



# Universiteit Utrecht

Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences  
Master of Work & Organizational Psychology

## **Social media influence in the workspace**

*The relationship between public social media use for work, work-related virtual social networking, authentic living at work, and organizational affective commitment*

### **MASTER'S THESIS**

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Word count: 8057

Date: 24<sup>th</sup> of June, 2022

*The manuscript can be made publicly accessible.*

## Abstract

Should organizations encourage and facilitate social interaction between their employees via social media? As organizations and work environments are evolving and transforming, social media has become an important part of the way employees are communicating, network, and relating to each other. Additionally, working from home has become more present in the organizational setup, even as the COVID-19 crisis has become more manageable in most countries (more organizations are allowing remote/hybrid work). In line with this, the goal of this study is to gain insight into the following research questions: *To what extent is public social media use for work positively influencing work-related virtual social networking for the employees?* and *To what extent is work-related virtual social networking positively influencing affective commitment, and does authentic living act as a mediator?*

This study examines the relationship between public social media use for work, work-related virtual social networking, authentic living at work, and organizational affective commitment in the working population with a direct employment contract (no contractors or freelancers were allowed to participate). The Self-Determination Theory, Roger's Person-Centered Therapy, and Social Capital Theory serve as a theoretical framework. Data was collected using the snowball method and no control variables were used.

The following results were found: public social media use for work increases work-related virtual social networking ( $b=.518, p<0.05$ ); authentic living at work increases when work-related virtual social networking increases ( $b=.13, p<0.05$ ) affective commitment increases when authentic living increases ( $b=.20, p<0.05$ ). In addition, work-related virtual social networking acts as a full mediator for the relationship between public social media use for work and authentic living at work. Nevertheless, authentic living at work was not found to be a mediator in the relationship between work-related virtual social networking and affective commitment.

This research adds up to the social media, authenticity, and affective commitment research in the work context by investigating how networking with work colleagues via social media has an impact on fostering a work environment where employees can be themselves and develop an emotional commitment to the organization.

## Introduction

The goal of this research thesis is to understand the relationship between public social media use for work, virtual social networking, authentic living at work, and the impact on affective commitment.

As social media increasingly becomes part of everyday life, more of people's social networking takes place in the virtual environment facilitated by social media platforms. This virtual environment poses new challenges for organizations, which can use this disruption as an opportunity to increase their employees' authenticity at work (referring in this study to the way people can 'be themselves' at work and pursue their passions), and organizational commitment. Because there is no single universal theory to which to approach the constructs relevant for this study, there will be references to multiple theories, such as self-determination, human capital theory, person-centered, and organizational commitment theory.

Studying social media is important, having previously been linked with positive outcomes such as job performance and satisfaction (Jiang, H., Luo & Kulemeka, 2017), and representing a source for employees to gain new information and develop networks. Social media is enabling virtual social networking, by the means of reacting to content generated by directly and indirectly connected people, by following, commenting, sharing, etc. This also allows people to broaden their networks outside and within the organization, they are employed. As a result, the workplace environment is inevitably disrupted by social media. The study of authenticity is becoming more relevant, as more people are seeking to understand it from a personal and professional standpoint (Lenton et., al. 2014). By definition, authenticity refers to the individual's ability to act in accordance with their true self (Wood et. al., 2008). Literature also suggests that there is a relationship between authentic living at work and affective commitment. Additionally, self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 1985) is describing relatedness as one basic need, referring to security as well as connection with others when doing something.

Therefore, the goal of this study is to gain insight into the following research questions:

*To what extent is public social media use for work influencing work-related virtual social networking?*

*Is work-related virtual social networking influencing affective commitment, and does authentic living act as a mediator?*

This study contributes theoretically by connecting public social media use for work, work-related virtual social networking (i.e., with other employees within the organization), authentic living at work, and affective commitment.

The practical relevance of this study consists in providing employers and employees with insights regarding how public social media use and virtual social networking are interacting in the work environment, and their effect on authentic living at work and affective commitment. This is important because authentic living at work has previously been associated with work engagement, dedication, and absorption (Van den Bosch & Taris, 2014), while affective commitment with outcomes such as reduced turnover and improved performance (Mercurio, 2015). The insights generated by this study can be capitalized on by employees and organizations, to increase retention and performance.

Additionally, this paper's timing is opportune, given the increased movement from office jobs to remote or hybrid jobs. According to Chui, Manyika & Bughin (2012) companies were already enhancing their mastery of social media before this change, utilizing them to improve operations and exploit new market opportunities. This research will give organizations knowledge about work-related virtual social networking, which is less structured and hierarchical compared to traditional social networking.

### **Theoretical framework**

This section introduces the conceptual model that was created to investigate the research subject. Each variable and its associated linkages are described in reference to theory and prior study findings. Because there is no overarching theory, this study will employ multiple theories to produce hypotheses that will lead the investigation into the research issue. The hypotheses are formed in this manner. First, the topic of social media use in the context of work will be discussed in greater depth.

### **Social media use for work**

Social media are current applications of technology that enable virtual social networking between people, either directly (through a public page, group, or feed) or indirectly (by a direct chat or dialogue in the comments area of material) (Carr & Hayes, 2015). Social media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter facilitate networking.

Social media use can be public or private. The difference consists in whether the conversation is open to new participants (Carr & Hayes, 2015). For example, one person can publish content that facilitates a public discussion between people in the comment section. Alternately, published content may start a conversation between two or more people via private social media features, such as a private chat.

Social media is also used for work-related purposes. In the context of this paper, this refers to individual employees of the same organizations making use of their own public social media accounts to produce and consume work-related content. Such content may relate to the organization itself, work experiences, or the industry the employees are part of (Van Zoonen et. al., 2017).

This paper will focus on employees' public social media use for work. The scope is limited to employees, to reduce the complexity generated by other work arrangements (e.g., contractors, freelancers), and to public use of social media, as private use is beyond the reach of an organization.

### **Virtual work-related social networking**

Social networks consist of relationships that result from direct and indirect interaction. According to social capital theory, these interactions enable individuals to access and leverage resources embedded in relationships (Almashari, Zairi & Alathari, 2002).

However, social media is enabling *virtual* social networking, which is structured in a less pre-defined manner, causing “many of the organizing schemes and authority [to be] based more on informal agreement than a strict hierarchy” (Ganley & Lampe, 2009, p. 267). In other words, organizations have less control over virtual social networking, as opposed to traditional social networking. Also, according to Cao, Guo, Liu & Gu (2015) social media use can facilitate the formation of employees' social capital, as indicated by virtual work-related social networking. For

example, employees get information on relevant topics related to the organization, which otherwise would not have been shared in traditional meetings.

This is important for organizations because previous research suggests that work-related social networking may be linked with authenticity at work (Schmid, 2005), which refers to employees feeling like they can be themselves in work situations. This can become a resource for employees, preventing emotional exhaustion, job turnover intention, and low performance (Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Additionally, social media may act as a knowledge transfer system, encouraging work-related experiences and expertise sharing. Thus, it stimulates a relational and collaborative environment at work, fostering organizational performance, relationship building, and security (Levin & Cross, 2004; Almashari, Zairi & Alathari, 2002), which may in turn increase employees' authenticity.

Social media use facilitates maintaining personal relationships with family, friends, and colleagues while also providing new opportunities to make social connections (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). In the professional context, social media use can facilitate virtual social networking. In other words, employees who are using public social media for work are sharing work experiences, organizational news, or industry-related information, becoming more likely to engage virtually with colleagues (Cao et. al, 2015). This effectively translates into employees creating a virtual social network with one another. Based on principles from human capital theory and findings from previous research a relation between public social media use for work and work-related virtual social networking seems plausible.

H1: The more employees use public social media for work, the more they indicate they do work-related virtual social networking with other employees within the organization.

### **Authentic living at work**

The self-determination theory posits that authenticity is closely related to autonomy, as autonomous behavior is perceived as being intrinsically motivated and congruent with one's core self. This, in turn, increases well-being (Ryan & Ryan, 2019; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Authenticity is also a core concept in person-centered therapy, which asserts that it plays an important role in increasing well-being, and reducing psychopathology (Rogers, 1951).

According to Van den Bosch & Taris (2014), authenticity in the work context has three dimensions:

- self-alienation, referring to the discrepancy between the true self and conscious awareness,
- authentic living, referring to the consistent expression of emotions and behaviors according to one's conscious awareness of physiological states, emotions, beliefs, and cognitions, and
- social influence, referring to the influence of the environment (i.e., external influence) on an individual's behavior.

For the scope of this thesis, we will only focus on authentic living as a variable. This definition shows that authenticity is defined in a social context. According to Schmid (2005), authenticity, as a process of balancing realizing one's own needs *and* meeting others', is intrinsically social. In other words, the social context plays a crucial role for individuals to feel authentic. Moreover, Rogers (1951) in his center-person theory, points out that authenticity can only happen in the context of a relationship because it includes the feeling of being seen by others as one sees their true self. Other research indicates that people need others to feel authentic, and such feelings take place inside relationships (Lenton, Slabu, Bruder, & Sedikides, 2014; Didonato & Krueger, 2010; Swann et al., 2004). In conclusion, studying authenticity makes sense in the context of networking at work, and this paper takes this a step further into the virtual environment.

From an organizational perspective, this is relevant because employees who have jobs consistent with their values (i.e., manifesting authentic living at work) are more likely to have a higher level of work engagement (Van den Bosch & Taris, 2014). As stated before, this research aims to look into the assumption that social networking at work, also in a virtual context, may be beneficial to work engagement. Additionally, research on work engagement has shown that it is strongly related to other positive work-related outcomes, such as organizational commitment, reduced turnover intention, and good performance (Bakker et al., 2005; Demerouti et al., 2009).

A previous study from Bennet et. al (2010) argues that business advantages and benefits of virtual social networking in the workplace are still very much underappreciated and undervalued. Rogers's center-person theory and self-determination theory view authenticity as related to belongingness. It may be assumed that employees would feel more integrated into the company culture and would be likely to express and share authentic emotions and behaviors. This might

also be manifested in real-life interaction, following virtual social media interaction. It seems plausible that virtual networking virtually facilitates familiarity with other colleagues and company culture, as nowadays organizations leverage technology to be more connected with social life and society in general. By being more exposed than ever to the company they are working for and their co-workers through public shares on social media, people who engage in virtual social networking might create a common foundation and shared interest. Companies are sharing achievements, insights about their values, and the employee value proposition, creating a rich exposure for the employees who are engaging with this type of content. As a result, this might make them see themselves as part of a larger picture in their work at the company, increasing engagement in the company culture. The familiarity and shared background between employees and the company might nurture authentic living at work, which may, in turn, facilitate the expression of emotions and behaviors under their conscious awareness of physiological states, emotions, beliefs, and cognitions. Based on principles from person-centered theory, self-determination theory, and findings from previous research a relation between work-related virtual social networking and authentic living seems plausible.

H2: The more employees engage in work-related virtual social networking, the more they will express authentic living at work.

### **Affective commitment**

Organizational commitment theory plays an important role in the scope of this study. According to Meyer and Allen (1991), organizational commitment refers to “a psychological state that (a) characterizes the employee's relationship with the organization, and (b) has implications for the decision to continue membership in the organization” (p. 67) which makes it an important factor in increasing employee retention.

As a part of organizational commitment, “affective commitment refers to employees’ emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in, the organization” (Rashid, Sambasivan, and Johari, 2003). Affective commitment has also been positively linked to work-related virtual social networking, authenticity at work, reduced turnover, and increased performance (Mercurio, 2015).



Social media pervades the work environment, by enabling work-related virtual social networking that otherwise would have been impossible (because of hierarchy, geolocation, etc.). Employees can now identify those who share the same interests, specialization, experience, and expertise (Brzozowski, Sandholm, and Hogg, 2009), inclusively inside their organization. As work-related social networking has an important impact on authenticity, this paper proposes that its virtual aspect influences authentic living at work. In turn, this plays an important role in developing employee affective commitment. Additionally, previous research has suggested that individuals who can stay close to their core selves at work are more adjusted to their particular roles or functions (Van den Bosch & Taris, 2014). In line with these findings, we expect that the perceived level of authentic living at work will also show a positive correlation with affective commitment.

H3: The more employees express authentic living at work, the more they will express affective commitment.

### **Work-related virtual social networking and its mediating role in the relationship between public social media use for work and authentic living at work**

This study focuses on the extent to which work-related virtual social networking is enabling employees to develop a good relationship with colleagues and what implications this might have on the relationship between public social media use for work and authentic living at work. Studies such as Cao et al. (2015), and Schmid (2005) suggest that it is likely that the relationship between public social media uses for work and authentic living at work is directly affected by work-related virtual social networking. This is because work-related virtual social networking enables a broader collaboration between colleagues and connects people from the same organization, which would otherwise have been harder, due to hierarchy and location. It is therefore plausible that the positive effect of public social media use for work on authentic living at work goes directly via work-related virtual social networking.

H4: The positive relationship between public social media use for work and authentic living at work is fully mediated by work-related virtual social networking.

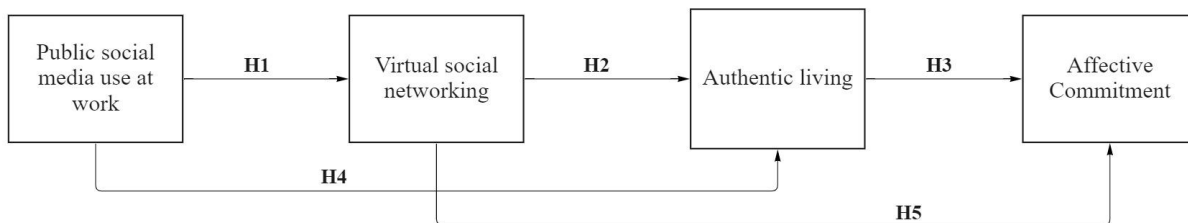
### **Authentic living at work and its mediating role in the relationship between work-related virtual social networking and affective commitment**

Fostering virtual social networking may facilitate employees' informal interaction and collaborative exchange, and allow them to gather personal information about their colleagues. Being able to access personal profiles on public social media is enabling employees to identify those who share the same interests, specialization, and expertise, as well as break organizational hierarchies and connect with geographically or organizationally distant parties (Brzozowski et. al., 2009). Therefore, this paper investigates whether the relationship between work-related virtual social networking and affective commitment (Rashid, Sambasivan, & Johari, 2003), which causes employees to be more emotionally attached to the organization, is also partially mediated by authentic living at work.

H5: The positive relationship between work-related virtual social networking and affective commitment is partially mediated by authentic living at work.

Figure 1 below summarizes the expected relationships in an overall model. This study focuses on specific hypotheses as there is not enough information from the literature on all the relations together. As a result, the model was tested in parts and focused on the main hypothesis mentioned above.

**Figure 1**



*Note:* In H5 authentic living it is considered to be a partial mediator for the relationship between virtual social networking and affective commitment

## Method

### Research design & Procedure

The conceptual model and the associated hypotheses were tested by cross-sectional quantitative research with an online survey. The approach makes it easier to question a larger group

of people. The survey was executed via the online software 'Qualtrics'. The link for the survey was shared via e-mail and social media. The survey was developed in English to ensure consistency with the original scales for each of the four variables.

### **Ethical Issues**

Following Utrecht University's requirements, the study was registered and approved by Faculty Ethics Review Committee (FERB) before participants could complete the questionnaire.

Before completion, an information message regarding the purpose of the study, the relevance as well as insurance regarding confidentiality and data protection was available to the participants. Participants were also informed of their right to drop out of the study at any time, as well as their right to request the results once the study was finalized. All participants were asked to give their consent before they started filling out the questionnaire. See Appendix A for the introductory page of the questionnaire.

### **Participants**

The target population of this study is the general working population ( $\geq 18$  years) regardless of the position, industry, or tenure. However, only direct employees of a company are included, because contractors or freelancers have multiple companies they could relate to when completing the self-assessment. A priori G-power analysis (version 3.1.9.7) was conducted, suggesting 120 participants. For this sample size, the effect size is 0.15 (power = 0.95,  $\alpha = 0.05$ ,  $F2 = 0.15$ ). According to Cohen's criteria, an effect size of 0.15 is considered medium (Borenstein and Cohen, 1988). As there is little indication from previous research of the strength of the relationships investigated, a medium effect size was applied. Snowballing was used for recruiting the participants.

A total of 120 participants filled in the survey of whom 46 (38.4%) were male and 74 (61.6%) were females. Age ranges from 20 to 56 with most participants between the ages of 20-35 (89%); tenure in the company was 1-3 years (26.7%), less than 6 months (25%), and 6 months to 1 year (24.2%); most of the participants identified as individual contributors (employees without a people manager role) (82.5%). An overview of the demographics can be found in Appendix B.

### **Measures**

The scales used for this study were carefully chosen based on the used construct definitions. In addition, they have been found to have high validity and reliability in the literature. Lastly, they are suitable for the target group since they are understandable to participants from different

educational levels. Additionally, the reliability of each scale was calculated in the present study. When looking at the items of the affective organizational commitment questionnaire, some questions were positively stated and some negatively. Various studies have shown that negative items harm the reliability and validity of scales (Weems & Onwuegbuzie 2001). Therefore, the items of concern were reversed before the data collection. The entire survey can be found in Appendix C.

*Affective organizational commitment (AOC)* was assessed with 8 items out of 23 of the Organizational Commitment from Meyer & Allen (1997) that assess the organizational commitment for “Affective commitment”. An example item of “Affective commitment” is: “*I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization*”. The answers are based on a five-point Likert scale, which will allow respondents to express how much they agree or disagree with these statements. High scores indicate that the employee has higher affective commitment. Items 4, 5, 6, and 8 have reversed scores. Previous research reported a Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of 0.85 (Meyer & Allen, 1997). In the present study, a Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of 0.63 was found an average inter-item correlation of .37.

*Public social media (use for work) (PSM)* was assessed with a 5 items scale adapted from Van Zoonen et. al. (2017). In the original study, the authors apply the questionnaire three times, on three separate social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn). However, only one questionnaire was used in this study, replacing “Twitter/Facebook/LinkedIn” with “social media”, because it was not differentiated between public social media platforms. The items measured the frequency of work-related social media use. The answers are based on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (multiple times a day). An example item is: “*I share my organization's accomplishments on my personal social media account*”. Previous research reported a Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of 0.81 (Van Zoonen et. al., 2017). The present study found a Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of 0.82 and an average inter-item correlation of .66.

*(Work-related) virtual social networking (VSN)* was assessed with a 3 items scale adapted from Cao et al. (2015). The answers are based on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). An example item is: “*I have developed good relationships with my colleagues in the virtual community created by social media.*”. Previous reported a

Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.90 (Cao et al.,2015). The present study found a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.92 and an average inter-item correlation of .87.

*Individual Authenticity Measure at Work* (IAMW) was assessed with a 10 items scale from Van den Bosch & Taris (2014). The answers are based on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always). An item example of the factor of authentic living is: “*I am true to myself at work in most situations*”. Previous research confirmed construct validity and reported a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.93 (van den Bosch & Taris, 2014). The present study found a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.89 and an average inter-item correlation of .66.

*Control Variables* are not included in this study, as the research goals and objects do not justify including any.

The demographic questions such as age, gender, tenure, position, function, and nationality were used to obtain a more refined view of the sample population for this research, however, they were not part of the research (Appendix D).

### **Statistical analysis**

The data derived from the survey was uploaded into IBM's Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 28. Before performing the statistical analysis four assumptions were checked: linearity, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, and normality. For all the hypotheses the regression assumptions were met except normality (in all cases), which did not have a major deviation. As research shows a violation of the assumption of normality is quite common for larger samples (> 30 participants) (Pallant, 2020), it was decided to not alter the scales. Additionally, the scales were checked for outliers. Six outliers were found in PSM, four in IAMW, four in AOC, and zero in VSN. Before removing the outliers, the Mahalanobis distance was performed to check for multivariate outliers. The results showed that there are no multivariate outliers (no probability was below 0.001, which indicates that the chance is high that it is not an outlier). Therefore, no responses were removed.

After doing all the pre-analysis, to test the hypotheses, descriptive statistics were conducted. This study aimed to understand the relationship between public social media use for work, virtual social networking, authenticity at work, and the impact on affective commitment. Therefore, three multiple linear regression analyses were used to test hypotheses 1 through 3 (i.e.

to test the direct effects) with a significant level of .05. To test hypotheses 4 and 5 (the mediation of VSN and IAMW), PROCESS macro for mediation model 4 was used (Hayes, 2017). In the current research, a 95% bootstrapped confidence interval was used to establish the significance of the mediator’s indirect effect.

### Principal Component Analysis

Some of the variables in this study might bear certain similarities to one another. For example, PSM and AOC. For instance, “I use my personal social media account to share work-related information” (PSM) and “I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside it” (AOC). For checking the correlations between the scales and to ensure a lack of a common method bias (which accounts for the bias generated by the measurement tool, rather than participants’ inclinations) a Harman Single Factor test and a Principal Component Analysis with one extracted component were conducted (Podsakoff et al., 2012). The Harman Single Factor test indicated a total variance of 28.23%, under the threshold of 50%, meaning that the common method bias did not affect this study’s data.

### Results

An overview of the range, means, standard deviations (SD), and correlations are presented in Table 1. Age and gender are included. The table shows a positive correlation between PSM, VSN, and AOC ( $r=.28$ ,  $r=.26$ ). Also, we can see that there is a correlation between VSN, authentic living, and AOC ( $r=.22$ ,  $r=.20$ ). Another correlation is noticed between authentic living and AOC ( $r = .20$ ).

*Table 1: Range, means, standard deviations, and correlations between study variables, age, gender*

Variables	Range	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
PSM	1-7	1.84	.97	-					
VSN	1-7	3.90	1.77	.28**	-				
Authentic Living	1-7	5.61	1.01	.11	.22*	-			
AOC	1-5	3.13	.83	.26**	.20*	.24**	-		
Age	1-4	27.4	7.4	.13	.08	.12	.03	-	
Gender	0-1	0.6	0.5	-.005	.14	.10	0.1	.01	-

\*\* =  $p < .01$  \* =  $p < .05$ .

*Note.* Gender, age, and education level are measured categorically. For gender applies: 0 = male, 1 female. For age 1=20-25, 2=26-35, 3=36-50, 4=51-56

## Testing of hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 predicts that PSM would be positively related to VSN.

The 7.5% variance in VSN is predicted by PSM (the correlation between the two variables is 0.287). The p-value of the test is  $p < 0.05$ , so the null hypothesis is rejected. The study model with a predictor explains more variance than a “baseline” model that contains no predictors.

*Table 2: Regression Coefficients of PMS on VSN*

Model		Unstandardized		Standardize		95.0% Confidence		
		Coefficients		d		Interval for B		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	2.94	.33		8.87	<.001	2.289	3.603
	PSN	.51	.15	.28	3.26	.001	.203	.833

a. Dependent Variable: VSN

PSM is a statistically significant predictor of VSN; the p-value for its regression coefficient is smaller than alpha 0.05 ( $b = .51$ ,  $t = 3.26$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The regression coefficient is positive, so there is a positive effect of  $b = .51$  ( $p < .001$ ). This means that employees who have a higher score on PSM tend to also have a higher score on VSN. Specifically, it is predicted that when the degree of PSM increases by one point, the degree of VSN increases by .51. The standardized coefficient Beta = 0.287, which means that when the degree of PSM increases by one *SD*, the degree of VSN is predicted to increase by .28 *SD*. The regression analysis for the relationship between PSM and VSN supports hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicts that VSN would be positively related to authentic living at work. The 4.4 % of the variance in authentic living is predicted by work-related virtual social networking (the correlation between the two variables is .22). The p-value of the test is  $p < .012$ , smaller than alpha, so the null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that the model explains significantly more variance than a “baseline” model that contains no predictors.

*Table 3: Regression Coefficients of VSN on Authentic living*

Model		Unstandardized		Standardize		95.0% Confidence		
		Coefficients		d		Interval for B		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound

		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	5.11	.21		23.35	<.001	4.677	5.544
	VSN	.13	.05	.22	2.54	.012	.029	.231

a. Dependent Variable: Authentic living at work

VSN is a statistically significant predictor of authentic living at work; the p-value for its regression coefficient is smaller than alpha 0.05 ( $b=.13$ ,  $t=2.54$ ,  $p<.012$ ).

The regression coefficient is positive, so there is a positive effect of  $b=.130$  ( $p<.012$ ), which means that employees that have a higher score on VSN tend to also have a higher score on authentic living at work. Specifically, we predict that when the degree of VSN increases by one point, the degree of authentic living increases by .13. The standardized coefficient  $Beta = .22$ , which means that when the degree of VSN increases by one *SD*, the degree of authentic living at work is predicted to increase by .22 *SD*. The regression analysis for the relationship between VSN and authentic living at work supports hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 predicts that authentic living at work would be positively related to AOC. The 5.2% variance in AOC is predicted by authentic living (the correlation between the two variables is .24). The p-value of the test is  $p<.007$ , smaller than alpha, so the null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that the model explains significantly more variance than a “baseline” model that contains no predictors.

*Table 4: Regression Coefficients of Authentic living on AOC*

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized		95.0% Confidence Interval for B		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	2.01	.41		4.82	<.001	1.184	2.835
	Authentic Living	.20	.07	.24	2.74	.007	.056	.345

a. Dependent Variable: AOC



Authentic living at work is a statistically significant predictor of AOC; the p-value for its regression coefficient is smaller than alpha 0.05 ( $b=.20, t=2.74, p<.05$ ).

The regression coefficient is positive, so there is a positive effect of  $b=.201$  ( $p<0.05$ ), which means that employees that have a higher score on authentic living at work tend to also have a higher score of AOC. Specifically, we predict that when the degree of authentic living increases by one point, the degree of affective commitment increases by .20. The standardized coefficient Beta = 0.24, which means that when the degree of authentic living increases by one *SD*, the degree of affective commitment is predicted to increase by .24 *SD*. The regression analysis for the relationship between authentic living at work and AOC supports hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 4 predicts that the positive relationship between PSM and authentic living at work goes completely through VSN.

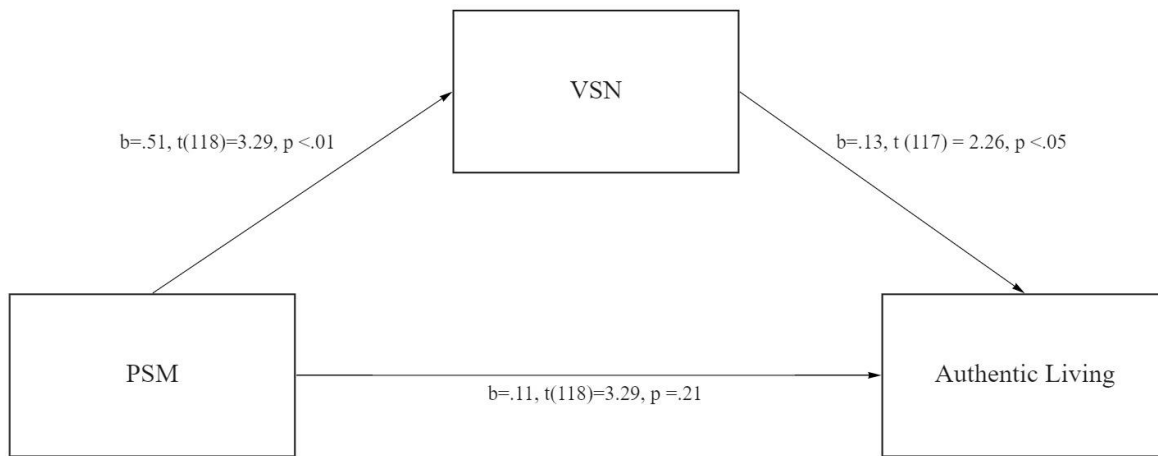


Figure 2. The tested hypotheses in the first mediation analysis

Table 5: Direct and Indirect effects of PSM on Authentic Living using PROCESS

Direct effect of X on Y					
Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
.05	.09	.58	.56	-.1353	.2465
Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:					
Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI		
VSN .06	.03	.0060	.1462		

The direct effect is 0.0556 and it is not significant ( $t=.58, p=.56$ ). The indirect effect is .06 and it is significant, because BootLLCI, BootULCI [0.0060 – 0.1462] does not include the value zero. This means that the relationship between PSM on authentic living goes completely through VSN, which represents a full mediation, supporting hypothesis 4.

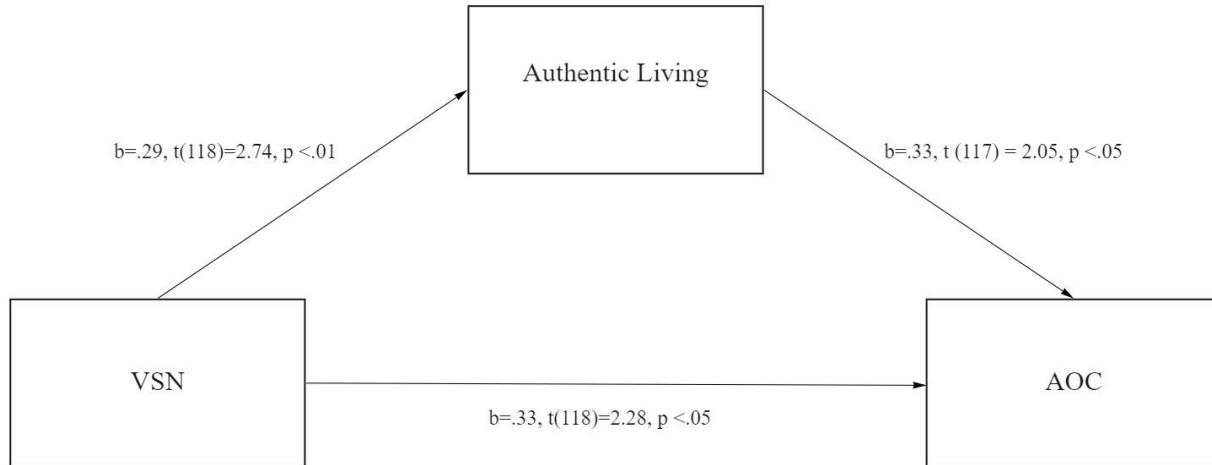


Figure 3. The tested hypotheses in the second mediation analysis

Hypothesis 5 predicts that the positive relationship between VSN and affective commitment goes partially through authentic living at work.

Table 6: Direct and Indirect effects of VSN on AOC using PROCESS

Direct effect of X on Y						
	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
	.07	.04	1.73	.084	-.0103	.1576
Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:						
	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI		
Authentic Living	.02	.01	-.0124	.0643		

The direct effect is 0.07 and it is not significant ( $t=1.7386$ ,  $p=0.0847$ ). The indirect effect is .02 and it is not significant [BootLLCI, BootULCI] = [-0.0124 – 0.0643] as it includes value zero. The mediation of authentic living at work does not support hypothesis 5.

After testing each hypothesis individually, it is concluded that 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> are confirmed, while the 5<sup>th</sup> one is not.

### Discussion

This research goal was to reveal insight into the implication of PSM and VSN on authentic living at work as well as AOC.

The regression-mediation model was found to be most significant, with hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 4 accepted and hypothesis 5 rejected. This means that work-related social networking will increase as a result of employees using public social media for work. Also, authentic living at work

will increase as a result of VSN. Additionally, AOC is predicted to increase as a result of increasing authentic living at work. For the first mediation relationship, it can be seen that the effect of public social media use for work on authentic living at work, goes completely through VSN. Because the second mediation was not confirmed, it can be concluded that there was no finding that authentic living at work plays a role in the relationship between VSN and affective commitment.

### **Interpretation of Results**

The results of this study showed that using public social media for work has a positive impact on professional social networking. This means that the more employees are using social media platforms, share work experiences, organizational news, or industry-related information the more they will engage in behavior such as virtual networking with colleagues. As a result, employees are building a virtual space that allows them to network outside of traditional borders (Ganley & Lampe, 2009), which supports the study's first premise.

Additionally, VSN had a positive impact on authentic living at work. This means that the more employees engage in social networking with each other the more their perceived authentic living at work will increase. This effect is explained by the fact that identifying and engaging with other colleagues with similar interests, specializations, experiences, and skills within their firm is an important factor for authenticity (Brzozowski, Sandholm, and Hogg, 2009). This is even more relevant now after the COVID-19 crisis, as many organizations are embracing hybrid or entirely remote work arrangements. The challenge of those arrangements might move employees to continue socializing in the virtual space. Moreover, employees develop common foundations and shared interests as they become more exposed to the organization and their coworkers through public social media posts.

Furthermore, authenticity has become a relevant research issue, with people seeking it in both personal and professional relationships (Lenton et al., 2014). A previous study has revealed that those who can stay connected to their selves at work are better suited to their specific tasks or duties (Van den Bosch & Taris, 2014). As a result, the perceived level of authentic living at work had a positive link with affective commitment. Being in an environment that allows one to operate in a way that seems coherent with one's inner values, emotions, and cognitions (Van den Bosch & Taris, 2014) allows individuals to build emotional bonds with their colleagues and, indirectly, with the organization (increasing affective commitment). This adds up to the third hypothesis for AOC and authentic living at work. Looking back at Rogers' person-centered theory and self-

determination theory, both of which value authenticity as a basic construct, can help explain why the positive association between PSM and genuine living at work is entirely mediated by VSN (hypothesis 4). In practice, this will manifest as employees acting more authentically at work as a result of virtual networking with coworkers, increasing turnover and job satisfaction.

Although all the paths in the fifth mediation model were significant when calculating the direct and indirect effect of authentic living on the relationship between VSN and AOC it was not found to be a mediator. This means that authentic living does not explain part of the variance between VSN and AOC. As a result, there might be other factors that explain this relationship.

### **Methodical limitations**

*Procedure.* Aside from theoretical and literature-based reasons, systematic flaws such as the process could have resulted in the current findings. The study's participants were mostly from the Netherlands and Romania, although there were many other nationalities represented. This was overlooked, and nationality should have been added as a control variable or restricted to a single population. Participants also had a variety of roles in their organizations, with the most common being software/IT developer, marketing, and human resources. This can also affect the outcome. Some job activities that use social media in their daily work may have a distinct relationship with virtual networking. At the same time, every culture has different ways of working and collaborating, and those differences may play a part in how employees are networking online as well as how authentic living at work may be perceived. For example, past research found that the Romanian working population expresses more work obsessive passion (Mititelu, 2020) which might also influence authentic living and AOC. At the same time, having a job involving significant social media use can also influence the results. So, people whose work involves social media might be more open to utilizing it in other interactions outside of their job scope.

*Measurements.* Concerning the used measurements, the questionnaires have been validated in a somewhat different context and sample populations. As a result, for the AOC scale, Cronbach's alpha was lower (.65) than the expected one (.85) from other studies (Meyer and Allen, 1991) which may alter internal consistency. Although the Principal Component Analysis indicated a variance lower than 50%, when looking back at the scale future research might consider excluding item 7, as it had a negative inter-item correlation.

*Sample issue.* There was a slight gender imbalance in the sample, with more females than males. This could have ramifications for social media usage objectives, as previous research found

that males aim to make more new contacts than females, whilst females use it to retain existing relationships, for academic purposes, and to follow specific agendas (Mazman & Usluel, 2011). What this means for the scope of this study is that when utilizing social media, male employees are more likely to network with new colleagues, whilst female employees may consolidate existing ties and stay up to speed on their work. It is, therefore, possible that women score higher on authentic living and affective commitment because they focus on strengthening their existing relationships.

### **Further research**

The study results showed some important findings for future research as all three regressions and one of the mediations were shown to be significant. However, authentic living at work did not act as a mediator for the relationship between VSN and affective commitment. Therefore, future research should look into other mediators for that relationship, one possible alternative might be work engagement that has been linked to AOC in the past.

*Further research.* For further research, there are two theoretical main points of recommendation. First, the ability/requirement to (partly) work remotely may increase employees' need to relate to others in the organization, increasing their use of social media for this purpose. In contrast, employees who work primarily in the office might conversely feel the need to disconnect from work (Van Zoonen et. al., 2017). It is suggested that future studies look at both samples (remote/hybrid and office workers) and investigate if there is a significant difference in terms of authentic living and affective commitment.

This study did not look into the negative sides of social media in the workplace. Previous research, for example, linked social media to employees being distracted from their jobs and developing wellbeing problems. In studying this aspect, the JD-R model might serve as a framework as it defines job characteristics in two different categories: job demands and job resources. An example of job demands might be the use of social media and networking online with colleagues. On the other hand, job resources might be a leader-member exchange, feedback, and the comfort to act authentically at work. The two processes from the JD-R model, the health impairment process and a motivational process, imply that demands are the most important predictors of tiredness. After all, they necessitate physical or psychological expenditure, whereas job resources are generally associated with motivation and engagement because they meet basic psychological requirements. Further research should examine whether networking with work

colleagues via social media might be considered a demand or a resource, and what implications this might have on authentic living and affective commitment.

### **Practical implication**

The result of this study highlights important practical implications for organizations, organizational psychologists, and employees. With the help of social media networks, organizations can foster a work environment that enhances the level of authenticity that employees experience at work as well as their affective commitment toward the organization. Both authentic living and AOC are important for organizations, having been associated in previous studies with positive outcomes such as longer tenure in the organization, identification with the organizational goals, and work satisfaction. Additionally, employees who are effectively committed feel valued and act as ambassadors for their organization (Bakker et al., 2005; Demerouti et al., 2009). Enhancing the communication and collaboration of employees facilitates knowledge transfer and consequently makes organizations more agile. Being able to use VSN might help employees reduce social isolation and see themselves as part of a larger picture. Making employees more engaged in the company culture creates more familiarity and shared background between employees and how they are feeling in the work environment in terms of authentic living at work, which might also increase employee satisfaction.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study revealed some additional insight regarding public social media use for work, work-related virtual social networking, authentic living at work, and organizational affective commitment. Most of the regression-mediation model was found to be significant. Employees' public social media use for work increases as a result of work-related social networking, and additionally, authentic living at work increases as a result of work-related virtual social networking. Affective organizational commitment is predicted to increase as a result of increasing authentic living at work. Additionally, it was found that for public social media use for work to increase authentic living at work, employees need to engage in work-related virtual social networking. However, authentic living at work was not found to be a mediator in the relationship between work-related virtual social networking and affective commitment. The result of this study can help organizations foster employees' authentic living at work and affective organizational commitment.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

Dear Participant,

My name is Andreea Militaru and I am a master's student at Utrecht University. With this letter, I ask you to participate in the research for my master thesis. I am conducting an online survey to examine the relationship between public social media use at work, virtual social networking, authenticity at work and organizational affective commitment under the supervision of Dr Wieby Altink.

#### **Eligibility**

In order to be eligible to participate in this study you must be at least 18 year old and be directly employed by the company you are working for.

#### **What is expected of you?**

As a participant, you will fill out a one-time online survey. The current page of the survey contains a brief overview of the survey's contents, information concerning anonymity of identity and confidentiality of data, the next page contains a statement of consent, and the following pages are divided based on the theme of measure. Items are phrased as statements, and you will indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with them on a numerical scale. The survey is designed to not take longer than 10-15 minutes to complete. Upon completion, the last page will thank you and provide contact details in case you have any questions or would like to know about the results. By participating in this study, you will not be subjected to any present or future harm.

#### **Confidentiality of data processing**

This research requires me to collect data from you, which is specified in the consent statement on the following page. This information is necessary to answer the research question. The computer

that stores this data is secure and only the researchers can access it. Your identity will remain anonymous throughout the entire study, meaning that your data can not be traced back to you as a person as the data will be processed on a group level. Your data will be stored for at least 10 years. This is according to the appropriate VSNU guidelines. You can read more information about privacy on the website of the Personal Data Authority: <https://autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl/nl/onderwerpen/avg-europese-privacywetgeving>

### **Voluntary participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can stop participating at any time, without giving a reason or adverse consequences. If you do decide to stop participating, your data provided thus far will not be used.

### **Independent contact person and complaints officer**

If you have questions or comments about the study, you can contact Dr Wieby Altink at [w.m.m.altink-vandenberg@uu.nl](mailto:w.m.m.altink-vandenberg@uu.nl). If you have an official complaint about the investigation, you can send an e-mail to the complaints officer via [klachtenfunctionaris-fetcsocwet@uu.nl](mailto:klachtenfunctionaris-fetcsocwet@uu.nl).

### **Contact details Data Protection Officer**

<https://www.uu.nl/organisatie/praktische-zaken/privacy/functionaris-voor-gegevensbescherming>  
If, after reading this information letter, you decide to take part in the research, please read the following consent form and tick the box.

Kind regards,  
Andreea Militaru

## Appendix B - Demographics

Category	Subcategory	N	%
Gender	Male	46	38.3
	Female	74	61.7
Age	20 - 25	63	52.5
	26 - 35	44	36.7
	36 - 50	9	7.5
	51 - 56	4	3.3
Tenure	< 6 months	30	25
	6 months - 1 year	29	24.2
	1 - 3 years	32	26.7
	3 - 5 years	16	13.3
	5 - 7 years	5	4.2
	7 - 10 years	4	3.3
Position	> 10 years	4	3.3
	Individual contributor	99	82.5
	People Manager	21	17.5

### *Nationality*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Belarus	2	1.7	1.7	1.7
	Belgium	2	1.7	1.7	3.3
	Brazil	1	.8	.8	4.2
	Bulgaria	1	.8	.8	5.0
	China	3	2.5	2.5	7.5

Colombia	1	.8	.8	8.3
Germany	5	4.2	4.2	12.5
Greece	1	.8	.8	13.3
Hungary	2	1.7	1.7	15.0
India	5	4.2	4.2	19.2
Ireland	2	1.7	1.7	20.8
Italy	2	1.7	1.7	22.5
Jordan	1	.8	.8	23.3
Paraguay	1	.8	.8	24.2
Poland	2	1.7	1.7	25.8
Portugal	3	2.5	2.5	28.3
Rep of Moldova	1	.8	.8	29.2
Romania	45	37.5	37.5	66.7
Singapore	3	2.5	2.5	69.2
Slovakia	1	.8	.8	70.0
Suriname	1	.8	.8	70.8
Switzerland	1	.8	.8	71.7
The Netherlands	19	15.8	15.8	87.5
Turkey	1	.8	.8	88.3
UK	5	4.2	4.2	92.5
USA	9	7.5	7.5	100.0
Total	120	100.0	100.0	

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*Function*

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		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Business Analyst	4	3.3	3.3	3.3
	Business Developer	2	1.7	1.7	5.0
	Finance	5	4.2	4.2	9.2
	HR	17	14.2	14.2	23.3
	Marketing	16	13.3	13.3	36.7
	Office manager	1	.8	.8	37.5
	Other	20	16.7	16.7	54.2
	Product Designer	1	.8	.8	55.0
	Product Development	1	.8	.8	55.8
	Program management	1	.8	.8	56.7
	Project manager	1	.8	.8	57.5
	Researcher	8	6.7	6.7	64.2
	Sales/Account Management	5	4.2	4.2	68.3
	Software/IT Developer	38	31.7	31.7	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	

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## Appendix C - Scale Questionnaire

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Item wording</b>
Public Social media use at work	(1) I share my organization's accomplishments on my personal social media account. (2) I publish information about my profession on my personal social media account. (3) I use my personal social media account to tell others about the work that I do. (4) I use my personal social media account to share work-related information. (5) I use my personal social media account to read up on work-related information.
Virtual social networking	(1) I have developed good relationships with my colleagues in the virtual community created by social media. (2) I have built a social network with my colleagues in the virtual community created by social media. (3) I have cultivated ties with my colleagues in the virtual community created by social media.
Authentic living at work	(1) I am true to myself at work in most situations. (2) At work, I always stand by what I believe in. (3) I behave in accordance with my values and beliefs in the workplace. (4) I find it easier to get on with people in the workplace when I'm being myself. (5) My daily behaviour at work reflects "the real me". (6) At work I behave the way I feel. (7) I feel that I am doing the things in the workplace that are right for me. (8) I think it is better to be yourself at work than to be popular. (9) At work, I feel free to express my emotions to others. (10) I dislike people in the workplace who pretend to be what they are not.



Affective organizational commitment	(1) I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization. (2) I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside it. (3) I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own. (4) I think that I could easily become as attached to another organization as I am to this one. * (5) I do not feel like "a part of the family" at my organization. * (6) I do not feel "emotionally attached" to this organization. * (7) This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me. (8) I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization. *
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#### Appendix D - Demographic questionnaire

Category	
Gender	Male Female Other
Year of birth	(Open question)
Where are you from?	(Open question)
Are you directly employed with the company where you are currently working? (No third party involved)	Yes No, I am a contractor No, I am a freelancer Other (please mention)
For how long you have been working for the company	< 6 months 6 months – 1 year 1 year – 3 years 3 year – 5 years 5 years – 7 years 7 years – 10 years > 10 years
What is your function in the organization?	Software/IT Developer

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HR

Finance

Researcher

Marketing

Others (please mention)

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