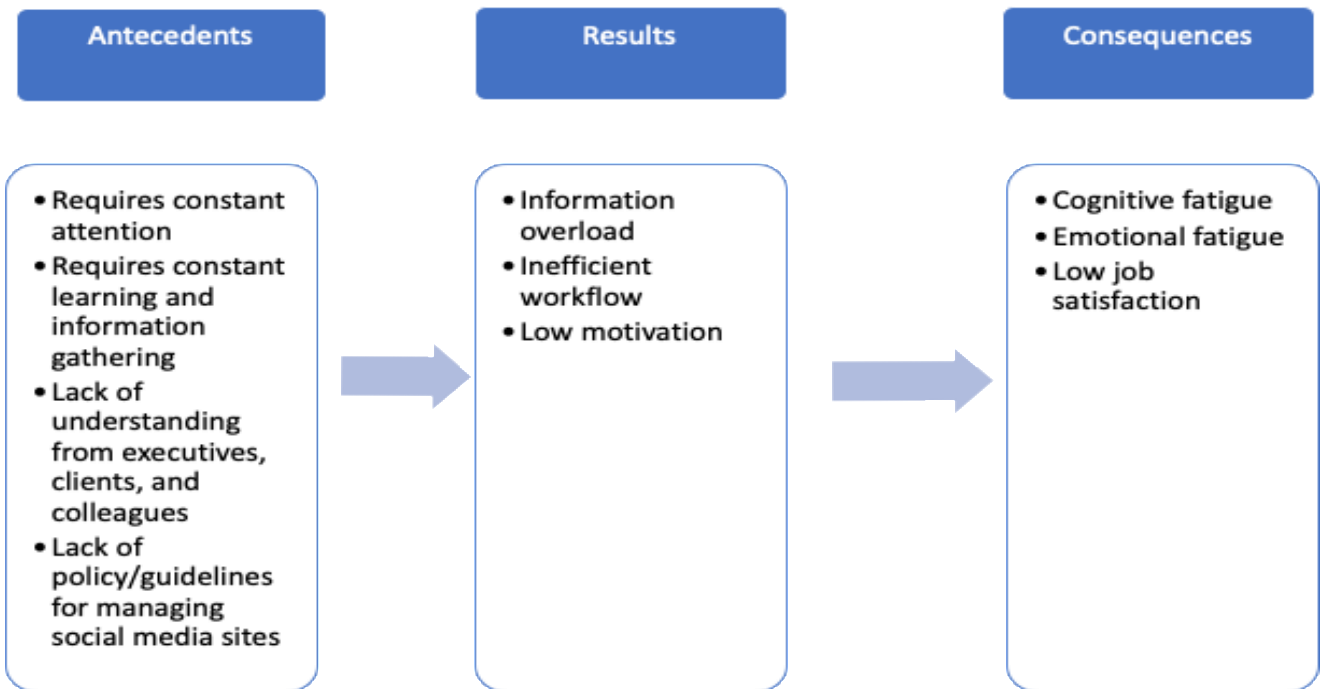


Figure 2: Antecedents and consequences of social media fatigue for content creators.

Social media sites require constant attention

Participants from both the public and private sectors explained that managing social media sites requires constant monitoring and responding to comments and messages from consumers. While participants expressed an affinity for direct engagement with consumers and the opportunity to build community on social platforms, they also acknowledged the increasing amount of energy and time necessary to sustain interactions with social media followers.

Generally, participants indicated that they cannot ignore getting notifications or messages from consumers because their cellphone is linked to social media sites they manage. The majority of participants expressed that managing social media accounts is deeply related to their personal lives because the majority of American adults keep their cellphones on (Rainie & Zickuhr, 2015). The constant notifications from social media apps

lead professional content creators to feel overwhelmed and urged to respond. In focus groups with professional content creators from the private sector, participants unanimously agreed that social media management dominated their thoughts after hours. Participants often commented on how difficult it was to engage with family or even on other work tasks without stopping to check their devices. Participants felt compelled to check notifications for fear of negative consequences incurred by the organization if they did not respond to a disgruntled customer.

“It is 24/7. Whether you are in a theater or trying to have dinner with your family or going on vacation, you are tethered to it because you know there’s always something. It’s a 24-hour news cycle in your pocket.” (Emily, private sector)

“It’s overwhelming and constant. Having these large brands on me, it can be intense thinking that you can’t mess that up.” (Brittany, private sector)

In addition to the pressure to promptly respond to comments, professional content creators expressed the impact of addressing disgruntled customers and citizens. Participants indicated the fatigue associated with, at times, the toxic nature of social media conversations.

“You feel guilty because there are so many people and you can never make everyone happy. So it’s just like sometimes you get the negative feedback or negative messages and it kind of affects your day because you’re a first responder to that.” (Bethany, private sector)

“I think anybody who manages social media day to day is somewhat burned out from it. I think for the government especially, it’s somewhat of an uphill battle with people because you always have people who come onto your page just to complain about something.” (Chris, public sector)

Accordingly, professional content creators struggle to find time to focus on their other responsibilities (e.g., creating promotional photos and videos, data analytics), which leads them to feel incompetent and inefficient. As a result, this inefficient workflow affects job satisfaction as well as work performance (van Zoonen & Rice, 2017). This is one of the consequences of social media fatigue among professional content creators. When participants, especially those for whom social media management is not their sole

responsibility, are overwhelmed with the time needed to engage on social media platforms they experience a decrease in job performance.

“I would like to be more strategic in my job even more of a strategic person, but I do feel overwhelmed that social media takes up half my time and I am not able to plan things out more in advance and have bigger campaigns. Because I am always focusing on the social media now.” (Jeremy, public sector)

“If it does have an impact in terms of not so much the quality of my other work, but it does impact the amount of other work that I can get done.” (Chris, public sector)

Social media sites require constant learning and information gathering

Participants indicated that social media sites require endless learning and information gathering because of their rapid evolution and changing features. Across different social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), there are always new features (e.g., scheduling postings) or new algorithms that impact how information is seen by social media users. Also, content creators need to follow up with new social media sites when their clients or organization want to adopt them.

“Facebook changed and we were in the middle of running a contest. Facebook changed how their notifications were coming in and so it messed up our count for the contest. And it took me eight hours to go through the individual count. Things like that are out of your control and it’s hard.” (Charlotte, public sector)

“My least favorite part of social media is trying to figure out what the heck is next, and do I have to learn yet one more platform. I refuse to go to Snapchat. That is the toughest thing for me. I really do suffer from the “Oh crap. There’s more. They do more. I got to figure this out.” (Drew, public sector).

“Everything is changing daily. And processes are changing daily. And it can be frustrating, and I am very organized. And sometimes that doesn’t work for social media.” (Anna, private sector)

“I think social media doesn’t have an end and you are constantly learning and thinking of new ideas and you have to keep doing it. After a while, you become mentally exhausted and don’t want to do it anymore.” (Andrew, public sector)

Participants explained that changes in social media sites are inevitable. They need to keep up with changes to promote clients’ businesses or public organizations. However, it is

important to note that keeping up with changes in social media hinders them from other daily responsibilities. This is not because of their lack of capability. Instead, it is physically challenging to follow up with everything they are required to do daily. As a result, participants often feel like they are running behind schedule which generates cognitive and information overload (Bawden & Robinson, 2009). On top of that, professionals experienced exhaustion and low motivation of work. When there is no finish line of learning new information, it is challenging for professionals to keep pushing themselves.

Lack of understanding from executives, clients, and colleagues

Participants indicated that they often experience frustration and fatigue when executives and clients are not familiar with the strategy, effort, and intentionality needed to successfully engage in social media management for organizational purposes. To some executives and clients, social media is still a new media platform. Accordingly, professional content creators are often asked by clients and supervisors why their posts do not get thousands of “likes” or “get shared” by consumers. Therefore, professional content creators must consistently reiterate the technological aspects of social media sites along with educating clients and management about the required budget for social media management.

“When there is a knowledge gap between clients and agency, it is challenging. You need to be the front line and provide the most effective ways of advertising for the clients. And it is challenging when we are not on the same page with the clients. Sometimes you just need to navigate everything for the clients.” (Tristan, public sector)

“This is one of the things I've been working on with my supervisor, which just happens to be our mayor. Um, you know, trying to get him to understand how much more time I've spent even in just the last year doing social media than I was in previous years because as our page followings grow, you get more questions, you get more comments, and that's more effort on your part to sort of respond to this stuff.” (Chris, public sector)

Professionals discussed that lack of understanding of managing social media channels comes from colleagues as well. And it has influences on work performance. Participants stated that:

“I think everyone thinks that they are experts at social media and think that I just sit on my phone when I am looking at helpful important things like analytics. We get a lot of that. My colleagues provide constant suggestions but more so in a critical way.” (Bethany, private sector)

“I think in the role of social media, manager, specialist, whatever you are. At least me, with my peers, there has been a lack of respect for the job title. People think that I am playing with Facebook all day and checking on the newsfeed. I think that is something I need to be aware of. Especially with older people. They are like ‘Oh, you are on Facebook.’ There is a lack of respect right now.” (Haley, private sector)

Participants agreed that they may look like they are “playing” with their phones all the time, but they often wear many hats including data analyst, social media community manager, photographer, and writer. And when they are “unappreciated” or “undervalued,” they feel emotionally drained and unmotivated. These are consequences of social media fatigue which decrease work performance for professional content creators.

Lack of policy/guidelines for managing social media sites

This study found that few companies have a clear policy for managing social media channels. Out of 21 participants, only two participants indicated that they work under a solid social media management policy. In this research, policies and guidelines for managing social media sites refer to having clear boundaries for creating content for social media accounts (Herrera-Damas, 2014). One participant who is working under a clear policy explained:

“In our signed documents, we have in writing ‘our agency will manage social platforms Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Will respond to inquiries within 15 hours.’ We have that in writing which is why I don't feel fatigued or resentful because I think a lot of us have been in a spot where it is not.” (Emily, private sector)

It is critical to note that having a mutual understanding between the agency and the client helps professional content creators reduce anxiety and allows them to perform better in their social media management roles. Also, participants agreed that having specific examples or guidelines is helpful for the clients.

“I would say lack of social media management policy could affect the relationships with my clients. Like if you post something and it wasn't up to brand standards and

your client is having to email you and tell you that you shouldn't post that. And it kind of falls negatively on me as a professional. If there were some standards set from the start, I could have prevented that from happening." (Cara, private sector)

Participants argue that social media management guidelines need to be practical and appropriate for the organization. They also acknowledged that each organization has a different level of need for social media management policy.

"My ideal policy for social media is really just a policy that sort of says, use good common sense and that's really it. It wouldn't be very long. I think you really have to give people the freedom to use social media in the way that they're comfortable with within some sort of reasonable guidelines and expectations that you have as an organization. Because you have to uphold your image in, you know, the sort of expectation that your community has for the way you conduct yourself as a, you know, as the sort of community per se." (Charlie, public sector)

"It could be sometimes helpful to have a clear line. However, drawing a boundary is counter to our agency's philosophy which is being a partner with them. When bad things happened to our clients, we are on it. Because they are the ones who pay the bills." (Tristan, private sector)

Overall, 95% of focus groups and interview participants agreed that having a social media management policy or guidelines would help them professionally. Having a solid agreement of social media management from the client empowers professional content creators to manage workflow daily. Participants agreed that in a policy they want to see solid examples of handling comments (e.g., responding to negative comments from customers) and overtime pay.

DISCUSSION

Prior studies have examined social media fatigue among individuals who use social media for professional purposes. The impacts of excessive social media usage among professionals who use social media at work were cognitive and emotional overload (Yu et al., 2018). Social media fatigue significantly decreases work performance. Also, work-related social media usage negatively influences an individual's mental health (van Zoonen & Rice, 2017). However, little is known about the exact reasons for social media fatigue among

professional content creators. This study attempts to explore the antecedents and consequences of social media fatigue from the professional social media content creators' perspective by conducting focus group sessions and in-depth interviews.

In large part, professional content creators are expected to pay constant attention to various social media accounts for work. There are several reasons for this trend. First, it is difficult to ignore notifications from social media apps on smartphones. According to a recent study, more than 90% of adult Americans say they do not turn their phones off (Rainie & Zickuhr, 2015). Likewise, professional content creators are constantly connected to social media on their smartphones. Second, professional content creators are responsible for monitoring and replying to comments from consumers. It is especially important to monitor negative and inappropriate comments on postings since those comments may negatively affect the brand's reputation. Lastly, professional content creators need to stay abreast of changes on social media, which consume significant time and effort. Study participants explained that each social media channel has unique features (e.g., scheduling posts), which are frequently changed. To effectively utilize each social media channel for their clients, content creators need to be aware of every change on each platform. Therefore, they cannot get a break from social media even if they are on vacation with family or simply trying to have a relaxing evening at home. As a result, they experience information overload, inefficient workflow, and low motivation to engage with their job duties.

The study participants agreed that the social media management role deserves greater support and understanding from executives, clients, and colleagues. Although social media is one of the most widely used business platforms in the U.S. (eMarketer Editors, 2018), these sites are still considered new media platforms. Consequently, executives and clients who decide on budget and promotion executions often request unrealistic goals such as getting thousands of engagements (e.g., "Likes") from consumers in a short period of time or promoting businesses without a proper budget. Furthermore, participants expressed that their jobs are not appreciated or respected by colleagues because they are often seen on their mobile devices in the office. Although these professionals "work" on social media platforms throughout the day, they may be seen as distracted or disengaged at work. Additionally, people often think that they are also social media professionals just because they have social

media accounts. Consequently, professional content creators experience low job satisfaction as well as emotional fatigue from their work obligations.

Lastly, the study findings indicate that having a solid social media management policy or guideline is critical for professional content creators. Each organization works with various clients, so companies need to make sure that the policy is practical and applicable to different situations. For example, the policy may indicate the exact time period for responding to consumers' comments on postings. Also, the policy may show an example of how to respond to negative comments from consumers (e.g., deleting comments). It is important to note that the policy needs to be shared with clients so that there are no surprises from either party. This research found that professionals who work under a concrete policy experience higher job satisfaction than professionals who work without a policy because they work with more authority in responding to consumers' comments, creating postings, and managing overall strategy for each social media channel. Ultimately, social media policies help professional content creators to work with less cognitive and emotional fatigue.

Limitations and Future Research

As with qualitative research, the generalizability and reliability of these findings have limitations. Because this is an exploratory study, many of the findings may not be generalizable to all professional content creators across various industries. Therefore, it would be interesting to see if studies based on other research methods, such as a quantitative survey, would result in similar findings to this study. Second, scholars may want to collect data from a larger sample to increase the generalizability of the results. Third, it would be interesting to analyze the social media policies of organizations to determine the degree that management protects professional content creators from social media fatigue. Next, professional content creators expressed that their work was perceived as frivolous by colleagues, executives, and clients, which directly contributed to lower job satisfaction. While the professionalization of social media management is evident in the rising number of roles solely dedicated to communicating within these platforms, perceptions of professional social media content creators have not kept pace. Scholars might study the position of professional content creators within an organization's structure. Are social media managers included in decision-making processes? Are there gender and tenure

implications for these professionals? By examining these areas, we may begin to understand more about how organizations include and empower professional content creators to be an integral part of an organization's overall community strategy while also respecting their positions through adequate support and workload policies. Lastly, considering that recent college graduates will work as professional content creators in various fields, it is imperative to set standards for their work to ensure that they remain in the profession. Thus, scholars may want to explore how strategic communication programs encourage or even teach students to set boundaries with technology use considering the reality of social media fatigue among general professional content creators.

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Online Connections

To follow these authors on social media:

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APPENDIX

TOPIC GUIDE

AGGREGATE QUESTIONS:

- How many of you have direct responsibility for managing social networking sites? Yes/no
- How many of you are posting content to these sites yourselves? Yes/no
- Do you often or sometimes create content yourself for these sites? Yes/no
- How long do you spend on social media daily for your work? More than 50% of the day? More than one-fourth of the day? More than 10 percent of your day? Other?
- Do you spend time after hours on social media for work? Yes/no
- Do you spend time on weekends on social media for work? Yes/no

- How long have you been working in a job with social media responsibilities? More than 10 years? More than five years; from 3-5 years? 1-2 years?
- Does your organization have social media policies? Yes/no

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Please write down 3-5 words that show how you feel about managing social media for your organization.
2. I would next like each of you to talk a little about your daily responsibilities for social media management, in terms of the types of tasks you are doing.

PROBES: Frequency of posting something, timeline for replying to any comments, any other requirement for managing social media accounts)

3. Let's talk about training or professional expertise you have in managing social media platforms.

PROBES: College? Special courses? Graduate school?

4. Now I would like to talk about your organization's social media policy. What is in place that guides how you interact on social networking sites?

PROBES: If not, does the lack of a formal policy hinder or effect your work in any way? Do you think it would be helpful to have a formal social media policy? Why or why not?

5. Let's say that you are in charge of changing social media management policy for your organization. What changes would you make?
6. What are your favorite aspects of managing social media accounts for your work?
7. What are your least favorite aspects of managing social media accounts for your work?

PROBES:

8. Have you ever felt tired/fatigued from managing social media for your organization?
 - a. If yes, what makes you feel exhausted or tired emotionally and cognitively?
9. What do you do when you feel tired or fatigue from managing social media for your organization? What are your coping strategies? (e.g., do you seek help? Talk about how you feel? Do you develop a plan? Do you set boundaries on the amount of time you spend on social media platforms?)

10. In what ways, if any, does social media fatigue impact your work performance?

11. If you were asked to give one sentence of advice to students who are interested in working as a content manager/creator for work, what would you tell them?

CLOSING

- Is there anything else you'd like to say about this topic?