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Exposure to colleagues' social media content and workplace relationships

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Submitted in compliance with the requirements for:

Master of Arts in Organisational Psychology,

University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

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Declaration

I, Tiffany Macedo Dias, declare that this research project is my own unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university.

Tiffany Macedo Dias



Signed: 15.03.2023

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ABSTRACT

The increasing rate of technological advancement has driven social media into the centre of certain aspects of an individual's life and indicates the need to understand the potential implications that this may have for organisations and their workforces. This study aims to explore the phenomenon of impression management and online boundary management in social media among professional and skilled employees in South Africa corporate environment in relation to their exposure to their colleagues' social media content and the influence this has on their informal workplace relationships. The study seeks to gain a better understanding of how individuals in these contexts form impressions of their colleagues based on their social media content, the influence of this on their relationships, and how they attempt to handle the potential effects of this exposure, relative to their relationship with their colleagues. The findings of this study suggest that there is no clear environmental context that can direct this. However, the findings did suggest that organisations could benefit from putting clear and regular social media policies and trainings into effect.

The study utilised a qualitative, exploratory research design. A total of 13 professional and skilled employees in the South African corporate environment were recruited to participate in semi-structured interviews. The study used a two-pronged non-probability sampling strategy using snowball sampling and purposive sampling to attempt to recruit a sample that was representative of the diversity that exists in South African corporate environments. The data collected from the 13 interviews were analysed and coded into themes in relation to the research questions using Thematic Content analysis.

Key Words: social media, workplace relationships, impression management, online boundary management, South African professionals

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The increasing rate of technological advancement has driven social media into the centre of certain aspects of an individual's life and indicates the need to understand the potential implications that this may have for organisations and their workforces. This research is particularly interested in investigating the effects which the content that individuals disclose on social media may have on their workplace relationships. The transparency and permanency that social media allows have potential implications for professional and skilled employees' ability to segment their private and personal forms of self-expression from their professional lives. Professionals that participate on social media are introduced to a new publicly accessible audience where both their professional and personal contacts can coexist. This can make it difficult for them to navigate which information is appropriate to share, which is not always appropriate to share and how their professional audience will regard them following their exposure to this content. The professionals participating on social media in today's society open themselves up to the risk of unknowingly sharing unfavourable information with their professional audiences which may be considered inappropriate. The ambiguity of the audience on social media opens professionals up to the potential risk of reputational damage as their forms of self-representation on social media, and in their professional environment are now seen as one and the same and cannot be separated. This study aims to understand the potential effects which exposure to colleagues' social media content may have on their workplace relationships, relative to South African professionals and skilled employees in a corporate context. This explores how the individuals in these contexts form impressions of their colleagues based on the social media content they post as well as the effects of this social media content on their relationships with their colleagues. This also includes the strategies that they

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attempt to use in handling these effects on their work relationships. The study aims, as stated above, are explored using Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach to impression management and Ollier-Malaterre et al.'s (2013) theoretical framework of online boundary management. In his seminal text, The Presentation of Self in Everyday life, Goffman described impression management as a theatrical performance of oneself whereby the actor attempts to present themselves in a way that is favourable to the environment that they find themselves in. Goffman (1959) stated that successful impression management is reliant on the actor's ability to shape their forms of self-presentation to align with the expectations and norms of the current audience. This study also uses the Ollier-Malaterre et al.'s (2013) theoretical framework on online boundary management to explore how professionals attempt to manage the potential effects of social media on their relationship with their colleagues. Boundary management can be described as the strategies which individuals regularly adopt to keep the different areas of their life separate, such as their work life and their personal life. Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013) developed a theoretical framework that describes four online boundary management behaviours that professionals adopt when managing the boundaries between their personal and professional lives on social media. The premises of the online boundary management behaviours are based on the professional's preference towards two aspects: (1) "segmenting" or "integrating" their professional and personal audiences on social media and (2) their intention of using social media as a means of "self-validation" or "self-enhancement". The theoretical framework of online boundary management by Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013) highlights that professionals adopt one of the four online boundary management behaviours namely opened boundary management, audience boundary management, content boundary management and hybrid boundary management according to their preference towards the above-mentioned aspects.

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The existing literature on impression management and online boundary management in social media, particularly from an organisational perspective, is predominantly based within a westernised context. The South African corporate environment is unique in that it is characterised by co-existing professionals that come from a diverse range of cultural, racial, religious, and social backgrounds. This diversity has the potential to come with a diverse range of interpretations of what constitutes professionally appropriate and inappropriate forms of self-representation on social media. This suggests that impression management is more complex in a diverse context such as the South African corporate environment due to the potential differences in these professionals' perception of their colleagues' social media content. Limited literature is available that explores these phenomena in the context of a diverse and multi-cultural workplace composition relevant to the corporate working environment of South Africa. This research seeks to explore the phenomenon of impression management and online boundary management in social media among professional and skilled corporate employees in South Africa in relation to their exposure to their colleagues' social media content and the influence this has on their informal workplace relationships.

The study will examine the experiences of South African corporate employees with access to their colleagues' social media content, to gain a better understanding of how individuals form impressions of their colleagues. Furthermore, this study will seek to gain insight into the most prevalent and accepted forms of impression management and online boundary management that influence informal workplace relationships in this context as recommended by the experiences of the individuals with access to the social media content of their colleagues.

The impact of this research is that it initiates an academic literary conversation and exploration into these phenomena within a South African corporate context. Understanding the

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multiple expectations within this diverse organisational context regarding what forms of formal and informal self-representations on social media are deemed appropriate or inappropriate by one's colleagues, could improve relationships in organisations. The significance of this study is that it may consider potential obscure aspects which are not widely found in the available literature on impression management and online boundary management on social media and that may be beneficial to the success of future South African corporate organisations.

The additional value of this inquiry is that it does not try to understand these phenomena from the conventional angle found within most of the existing literature where these phenomena are understood relative to the desired impression that individual employees are trying to form and manage using social media. Aspling (2011) describes how individuals actively portray their frontstage forms of self-representation on Facebook to leave both their personal and professional online audiences with a desirable impression of them. The study suggested that the individuals felt it was not appropriate to share backstage forms of self representation on Facebook as opposed to their preference for this on their personal blogs (Aspling, 2011). In a similar way, Tashmin (2016) observed how individuals use Facebook as a platform to develop a positive impression amongst their online audiences by actively regulating their frontstage forms of self-representation online. Del Riego et al. (2012) discuss how millennials are increasingly using social media to connect with their superiors on social media as a means of staging a favourable character amongst their superior professional audience. The study suggests that millennials are using social media to gain access to their superiors and perform an unconventional "elevator pitch" (Del Riego et al., 2012). Paliszkiewic and Madra-Sawicka (2016) highlighted the importance of self-representation in determining professional reputational maintenance and success, particularly on LinkedIn. The significance of this was seen with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and the strict social restrictions that

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forced the majority of professionals around the world to suddenly work from home. Hall et al. (2021), Mashud et al. (2020) and Pennington (2021) discussed how professionals were ever more predisposed to using social media to connect with and form impressions of their colleagues. The literature found that professionals were increasingly using social media to engage with their colleagues online and make up for the sense of isolation that the Covid-19 pandemic induced. This study intends on investigating these phenomena from the position of the individual employees within the virtual audience, who are exposed to the social media content broadcasted by their colleagues. Moreover, the study explores how the nature of their colleagues' social media content may influence the impressions that they form of their colleagues, the nature of their relationship with their colleagues, and how they attempt to handle the potential effects of this exposure, relative to their relationship with their colleagues.

Another objective of this research is to better understand the relationship dynamics that exist within the South African corporate workforce to inform and assist organisations in their ability to effectively manage the use of social media among their workforce and subsequently manage an organisation's culture to foster success in the long run.

Summary

The study attempts to understand the effects of social media on professional and skilled employees' perceptions of and relationships with their colleagues in a South African corporate environment. Furthermore, the current study sought to investigate the approaches or tactics that these professional and skilled employees utilise to manage the potential effects of their exposure to their colleagues' social media content. The value of this study is that it seeks to provide insight into the potential impact of social media on workplace relationships specific to the unique, diversified South African corporate environment. The report will first provide a

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comprehensive analysis of the literature on social media, impression management and online boundary management as the theoretical basis for the current study. This will be reviewed along with the research questions in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology used in this study including the sampling methods used to obtain the requested sample, the research instrument and process utilised to collect the data, the analytic process used to interpret and code the data, the study rigour and the ethical considerations. The report will go on to discuss the themes identified from the data in relation to the research questions and previous literature. The findings and discussion will be analysed in Chapter 4 of the report. Finally, the limitations as well as the recommendations for future research and organisations will be discussed in Chapter 5.

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CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The relevant existing literature on social media usage within organisations and the theory on impression management and online boundary management will be evaluated in this section. First, the literature on the influence that the increasing use of social media presents for organisations at an individual and organisational level will be discussed. Goffman's dramaturgical approach to impression management will then be discussed as the guiding theory of this research study. The research on impression management is also reviewed within the South African context to understand how "self-presentation" is interpreted in this unique context. Finally, online boundary management will be discussed as an exploratory lens through which research will analyse the different strategies which the participants may use as a means of coping with their exposure to their colleagues' social media content.

2.2 Social media content

Kietzmann et al., 2011 describe social media as web-based applications which provide functionality for sharing and receiving information communicating, connecting and relationship building. Examples of the current, most prevalent social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube and Snapchat. The progressive advancements in technology and social networking platforms have resulted in a growing prevalence and social media influence within an individual's personal and professional spheres of life. These platforms have several individual and organisation benefits. Hasib (2009) and Schmidt et al. (2016) discuss how social media allows professional employees to connect with and build their professional network, exchange important organisational knowledge, and

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receive support. The literature suggests that social media can benefit organisations in that it builds a workplace culture of interconnectedness (Hasib, 2009; Schmidt et al., 2016). Schmidt et al. (2016) described this as "social capital". The literature suggest that professionals are predisposed to develop and foster relationships with their colleagues based on the "social capital" that they seem to display on social media (Del Riego et al., 2020; Hasib, 2009; Schmidt et al., 2016). Aspling (2011) suggests that social media can also be seen as a beneficial platform for employees to interact with and promote their employers by broadcasting their accomplishments and favourable experiences at work to a broad online audience. Furthermore, Del Riego et al., (2012) and Schmidt et al. (2016) suggest that professional employees are increasingly using social media to market themselves. The literature suggest that professional employees publicise information about their professional competencies on social media so as to position themselves as favourable candidates for potential career development (Del Reigo et al., 2012; Schmidt et al., 2016).

The literature also discusses the value that social media is proving to have in enhancing professionals' intercultural knowledge and understanding (Aspling, 2011; Hasib, 2009; Schimdt et al., 2016; Swayer, 2011). Swayer (2011) described how social media has promoted "cultural competence" among professionals which has enabled them to effectively interact with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds. The "Cultural competence" that professionals can gain from social media can help them understand, communicate, and interact effectively in intercultural contexts (Swayer, 2011). The literature found that this assisted organisations in building a diverse and inclusive workplace culture (Swayer, 2011). Furthermore, the literature indicates that professionals are increasingly using the information that they learn about their colleagues on social media to guide their interactions and develop rapport with them (Aspling, 2011; Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Schmidt et al., 2016). Professionals are increasingly more motivated to use social media to connect with their professional colleagues

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as they believe it fosters both online and offline communication and relationship building (Aspling, 2011; Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Schmidt et al., 2016).

The benefits of social media were increasingly prevalent during the Covid-19 pandemic because of the strict restrictions that were enforced on social interactions. Hall et al. (2021), Mashud et al. (2020) and Pennington (2021) observed how more and more professionals took to social media because of the sense of isolation that they experienced when working from home. The literature found that professionals used social media as an opportunity to regain a sense of connection with their colleagues, seek out support and foster their relationships with their colleagues (Hall et al., 2021; Mashud et al., 2020; Pennington, 2021).

The prevailing influence of social media has also become an increasing cause of concern from the position of the individual, as well as the organisation as examined below within the existing literature on the use of social media by professional employees.

Steinfield et al., (2012) and Ollier-Malaterre et al., (2013) observed how the prevalence of social media within various spheres of individuals' lives have weakened their ability to separate their professional and personal life due to the increasing existence of these contexts within one audience on social media. Steinfield et al., (2012) and Ollier-Malaterre et al., (2013) explain how the concept of "context collapse" is defined as the loss of separation between one's professional and personal audiences online and may result in significant consequences for individuals and organisations. This literature discusses how individuals have suffered from professional reputational damage as a result of the inappropriate disclosure of content to a broad audience in which both their professional and personal contacts exist. Hasib (2009) explained that the danger inherent in social media is that professionals do not recognise the permanency of the information that they share on social media which can be linked back to

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them and their organisation. These implications can go as far as an individual losing their job for the inappropriate disclosure of organisational information (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Steinfield et al., 2012). Ollier-Malaterre at el. (2013) explains a scenario in which a young professional took work related issues about her boss onto social media. The professional's employer was exposed to this publicly inappropriate social media content and she was dismissed because of the negative impact that this had on her professional reputation (Ollier-Malaterre at el. (2013). Kaul (2015) described an incident whereby the PR manager for InterActiveCorp shared a racially inappropriate Tweet regarding her trip to Africa. This spread across social media within minutes and the top trending hashtag was #hasjustinelanded (Kaul, 2015). This had long lasting reputational and financial consequences for her after being dismissed and by association, that of the company (Kaul, 2015). The literature reinforces that employees are custodians of their organisations in all areas of their life and need to emulate the brand in all contexts (Del Riego et al., 2012; Hasib, 2009; Kaul, 2015).

Steinfield et al., (2012) and Ollier-Malaterre et al., (2013) also discuss the potential organisational consequences which may stem from the increasing presence of social media in workplace contexts. This increases the organisation's susceptibility to reputational damage resulting from the unprofessional disclosure of content specific to the organisation from an employee's personal social media account or business account (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Steinfield et al., 2012). The increasing presence of social media within the organisation can also affect productivity as individuals may progressively use social media during working hours (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Steinfield et al., 2012).

The multiple social media platforms used by individuals in their personal and professional life (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn) allow for instant access

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to high volumes of personal information in multiple forms, be it written, verbal, or visual. (Colbert et al., 2016; Edosomwan et al., 2011).

Ritchey et al., (2016) explore how the concept of "context collapse" is intensified by the continuous advancement in social media platforms and the multiple consequences of this on various well-known organisations. These authors investigated the reputational damage which organisations such as KitchenAid and Singapore Airlines have suffered from the inappropriate tweets posted by their employees on the business's social media accounts. This resulted in significant public criticism and protest against the organisation as well as a subsequent loss of revenue (Ritchey et al., 2016).

These social media platforms allow individuals to form an opinion about their colleagues and provides working professionals with a convenient way to gain immediate access to a presentation of their colleagues as seen within the content communicated about them on social media (Colbert et al., 2016). Subsequently, influencing working professionals to form judgements and decisions over time about the nature of their relationship with their colleagues based on this online representation of their colleagues (Borkovich & Breese, 2016; Skeels & Grudin, 2009; Vitak et al., 2012). The usage of social media platforms for purposes related and unrelated to the workplace introduces complicated dynamics for an organisation's workforce and the quality of the organisational culture (Butler & Matook, 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Schmidt et al., 2016).

2.3 Impression management

Erving Goffmans's seminal work, "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" explains social interactions by comparing individuals to actors in a metaphorical theatrical production putting on a performance (Goffman, 1959). According to Goffman's dramaturgical approach,

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actors strategically manage their performance to manipulate the audience's impressions of them (Goffman. 1959). Goffman's dramaturgical approach to impression management is centred around the concept of "self-presentation" and is the fundamental basis upon which impression management is formed. Self-presentation explains how individuals alter how they conduct themselves based on the different social contexts in which they find themselves (Goffman, 1959). Goffman's dramaturgical theory speaks to four fundamental components within impression management: "the frontstage", "the backstage", "the actor" and the "audience". The frontstage illustrates the social contexts in which one's behaviours and motives for self-representation are acted out and which are aimed at gaining social approval from the "audience" (Hogan, 2010; Richey, 2017). "The backstage" entails a context in which one's behaviours do not require manipulation for acceptance from the "audience" and shows a more genuine display of the individual (Goffman, 1959). Goffman argued that successful impression management is reliant upon the actor's ability to keep their backstage forms of self representation from entering their frontstage performances (Goffman, 1959). The revelation of inappropriate information to an unsuitable audience can discredit the impression that the actor is trying to persuade the audience to believe (Goffman, 1959). Goffman regarded workplaces as social establishments which can be defined as any place where actors are required to align their performances to a predetermined standard (Goffman, 1959). In a professional corporate context, this would include professionally reputable conduct and etiquette, a level of expertise and being rational in one's approach (Del Riego et al., 2012; Shulman, 2017). Imperative to impression management in workplaces is Goffman's notion of a "team performance" which relates to the congruity of the actors' performances (Goffman, 1959; Shulman, 2017). The "performance teams" in an organisation align their performances to ensure that they are strategically positioning the organisation in a professional reputable light amongst their public audience (Goffman, 1959; Shulman, 2011).

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Goffman conceptualised three processes to circumvent and restore any disruptions to the organisation's "team performance" namely, (1) "dramaturgical circumspection", (2) "dramaturgical discipline" and (3) "dramaturgical loyalty" (Goffman, 1959; Shulman, 2011). "Dramaturgical circumspection" refers to the teams' preparation for successful impression management by planning for and minimizing the potential disruption such as allocating the right audience, environment, and team members for the performance (Goffman, 1959; Shulman, 2011). "Dramaturgical discipline" relates to the performers ensuring that their performance includes only the frontstage forms of self-representation as agreed to by the organisation's "team" (Goffman, 1959; Shulman, 2011). Thus, the performers must only disclose appropriate forms of self-representation that aligns with the teams' standards and upholds the audience's impression of the organisation (Goffman, 1959; Shulman, 2011). "Dramaturgical loyalty" pertains to the performer's sense of responsibility to the success of the "teams' performance" and in turn their responsibility to uphold the audience's impression of the organisation (Goffman, 1959; Shulman, 2011). The team members develop a sense of commitment to preserving the organisation's reputation amongst the public by ensuring that they are aligned with the appropriate frontstage forms of self-representation in their performance (Goffman, 1959; Shulman, 2011).

There is extensive literature that explores the use of impression management within organisations particularly relative to the continuously increasing use of social media within organisations and among their respective workforce (Paliszkiewicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016; Richey et al., 2017). The available literature on the use of social media in organisations is centred around emphasising the potential need for individuals to adopt impression management skills to handle the increasing loss of contextual boundaries between one's social and

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professional spheres (Paliszkiewicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016; Richey et al., 2017; Tashmin, 2016).

Hogan (2010) discussed the increased need for impression management skills throughout an organisation's workforce to effectively manage the potential outcomes associated with the increased prevalence of social media in the workplace. Hogan (2010) viewed this as a necessary reaction to an individual's limited control over their audience's impression of them as a result of the constant and instant access to content about them presented online on social media. Hogan (2010) suggest that one of the only ways in which individuals can attempt to influence the impression which their audience forms about them, is to learn how to effectively manage their social media content to match their desired impression (Hogan, 2010).

Grudin and Meredith (2009) discuss the use of social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn to produce intentional organisational outcomes. They examine the value associated with the use of impression management skills to manage individual employees' social media content to foster workplace relationships. However, this literature also cautions individuals about the restraints to be considered relative to the formal structure of one's professional context when contemplating particular workplace relationships fostered through social media.

Pillemer and Rothbard (2018) and Coupland, et al., (2016) evaluate the strain which social media can place on workplace relationships as a result of individual employees' unsuitable management of their social media content. This can be seen in individuals who are unable to create and manage equally appropriate personal social media content online for their professional and personal life contexts. Thus, the consequence of social media is that it may allow for the disclosure of content that includes details about individuals which are not suitable to mix across contexts.

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Elison, et al., (2012) evaluates both the perceived risk and benefit of social media for relationships in the organisation, particularly in connection with an individual's use of Facebook to maintain professional contacts, but the consequence which may come from the blurred boundaries which this creates between one's life contexts.

The literature on impression management, as discussed in section 2.3.1, indicates the complex repercussions that social media usage is proving to show for professional's identities in and out of the workplace and the effects this may have on their relationships with their colleagues.

Contrary to Goffman's dramaturgical model of impression management, Kien (2015) suggested that more and more professionals are using their social media to express their more authentic backstage forms of self-representation. Aspling (2011), Kien (2015), Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2022) and Schmidt et al. (2016) discussed how professionals felt more connected to their colleagues after being exposed to their more genuine, backstage forms of self-representation. Schmidt et al. (2016) explained how professionals enjoy seeing backstage information about their colleagues that they are not readily exposed to in a professional context. Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2022) found that professionals were generally more inclined to connect and foster their relationship with their colleagues when they disclosed backstage forms of self-representation on social media. The literature suggests that professionals are more likely to develop a positive perception of their colleagues when they were able to gain a more genuine and relatable understanding of these colleagues through social media (Aspling, 2011; Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Schmidt et al., 2016). This often came from their exposure to their professional colleagues backstage forms of self-representation on social media (Aspling, 2011; Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Schmidt et al., 2016).

This literature focuses on the impression management of one's identity from the perspective of the individual "actor".

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The current research study explores how individual's representation of their identity on social media is interpreted from the perspective of the "audience" or their colleagues. This study proposes the need to understand the perceptions which professional and skilled employees within the corporate context of South Africa may have towards their colleagues' social media content online when there is no clear environmental context that can direct this.

2.3.1 Impression management within a South African context

The South African population is often referred to as the "Rainbow nation". This can be attributed to the diverse characteristics of which the country's population is composed. This emphasises the need to recognise that the South African population includes individuals from different ethnicities, religions, cultures, languages, sexual orientations, education levels, socio-economic backgrounds, and more. (Delport, 2019; Kemp, 2013; Mtshelwane, 2016).

These factors should be considered when investigating any workplace in South Africa. These diverse population characteristics may introduce several implications when making inferences from a sample in the context of South Africa (Delport, 2019; Kemp, 2013; Mtshelwane, 2016).

This can be true when exploring individual's perceptions of their colleagues based on the social media content that they disclose and the influence of this on their relationships at work. Accordingly, diverse groups may potentially hold diverse beliefs and understandings about what and how individuals should represent and communicate their identities. Diverse understandings and opinions exist about what constitutes and fosters the nature of an informal relationship with their colleagues. Diversity in terms of the individual's perceptions of what constitutes backstage and frontstage forms of self-representation online and in real life. Lastly, diverse forms of preferred strategies which individuals may utilise to handle the effects of their colleagues' social media content on their existing relationship with and impression of their

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colleagues should be considered (Elison, et al., 2012; Pearce & Vitak, 2016; Pilcer & Thatcher, 2013; Tashmin, 2016).

The existing impression management literature relevant to the South African context is predominantly focused on the meanings which individuals in a particular culture group attribute to a favourable presentation of self across both their social and professional contexts and the impression management skills that these South African employees should adopt to attain this between these two contexts. This is seen in Delport (2020) who explores this among the coloured Afrikaans South African cultural group, Mtshelwane (2016) who explores this among the South African Zulu cultural group, and Kemp (2013) who explores this among the white Afrikaans South African cultural group.

Delport (2020) found that participants from the coloured Afrikaans speaking cultural group utilised an array of self-representation strategies in the working environment which align with basic standards of professionalism. However, their social self-representation strategies are more centred around men being the driver of their household, but also believed strongly in respecting all genders within this hierarchical belief (Delport, 2020).

Mtshelwane (2016) found that several idealistic and non-idealistic forms of self-representation exist among the South African Zulu cultural group. Mtshelwane (2016) stated that self-presentation strategies associated with professionalism are highly favoured in the workplace. Mtshelwane (2016) also found that there is a predominant belief about males having to take on more authoritative positions as opposed to women in workplaces and households. According to Mtshelwane (2016) those who hold a strong Zulu cultural identity, favour a highly traditionally aligned and collective representation of self in all life spheres.

Kemp (2013) found that the white Afrikaans South African cultural group favoured highly professionally aligned strategies of self-representation in their working environment and

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believed strongly in limiting the extent to which their personal life problems are observable within their professional life. Kemp (2013) also noted that men are predominantly seen as the appropriate candidates for leadership above women in the workforce, with women taking on a more compliant, feminine role.

The literature discussed above explores the phenomenon of impression management across the social and professional presentations of self that exist among these three South African cultural contexts. This research study seeks to expand upon the cross-cultural research on impression management in a South African context. There is limited research dedicated to exploring self-representation and impression management from a diverse sample personal and possibly culturally influenced accounts. This study explores this impression management phenomenon from an assumption that there are differences in cultures within the South African corporate environment of professional and skilled employees. This has the potential to influence the impressions that diverse individual's form of their colleagues in this multi-cultural context and therefore, influencing their willingness to pursue informal relationships with their colleagues as a result of the similarities or differences in cultures. Additionally, this research study will expand upon the existing literature in this context by considering the phenomenon of impression management relative to the influence of social media on the informal workplace relationships in the context of South Africa's corporate environment.

2.4 Online boundary management

The theoretical framework by Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013) on online boundary management states that individuals can be categorised into four categories, or styles of online boundary management behaviours. These are determined by the common means which the individual utilises to handle the boundaries between one's offline and online presentation of

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self, namely open boundary management; audience boundary management; content boundary management, and hybrid boundary management (Ollier-Malaterre & Rothbard, 2015).

These four categories are determined by the individual's preference towards two aspects. The first preference is one's predisposition towards the mixing versus separation of one's professional and personal life online (Hogan, 2010; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Ollier-Malaterre & Rothbard, 2015). This relates to the strength of an individual's desire to maintain stringent partitions between one's professional and private life, with online "segmentation" versus liberal partitions between these two life contexts through online "integration". The second preferential aspect pertains to the intentions which direct the individual's chosen style of online presentation and whether these presentations are used for self-validation or self-enhancement (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Ollier-Malaterre & Rothbard, 2015).

The individual's categorisation into one of the four online boundary management behavioural styles is based on their alignment with these two premises. These four online boundary management behaviours are performed in connection with the degree of "respect" and "liking" that one expects to receive from the audience with the use of this online boundary management behavioural style.

Open boundary management relates to individuals who conduct frequent online behaviours which are characterised by high personal and professional life interaction. These types of professionals are comfortable with overt and uncensored informational disclosure about their entire lives online and maintain little to no boundaries between the different spheres of their life online. (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013).

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Audience boundary management behaviours are used by individuals who purposefully divide their professional and personal spheres of life. These types of professionals prefer to exclude their online professional contacts from their personal social media accounts by deliberately disallowing these professional contacts access to their personal social media content (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Ollier-Malaterre & Rothbard, 2015).

Content boundary management behaviours are used by individuals who prefer to remain highly aware of the social media content being disclosed to both their professional and personal connections online (Hoffmann & Suphan; Ollier-Malaterre & Rothbard, 2015). This allows the individual to maintain informational boundaries within their social media account and only disclose content that is appropriate for a broad audience. (Hogan, 2010; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Tammes, 2021).

Hybrid boundary management behaviours are used by individuals or professionals who prefer to divide their work and personal contacts, or audiences, according to context so that they can devise and manage the content such as posts, photographs and comments that they broadcast to match what is appropriate for each audience (Ollier-Malaterre & Rothbard, 2015). These all result in different degrees of respect and liking for professionals among their colleagues. (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Ollier-Malaterre & Rothbard, 2015).

When trying to manage the effects of their colleague's social media content on their relationships at work, online boundary management behaviours will be used to guide the researcher's understanding of how the participants potentially position themselves within these four types of boundary management behaviours. This study aims to apply online management behaviours to a South African corporate context of professional and skilled employees. The

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research aims to inform employees and organisations in this context about how different forms of social media etiquette are received by colleagues today and fosters individual professional relationships as suggested by the experiences of colleagues in the online audience.

2.5 Research questions

This study exposes a sample of South African professional and skilled employees in the corporate environment to their colleagues' social media content and workplace relationships, using the following guiding research objectives:

1. Does the participant's exposure to their colleagues' social media content influence how they perceive their colleagues?
2. Does the participant's exposure to their colleagues' social media content influence their relationships with their colleagues?
3. What approaches/strategies do the participants utilise to manage the potential effects which may arise from the exposure to their colleague's social media content?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will explain how this research study was conducted. The qualitative, exploratory research design and interpretivist paradigm that was adopted in this study will be discussed in relation to its suitability for this study. The mixed non-probability sampling method of snowball sampling and purposive sampling is then discussed in relation to its appropriateness in obtaining a sample with the specific inclusion criteria required for this study. The specific characteristics of the sample are also included in this section to give an indication of the sample's fit within the studies inclusion requirements. A detailed description of the

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research instrument and procedures used in this study is then provided to give a clear understanding of how this data are gathered. A descriptive explanation is provided about the analytic process through which the data were analysed to identify the dominant themes with relevance to the research questions The study rigor is explained in relation to the research's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Finally, the study's ethical considerations are described in detail.

3.2 Research design

A qualitative, exploratory research design was utilised in this study to allow the researcher to explore the meanings that certain individuals draw from lived experiences, contexts, and situations (Ritchie et al., 2013; Tuli, 2010). This design enabled the researcher to investigate and understand from a holistic perspective, the different professional and skilled working participant's descriptions about their exposure to their colleagues' online social media content and the implications this may have on their relationships at work specific to the South African corporate context.

An interpretivist paradigm was utilised in this study to increase the researchers' ability to recognise reality as the subjective world as it is interpreted by each participant's constructed and voiced experiences (Tuli, 2011). The interpretivist approach was appropriate as it allowed the researcher to use semi-structured, in-depth interviews to recognise and document the different perceptions of each of the participants and understand how each participant makes sense of their colleagues' social media content. The approach was used to better understand and acknowledge the diverse influential attributes that may drive each participant's interpretations such as their diverse beliefs, attitudes, previous experiences, and background. In the current study, this was in connection with each of the participant's perceptions about their colleagues based on the social media content that their colleagues disclose and the

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potential effects this may have on their relationship with their colleague as well as the different ways that they try to manage the potential impact of their colleague's social media content on their workplace relationships (Ritchie et al., 2013; Tuli, 2010).

This approach allowed for an exploration of the diverse social constructions of reality by interviewing various participants to recognise what potentially underlies the different evaluations of reality that may exist within a particular context such as that of the South African corporate environment. While, simultaneously recognising the diverse attributes and background aspects that could play a role in this (Tuli, 2011).

3.3 Sample and sampling method

The requisite sample for this research study was professional and skilled working individuals within the corporate environment of South Africa.

The participants in this study were selected according to their specific fit within the study's inclusion criteria (Patino & Ferreira, 2018). The study had clear inclusion criterion in place to ensure that the desired sample of appropriate and experienced professional and skilled working individuals in the South African corporate environment was acquired to ensure that the study collected a wide range of comprehensive and experientially valid answers to the research question and objectives (Patino & Ferreira, 2018).

Once the certificate of ethical clearance was obtained, the researcher used social networking platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook to try and find participants who matched the current study’s intended sample. The researcher regularly posted information about the study on the various social media profiles belonging to the researcher so that potential participants who were interested in participating could contact them.

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The researcher asked their friends on these platforms to share this post so that the information was shared among a wider online audience. This was purposefully aimed at attracting participants who actively interact with such platforms. The researcher also interacted with acquaintances that were known to match the study's intended sample and asked them if they would be willing to share the information about this study with their network of potential participants.

In the current study, the researcher did struggle to gather a sample of participants that was sufficiently diverse and did not impose sampling bias via snowball sampling. Therefore, the researcher requested permission from two organisations that fall into the corporate environment of South Africa as a means gaining access to a more diverse sample of participants. The letter as seen in (appendix 5) was used by the researcher to request permission to gain access to these employees. Once permission was granted by the two organisations' the information sheets (appendix 2) were distributed via a companywide mailer to the potential participants. This allowed the researcher to obtain the two organisations permission to invite a diverse set of participants that was better representative of the South African corporate workforce of professional and skilled workers to partake in the study.

The inclusion criteria required for the participant's involvement in this study were as follows:

- The participant had to be over the age of 18.
- The participant had to be employed as a professional and skilled worker within the South African corporate environment.
- The participant was required to have a minimum education level equivalent to a matric (grade 12).

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- The participant had to have at least 6 months of working experience.
- The participant had to have access to a suitable device and internet connection which would allow them to participate in an online interview on Zoom or Microsoft teams.
- The participant had to have previous exposure to and engagement within social media platforms.
- The participant had to have access to at least one of their colleague's social media profiles.

The researcher conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 13 professional and skilled working participants from a variety of different corporate environments within South Africa. Saturation was reached after the tenth interview, but the researcher decided to continue until the thirteenth interview in the interest of ensuring that diversity was representative despite the small sample.

The study utilised non-probability sampling to enable the researcher to obtain a sample that fits the strategic research inclusion criteria and brings significance to the differences in participants observed experiences by ensuring their fit with the particular social experiences under investigation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). This aligns with the qualitative research design objective which is aimed at exploring specific individual and social experiences among a specified representative sample of the population within a particular setting (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

This study further applied a two-pronged non-probability sampling strategy and assembled the intended sample through snowball sampling and purposive sampling (Farrugia, 2019; Patino & Ferreira, 2018). The snowball sampling strategy was employed to recruit participants for the purpose of the study by actively requesting that the existing participants

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passed the details of the study on to other potential participants. The researcher informed the participants of their intention to recruit a sample that was representative of the diversity that exists within the South African corporate context. The participants were asked to share the details of the study with potential participants from a diverse range of cultural, racial and religious backgrounds. This sampling strategy was appropriate for this study as the present Covid-19 pandemic restricted the researcher's access to specific samples within a workplace. A purposive sampling strategy was utilised to direct the recruitment of participants according to the relevant inclusion criteria formulated for this study and ensured that participants with the relevant experience and background were selected. The use of the above non-probability sampling strategies was aimed at guiding the recruitment of participants in this study, to select only those who fit the group context under investigation, and this ensured that the participants reported experiences would provide the researcher with the insight needed to inform the research question and objectives (Farrugia, 2019; Patino & Ferreira, 2018). This also allowed the researcher to ensure that the participants that were recruited came from a diverse range of cultural, religious, and racial backgrounds that were a representative of the diversity that exists within the South African corporate environment.

Table 1 below includes the characteristics of the sample and highlights their fit within the current study's inclusion criteria.

Table 1

Characteristics of participants

Participant	Category

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	Age	Sex	Race	Highest level of education	Length of tenure	Occupation
1.	57	Female	White	Diploma	38 Years	Monitoring Analyst
2.	35	Female	Indian	Honours Degree	7 Years	Control Monitoring Analyst
3.	63	Male	White	Matric	40 Years	Executive
4.	47	Female	Indian	Degree	20 Years	Service Delivery Manager
5.	45	Male	Coloured	Degree	20 Years	Lead Developer
6.	60	Female	White	Degree	35 Years	Content Marketing
7.	31	Female	Black	Master's Degree	9 Years	Stakeholder Manager
8.	56	Female	White	Diploma	30 Years	Online & Application Specialist

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9.	26	Male	Black	Matric	8 Years	Business Development Manager
10.	24	Female	Black	Degree	3 Years	Credit Analyst
11.	35	Male	Black	Diploma	15 Years	Data Analyst
12.	23	Male	Black	Honours Degree	1 Years	Banker
13.	41	Male	White	Diploma	17 Years	Multimedia Designer

The sample consisted of 54% females (7 female) and 46% males (6 male participants). The racial composition of the sample was 39% black (5 participants), 39% white (5 participants), 15% Indian (2 participants) and 7% coloured (1 participant). The majority of the participants possessed a degree or diploma (85%) while the other 15% obtained a matric (2 participants). The age of the sample ranged from 23 – 63 years of age, 23% of the sample were between 20-30 years of age (3 participants), 23% of the sample were between 30 – 40 years of age (3 participants), 23% of the sample were between 40 – 50 years of age (3 participants), 23% of the sample were between 50 – 60 years of age (3 participants) and 7% of the sample were between 60 – 70 years of age (1 participant). The participants' length of tenure ranged from 1 – 40 years. The sample came from a diverse range of different occupations within the South African corporate environment as seen in Table 1.

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3.4 Research instrument

The instrument used to explore the research questions in this study was in-depth semi-structured interviews. The researcher constructed the interview questions around the research questions and previous research in the area.

The researcher constructed the interview guide which consists of 13 questions (Appendix 3). The interview guide consisted of six introductory questions which were aimed at getting background information to describe the sample in the research study (Appendix 3).

Questions 1.1 - 1.4 were structured around obtaining data about the frequency of social media use among the participants. This included questions about how often the participant used social media either to observe other's posts or post content about themselves.

Questions 2–5 were structured around gaining information about how colleague's online social media content influenced the impressions that the participants form of their colleagues. Additionally, how their experiences of having access to this social media content have negatively or positively influenced the perceptions they have of their colleagues. These items were formulated on the concept of Goffman's theory of impression management (Goffman, 1959), in connection with the first research question. Questions 3 and 4 asked the participants how they feel about seeing information about their colleagues' personal lives and work lives on social media. Question 3 attempts to understand whether seeing information about their colleagues' personal lives on social media constitutes backstage forms of self-representation for the professional audience on social media. Question 4 attempts to understand if seeing information about their colleagues' work lives on social media would constitute either backstage or frontstage forms of self-representation for their professional audiences on social media. Furthermore, question 5 states "how do you feel the exposure to your colleagues' social media has influenced your perception of them". Questions 5.1.1 and 5.1.2. go on to ask for

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examples of how the exposure has positively and negatively influenced the participants perception of their colleagues. These questions seek to gain a detailed understanding of the participants' perception about what types of social media content and conduct constitutes backstage and frontstage forms of self-representation. Thus, these questions try to gain information about what forms of self-representation are successful and unsuccessful for online impression management amongst a professional audience on social media.

Questions 6–9 were structured around collecting data about how the social media content that the audience have been exposed to of their colleagues online has affected their relationships at work. These included questions about how a participant's willingness to foster relationships with their colleagues were affected by the type of social media content that they disclosed about themselves online or others disclosed about them online. These were formulated based on Goffman's theory of impression management (Goffman, 1959), in connection with the second research question. Question 6 asked the participants, "how does exposure to your colleagues' information on social media influence your relationship with them". Question 7 asks "how does the type of content that your colleagues post on social networking sites influence your willingness to form/maintain workplace relationships with these colleagues (e.g.: posts with offensive material, inappropriate material, or posts with achievements, family life, significant life experiences)?". These questions were constructed to explore the participant's perceptions about how they felt that their exposure to their colleagues' social media content had an impact on their working relationship with their colleagues. Questions 6 and 7 are set out to understand what types of content had either a positive or negative impact on their working relationship with their colleagues so that the researcher could again understand what constitutes frontstage and backstage forms of self-representation amongst a professional audience on social media. Question 8 states "please can you tell me

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about situations that you may have encountered where your colleagues' reputations may have been effected by their social networking posts". This question was included to understand how the participant's exposure to their colleagues' social media content had impacted their professional reputation and their relationships with these colleagues. Question 9 attempts to understand how the participant's impression of and relationship with their colleagues are potentially influenced by content posted about them by other people.

Questions 10–13 were centred around collecting information about the strategies that participants use to try and manage the effects that their exposure to colleagues' social media content had on their workplace relationships. These included questions around the social media privacy settings that participants used, the professional contacts that they allowed to have access to their social media content, and the professional contacts with whom they were willing to connect with on social media. These were formulated based on Ollier-Malaterre et al.'s (2013) theoretical framework on online boundary management behaviour in connection with the third research question. Question 11 states "how do you manage the privacy settings you have on your social media content?" (e.g.: do you have an open, online profile where anyone can see the content you post, or do you have privacy settings to limit who has access to your social media content?). Question 12 asks "how do you determine what professional connection requests you accept or decline on social media?" Whereas question 13 asks "how do you determine which professional contacts you will connect with on social media?" These questions align with Ollier-Malaterre et al.'s (2013) online boundary management behaviours as it seeks to understand whether the participants prefer to "segment "or "integrate" their professional and personal audiences on social media. The questions are also constructed to understand whether the participants' chosen preference are motivated by "self-enhancement" or "self-validation".

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Question 14 focused on collecting information about how the potential cultural similarities and differences that exist between the participant and their colleagues may have influenced the impression that they form of their colleagues based on their social media posts. Furthermore, how these cultural differences or similarities might have influenced their willingness to form or maintain relationships with their colleagues as a result of their social media posts. These questions were constructed to understand whether cultural diversity had an impact on the participants' perceptions of and relationships with their colleagues. The questions were set out to understand what forms of cultural self-representation on social media could constitute backstage and frontstage forms of self-representations. Furthermore, the questions were aimed at understanding what types of cultural social media content may be perceived as favourable or unfavourable to share amongst a professional audience on social media.

This study utilised semi-structured, in-depth interviews to collect the requisite subjective and experiential data intended for this qualitative study.

This data collection method required an interview guide which allowed the researcher to direct the interview process according to the research question and objectives under investigation. This was achieved by developing prescribed questions that were constructed and positioned to explore and collect data from each participant in these uniform areas (Ayres, 2012; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The interview questions were asked in the specific order as seen in the interview guide (Appendix 3). However, there were instances where the participants answers pre-empted the questions to follow. In these instances, the questions were still asked to ensure that each question was answered in as much detail as possible. The additional value of this interview style was that it allowed the researcher to probe or encourage the participants to provide more detail in their explanation. This enabled the researcher to collect more holistic

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data and acquire a more in-depth understanding and perspective about each different participant's detailed experiences and views of reality (Vaughn, 2019).

This further allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions and improved the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations by trying to see how participants arrived at these evaluations (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The use of semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions facilitated the researcher in their ability to investigate and understand the different participants' experiences relative to their exposure to colleagues' social media content, and the impact they felt this had on their workplace relationships (Ayres, 2012; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

The interview questions were divided into three main research areas: the participant's perceptions of their colleagues based on the participants' exposure to colleagues' social media content; the influence which this exposure may have on the participant's informal workplace relationships, and finally, the subsequent strategic techniques which these participants may utilise as a form of managing the influences of this exposure on their informal relationships with their colleagues (Ayres, 2012; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

The semi-structured, in-depth interviews were useful to this research study as it allowed the researcher to analyse the data and remain attentive to the diverse interpretations of reality and meaning-making which may hold significance within the South African context.

3.5 Research procedure

The researcher first applied for ethical clearance from the university's ethical committee and was provided with a certificate of ethical clearance (as seen in appendix 7). The researcher constructed a poster that the researcher used to share information about the study on Facebook, LinkedIn and WhatsApp (as seen in appendix 6). The participants that showed an interest in the study were emailed by the researcher to introduce themselves to them in a polite

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and friendly manner. The researcher introduced themselves as a psychology student at the University of the Witwatersrand, who was currently studying towards obtaining a master's degree in Industrial Psychology. The researcher informed the individuals about the nature of the research study and how the study was being conducted as a requirement towards their master's degree.

The researcher engaged with the individual by asking them more about themselves and their job, before inviting them to participate in the research study. This enabled the researcher to build rapport with the individual before their participation in the study. This also allowed the researcher to ensure that the individual met the inclusion criteria required for their participation in the research study. When a participant expressed interest in the study but did not meet the requisite inclusion criteria, the researcher sent an email to the participant thanking them for their time and interest and informed them of the reasons why the researcher chose not to use them as a participant in this research study (as seen in appendix 4).

The researcher invited the appropriate individuals to participate within the research study and explained the nature of the research study as well as what their participation within the study would entail. The researcher explained to the participants, the potential value of the research in understanding and informing organisations about the influential role which social media can have on the dynamics of informal workplace relationships specifically within the corporate context of South Africa.

Once the participants had agreed to participate in the study, the researcher explained the detailed requirements of the participant concerning their participation within the study and that this involved taking part in a 45 - 60-minute online interview. Once, all the individual's questions or concerns were answered the researcher distributed the participant information

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sheet and informed consent forms to each individual via email for them to make an informed decision about their participation within the research study.

The participants were each contacted to schedule a date and time which was most convenient for them to take part in the interview. As a result, of the Covid-19 restrictions, these interviews took place online via the video conference applications of Zoom or Microsoft teams. The researcher ensured that each participant had appropriate and adequate internet access, availability of time, and environments for the interview process to have successfully taken place.

The researcher ensured that each participant scheduled the interview on a date and time most convenient to them, with 45 to 60 minutes adequately reserved for this process. The researcher ensured that each participant had steady access to the internet to ensure that the interview proceedings went smoothly and uninterrupted.

The researcher ensured that the participant found a silent and comfortable space where they partook in the online interview with ease of audio and visual aspects of the process and undisturbed by external factors.

The researcher ensured that all informed consent forms were signed and returned via email, before the interview proceeded. The researcher ensured that each participant was well informed about the measures that were taken to preserve their confidentiality and anonymity throughout the entire research process and any other potential uses of this data for research purposes, provided that the participant consented to this.

Before the commencement of the interview, each participant was informed of their right to withdraw at any stage of the research process without any repercussion and that participation was entirely voluntary. On the day of the interview each participant was asked for informed verbal consent and written consent as stipulated in the signed and returned consent form, to take part in and record the interview process.

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The interviews were each guided by the prescribed open-ended questions within the interview guide which was formulated with the intended purpose of answering the three fundamental research question and objectives within this research study.

The average duration of the interviews was approximately 47 minutes, with the shortest interview being 35 minutes and the longest interview being 1 hour and 3 minutes. The audio recordings of each of the 13 interviews were listened to and transcribed verbatim so that the data represented the exact articulated experiences of each participant. The transcripts were then analysed using Braun & Clarke's (2013) thematic content analysis to uncover themes that answered the research objectives from the participant's experiences.

3.6 Data analysis

Thematic content analysis by Braun & Clarke's (2006), was utilised within this study as the methodological basis upon which the collected interview data was examined to identify and extract important concepts that were related to the research question. Braun & Clarke's (2014) thematic content analysis is comprised of seven analytic phases within which the data was explored to identify collective meaningful experiences. These seven phases are, (1) Transcription; (2) Reading and familiarisation; (3) Coding; (4) searching for themes; (5) reviewing themes; (6) defining and naming themes (7) writing a report.

Phase1: Transcription

The first phase of transcription entailed listening to the audio recordings of the interviews and documenting the contents of each interview by typing out exactly what was discussed word by word. This allowed for each participant interview to be archived and later revised in a documented format which is true to the interview content (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2014).

Phase 2: Reading and familiarisation

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The second phase of thematic content analysis requires the researcher to read and acquaint oneself with the data that had been collected from the interviews. This entailed repeatedly analysing each of the interview transcripts to become aware of the contents of each interview (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2014). This deep engagement allowed the researcher to begin to identify the valuable commonalities among the participant's voiced experiences in connection with the research question and objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2014).

Phase 3: Coding

The third phase of data analysis required the formation of codes. The common shared experiences observed across the interviews were assigned an identifying label or "code" (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2014). These codes were informed by the research objectives and were based on the important collective participant responses which showed relevance to the research study (Braun & Clarke, 2014).

Phase 4: Searching for themes

The fourth phase of thematic content analysis required the researcher to begin considering themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2014). Themes were formed when the codes of relevant experiences observed among the interviews were clustered together according to their fit within a meaningful subject which addressees the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2014).

Phase 5: Reviewing themes

The fifth phase of Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic content analysis involved the revision of the proposed themes that were observed across the collected interview data. This was a process of self-review and scrutiny to ensure that the experiential codes align with the proposed theme. Accordingly, ensuring that the observed patterns of participant experiences or "codes" that were identified from the interviews are of a good fit for the broad significant

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experiential themes which it seeks to reinforce within the research study (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2014).

Phase 6: Defining and naming themes

The sixth stage required the researcher to label and describe the themes identified within the collected data. Each labelled theme required a summative phrase that defined the scope under which these common experiences fall (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2014). These codes highlighted the crux of what each theme characteristically represented in the collected data relative to the objectives of the research study (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2014). This required the researcher to define the grouped data codes that portrayed the central aspects of the participants' experiences that are relevant to the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2014).

Phase 7: Writing a report

The final phase required writing a report of the identified thematic experiences that were central to the research study by reporting on the observed participants' experiences and interpretations of the research question and objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2014).

The common experiential patterns observed across the participant interviews were used to discuss the research objectives under investigation from the interpretations of professional and skilled individuals' lived experiences working in corporate South Africa.

3.7 Ethical considerations

This research maintained ethical rigor by ensuring that several ethical considerations were undertaken throughout this research study. Primarily, the researcher applied for ethical clearance from the University’s ethics committee to ensure that the institution had approved

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that the research study and its associated data collection procedures were ethically sound (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Farrugia, 2019).

The researcher ensured that each participant was aware that their participation within the research study was voluntary, no forms of coerced or incentivized practice took place within the study (Flick, 2008). The participant was informed of their right to withdraw their participation at any time throughout the research process until the interviews have been transcribed and without any risk or imposed repercussion resulting from this decision (Shaw, 2008). The participants were issued participant information sheets and consent forms via email, which had to be signed and returned via email before their participation within the research process (Flick, 2008). These highlighted the nature of this research study and the proposed desired use of the data that was collected from the participant interviews (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Farrugia, 2019).

The participant was asked to provide verbal consent before the commencement of the interview as well as written consent to record the interview which was for ease of data collection and reliable documentation in the transcription process (Flick, 2008). The participants were informed of the efforts which the researcher is taking to safeguard each individual's privacy and uphold the confidentiality of the participant and their respective organisations throughout the research process and within the written research report (Farrugia, 2019). The participants were informed that their true identity would remain confidential and that a pseudonym was assigned to each individual’s participation throughout the research process (Shaw, 2008). Furthermore, the identity of the organisation where the participant is employed remained protected and was not disclosed throughout the research study. The organisation’s identities were supplemented with a fictitious label when referenced in the data (Flick, 2008). Finally, any potentially identifying data which can be traced back to the identity

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of the participant was excluded from the research (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Farrugia, 2019).

The researcher and their research supervisor were the only individuals who have access to the interview recordings, transcripts, and identity of the participants. The participants were informed that the interview data will be stored within a secured folder on a password-protected laptop to which only the interviewer and her supervisor have access (Flick, 2008). Furthermore, the researcher requested permission from the participant to securely store an anonymised format of their data indefinitely for potential use within future research.

In addition to this, the researcher ensured that measures were taken to ensure the security of this data following the completion of this research study (Flick, 2008; Shaw, 2008). Thus, all the collected data will be removed from the laptop and placed onto an external hard drive which will be stored in a safe cabinet at the researcher's place of residence once the study is complete but will remain on the supervisor's password-protected computer. The participant was provided with the contact details of the researcher and their supervisor which they could use should they have any queries or concerns throughout the research study (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Farrugia, 2019). The participant had the right to feedback and should any participant request feedback about the findings of the study the researcher will provide them with an executive summary of the study.

The researcher remained aware of the potential implications of online interviewing and research. The use of online interviews limited the researchers' ability to accommodate the individual participants and the researcher was required to take more consideration into the participant's experiences of the online interviews. The researcher attempted to strengthen this by frequently engaging with the participants throughout the research process. The researcher engaged with the participants to arrange a date and time for them to take part in the interview, which was most convenient to their schedule.

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The researcher reminded the participant about the most conducive environments for them to place themselves when they participate in the interview. The most significant was the individual's required access to a good internet line and a comfortable and private environment without the disturbances of external factors. This was necessary to maintain the confidentiality of the information which these participants disclosed but it also eased the individual into the interview process, so that they were not continuously worried about who would hear this or how uncomfortable they were.

The researcher ensured before the commencement of the interview process that each participant fit the research inclusion criteria and ensured that no participants were inconvenienced by their participation in this study (Flick, 2008; Shaw, 2008). Furthermore, the researcher ensured that none of the content that exists throughout the interview and the research process imposed unfair discrimination, bias, or harm onto any of the participants (Farrugia, 2019). This was particularly true to ensure the generalisability of this research study (Shaw, 2008).

3.8 Study Rigor

The research utilised Lincoln and Guba’s (1999) four-feature model to guide the research studies undertakings and ensure the upright nature of the interpretations made from the data that was collected (Baillie, 2015; Flick, 2008; Hadi & José Closs, 2015). The researcher attempted to uphold the rigor and truthfulness of this study by using various tactics that were intended to preserve the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability associated with this research study and its findings (Flick, 2008).

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3.8.1 Credibility

The credibility of a study is associated with the proposed authenticity inherent within a qualitative research study (Mays & Pope, 1995). The credibility of this study related to the truthfulness of the interpretations and descriptions that were made from the participant's lived experiences and world perceptions (Baillie, 2015; Hadi & José Closs, 2015).

The researcher interpreted and represented the multiple realities of each participant as they were perceived and described through the individual participants' lived experiences. The research findings mirror the interpretations which are made from the participant's opinions about the influence which the exposure to their colleague's social media content had on their workplace relationships.

The research attempted to uphold this by establishing rapport to improve the participant's confidence and comfort with them and facilitate the extent to which participants disclosed their experiences in greater detail. The researcher first ensured that time had been taken to welcome the participant in a friendly and polite manner, while also taking time to ask them how they were doing, thanking them for their participation, and finally ensuring that they were comfortable within their environment and that they were happy to continue. Before the interview, the researcher engaged with the participant to check in with them, by asking if they were okay or if they had any questions or concerns and took the time to discuss and schedule the interview at the most convenient time for the participant. The researcher opened the participant up to the interview process by first ensuring each participant was cognisant of their voluntary participation and right to withdraw. The researcher disclosed in full the nature of the study to the participant and informed them of the efforts that will be made to ensure their privacy.

The credibility of this study was reinforced by recording the interview process to document each participant's authentic verbatim expressions of their experiences (Baillie, 2015).

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This allowed the researcher to assess the accuracy of the interpretations made from the transcribed interview documents as well as the codes formulated through thematic content analysis by examining the match between the two.

The researcher created a reflexive journal to ensure transparency about any personal bias which surfaced throughout the research process and remained cognisant of this throughout the data analysis process. This documented the logic used to justify the purpose of each procedural step taken throughout the research study (Krefting, 1991; Seale, 1997). This provides evidence that can be used to track the credibility of the research procedures and the link between the collected data and the researcher's interpretations.

3.8.2 Transferability

The transferability of a study refers to the extent to which the findings within a particular research study would be an appropriate fit to other contexts and research studies alike (Baillie, 2015). The researcher provided a comprehensive statement about the contextual backdrop within which this study was conducted and the environment that the participant sample originated from. The researcher also explained the sampling strategies used to source these participants.

The study used mixed non-probability sampling strategies namely, snowball sampling and purposive sampling. This allowed the researcher to increase one’s ability to source participants that fit the study's inclusion criterion to meet the unique corporate context of South African professional and skilled employees. The above-mentioned gave an indication of the precise characteristic and context in which this data was applicable, specifically South African professional and skilled employees in the corporate environment.

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3.8.3 Dependability

The dependability of a research study reinforces the trustworthiness associated with the interpretations made by the study (Baillie, 2015; Hadi & José Closs, 2015). The dependability of this research study was openly reinforced by outlining in detail the operational steps which were utilised to arrive at the study's interpretations.

The researcher provided a comprehensive report about how the data were collected through semi-structured interviews that were directed by a specific preconstructed interview guide with open-ended questions to allow for probing (seen in the methods section).

The systematic description of the data analysis method used in the study known as thematic content analysis (Braun & Clark. 2014) which stipulates the exact steps that were used in the study to analyse the collected data. This described how the researcher made sense of the data relative to the research question and objectives. This allowed for the researcher to assess the interpretations made in the research by assessing the extent to which these inferences logically agree with the described data collection and data analysis methods used.

The code record process was used to assess the dependability of the interpretations made in the study. The researcher investigated the match between the primary and secondary experiential codes created using thematic content analysis when it was repeated on the same data no less than two weeks after the first analysis.

The study procedures and the researchers' implementation of these was evaluated by their supervisor who oversees the researcher's study. This continuous assessment and critique of the research study by a professional experienced supervisor enhanced its dependability as it allowed for the valuable advanced refinement and quality control of the research study.

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3.8.4 Confirmability

This refers to the extent to which the inferences stated within the research study are verifiable (Baillie, 2015; Hadi & José Closs, 2015). Thus, confirmability can be upheld when important interpretations that are reported within the research study can be corroborated by the data collected within the participant interviews.

The researcher kept a reflexive journal throughout the research process. The reflexive journal served as an instrumental self-check process where the researcher recorded any incidents throughout the research process where one's individual opinion or bias may come up. This allowed the researcher to recognise and acknowledge any of these biases and check that they may have not affected the inferences made at any time throughout the research study. Thus, filtering the data and the research studies interpretations to eliminate any inauthenticity and refining the confirmability of the findings (Krefting, 1991; Seale, 1997).

The confirmability of the study was reinforced by recording the interviews and transcribing them verbatim. This allowed for the researcher and their supervisor to verify the accuracy between the codes generated from the collected experiences of the participants and the final interpretations made in the study.

Finally, the researcher wanted to enhance the confirmability of the study by allowing the participants the opportunity to review and confirm the accuracy of their interview transcripts and make alterations to this if necessary. However, this was entirely up to the participant.

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CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The findings and discussion section will expand on the themes deduced from the thematic content analysis. The thematic content analysis revealed three main themes and numerous sub-themes that reinforce these themes. The themes discovered were positive online and real-life interactions, negative online and real-life interactions and online and offline boundary management behaviours. The theme of positive online and real-life expands on the sub-themes of relatedness, enhanced sense of respect for colleagues, cultural insight, interactional insight and the audiences' motives for self-development. The theme of negative online and real-life interactions highlights the sub-themes of adverse impression management and reduced sense of respect for colleagues which includes discredited professionalism and reduced sense of personal respect for colleagues.

The above themes pertain to the first and second research questions (1) Does the participant's exposure to their colleagues' social media content influence how they perceive their colleagues (2) Does the participant's exposure to their colleagues' social media content influence their relationship with their colleagues. These themes and their associated sub-themes explore the experiences of South African professional and skilled employees' exposure to their colleagues' social media content. Goffman's dramaturgical approach to impression management discussed above was used to understand the influence that the participants' exposure to their colleagues' social media content had on their perception of their colleagues as well as their relationship with these colleagues. However, it is important to note the theoretical limitation in that Goffman's dramaturgical approach was developed for the analysis of physical social interactions. This study applied Goffman's approach to impression management to the participants' online social interactions which are much more complex than the theory originally accounted for. The findings suggest that South African professional and

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skilled employees' perception of and relationships with their colleagues were both positively and negatively influenced by their colleagues' success or lack thereof in managing their social media content to exude a credible impression. Contrary to previous research these findings are significant in that they examine the effects of social media on the audience's perception of relationship with their colleagues.

The theme of online and offline boundary management behaviours pertains to the third research question in this study (3) what approaches/tactics do the participants utilise to manage the potential effects which may arise from their exposure to their colleagues social media content. The theme of online and offline boundary management behaviours highlights the sub-themes of disassociation, compartmentalisation, audience boundary management behaviours, content boundary management behaviours and hybrid boundary management behaviours. The findings expand on the South African professional and skilled employees' use of a combination of online and offline boundary management behaviours to manage the potential effects of their exposure to their colleagues' social media content. The online and offline boundary management behaviours that the participants cited using are largely a result of the influence that their colleagues' social media content had on their perception of and relationship with these colleagues.

The data revealed that the participants did not have a singular preference in relation to the online and offline boundary management behaviours that they utilised. The findings indicate that the participants used these online and offline boundary management behaviours interchangeably based on their situational needs. It is important to note that the first online and offline boundary management behaviours, disassociation and compartmentalisation, are discussed in relation to the participants' role as the audience of their colleagues' performances on social media. Whereas, the sub-themes of audience boundary management behaviours, content boundary management and hybrid boundary management behaviours will be discussed

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in relation to the participants' role as the actor performing on social media. The theme of online and offline boundary management behaviours and its various sub-themes will be analysed through the applied theory of Goffman's dramaturgical approach to impression management as well as the theoretical framework by Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013) on online boundary management.

4.1 Positive Online and Real-life Interactions

The findings suggest that the participants' exposure to their colleagues' positively perceived social media content could create a positive spill over onto their relationships with these colleagues in real life. Research indicates that professionals are increasingly using social media to help them connect with people in their organisation and their industry (Aspling, 2011; Hasib, 2009; Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre, 2019; Schmidt et al., 2016). In accordance with Goffman's dramaturgical approach to impression management, individuals are compared to actor's putting on a performance that is guided by their contextual norms to gain control over their audience's impression of them (Goffman, 1959). The participants discussed how their exposure to their colleagues' performances on social media had left them with a favourable perception of these colleagues. The participants explained how the information that their colleagues disclosed on social media had a positive impact on their impression of them and assisted them in fostering their relationship with these colleagues. The sub-themes of positive online and real-life interactions are relatedness, enhanced sense of respect for colleagues, cultural insight, interactional insight and the audience's motives for self-development. The sub-themes will be discussed below using exerts from the participants' interviews and analysed in relation to the first two research questions.

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4.2 Relatedness

Goffman's dramaturgical approach to impression management stressed high importance on actors maintaining well defined boundaries between their frontstage and backstage performances by ensuring that they exclude information about their personal, "private life" from their professional, more "public life" (Goffman, 1959). The premises of successful impression management was a determinant on the actor's ability to hide one's backstage forms of self-presentation from entering their frontstage performance (Goffman, 1959). However, the findings suggest that in some instances the participants' exposure to their colleagues' backstage information on social media had a positive influence on the impression that they had of these colleagues. This relates to impression management literature in that it shows how social media blurs one's ability to navigate their frontstage and backstage forms of self-presentation (Paliszkiewicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016; Richey et al., 2017; Tashmin, 2016). Nine participants cited that in some ways the social media content that is made available to them about their colleagues has given them a more positive perception of these colleagues as this made them more relatable. A common trend that came up among several of the participants was that they felt that social media allowed them to discover commonalities between their colleagues and themselves. The participants explained how this social media content often contained information about their colleagues that they aren't ordinarily exposed to in a professional context. The participants felt that this helped them develop a positive perception of their colleagues because they could relate to their posts.

Participant 2 expressed admiration towards her colleague after seeing her balance her work life and personal life on social media which is something she found relatable. Participant 2 explained that when she saw "them balancing their work and their home life, things like that. I think it's positive because we are actually trying to maintain that sort of balance". Similarly,

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participant 8 described how even her ex-colleague's post resonated with her and gave her a newfound positive perception of this ex-colleague. Participant 8 explained, "I was quite impressed by you know, what she said even though I no longer work with her it impressed me because I felt that she sort of got what I've been thinking".

Participants 7, 12 and 13 described how being exposed to their colleague's social media content allowed them to gain a more genuine understanding of these colleagues beyond the professional context. This allowed these participants to relate to their colleagues at a more personal level which enabled them to develop a positive perception of their colleagues.

Participant 7 explained:

> I have a colleague on social media, but I think I've actually got to know her more, because she's so regular on social media, from posting her favourite TV shows to her kid's birthday parties and so everything of hers is documented on social media. You know, so I think it's just given me an opportunity to know who she is outside of the context that I know and engage with.

Interestingly, Participant 12 discussed how seeing his colleague's social media content could positively influence his perception of these colleagues as "It would make them more personable, more unique than I guess a corporate cut out". The participant reiterated this sentiment later by explaining:

> You get to see a greater sense of what makes the person which helps them build their professional brand. So it's more genuine and I believe that genuine people are generally easy to make friends with and you know that it's genuine because it's their personal life.

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Participant 13 explained that social media can be valuable because it allows you to gain a sense of your colleague's true character. Participant 13 stated that “You can see what they do on the weekends and see whether they are completely the same person during the week and that’s also a good thing because it allows you to see their true character”. Concurringly, the research highlighted that many participants found that their colleagues social media content was positively received when it enabled them to gain a more genuine and relatable understanding of these colleagues beyond their work context (Butler & Matook, 2015; Hogan, 2010; Grudin & Meredith, 2009; Skeels & Grudin, 2009; Vitak et al., 2012). These findings suggest that the participants are using social media to form impressions of their colleagues based on both their frontstage and backstage forms of self-representation. Schmidt et al. (2016) made a similar claim that professionals are using social media to feel more connected to their colleagues as it allows them to share and view information that they would not typically disclose within their social interactions at work. Kien (2015) found that professionals are increasingly seen to link their personal lives to their social media as they prefer using online social networking sites to portray an authentic, backstage performance.

The data suggests that social media enables the participants to discover commonalities between themselves and their colleagues that they relate to, and which facilitate them in fostering their relationship with these colleagues. Five participants explained how social media provided them with additional insight about their colleagues beyond that which they are ordinarily exposed to within a professional context. The participants felt that this helped them foster a relationship with these colleagues as they were able to relate to their social media content.

Participant 8 highlighted this sentiment when explaining that “Social media can be used to build relationships. It gives people areas or touchpoints which we wouldn’t have known

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about if we didn’t see people tweeting and posting about it”. Participant 8 expanded on this idea by stating*:*

> When I see your post and I realise that we actually have a lot more in common, or we have something in common it allows me to perhaps forge a relationship. Where if I genuinely didn’t know that I wouldn’t have approached you about something, I wouldn’t have shared an article with you, or I wouldn’t have even asked you regarding your opinion on something, If I hadn’t seen on social media that you actually had an interest in that.

Participant 10 described how she was able to develop a positive perception of her colleague and wanted to befriend her after seeing her post something that she related to. Participant 10 explained that:

> One person posted something about watching the Harry and Megan interview and she said my African mom loves Princess Diana. I completely relate to that as it's like my mom and all my aunts as well I don't know why but they think they're like part of the royal family. I just thought that was so hilarious, how much I related to that post and then you know, that makes me feel like I would probably like you as a friend or something like that.

Similarly, Participant 12 felt more eager and comfortable to connect with and foster his relationship with a fellow colleague after seeing her post about her frustrations at work on social media. Participant 12 explained:

> I have a friend, she’s a colleague, who would post her frustrations over work and vent on social media platforms. That made me feel comfortable and I know that I can vent

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around her. She understands what I'm going through and I would be in a safe space from the get-go.

Participant 13 also highlighted this sentiment when explaining how social media influenced his relationship with his colleagues. Participant 13 said, "I think it also just brings people closer because you see what they are engaged in as well".

This aligns with the literature which suggests that social media encourages a "participatory culture" in which professionals experience an increased sense of "connectedness" and "intimacy" when engaging with their colleagues on social media (Aspling, 2011; Hasbib, 2009). Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2022) found that professional employees are more likely to connect with their colleagues online when they disclosed backstage forms of self-representation on social media. The research findings concur with the literature in that the professional employees began to form positive impressions of their colleagues and were eager to foster relationships with these colleagues when they were able to discover commonalities between themselves from their social media content (Aspling, 2011; Hasib, 2009; Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre, 2022; Schmidt, 2016).

Participants 7 and 12 emphasised how instrumental social media became during the Covid-19 pandemic in allowing them to build their relationships with their colleagues. Participant 7 highlighted how social media allowed her to follow her fellow colleagues milestones which enabled her to relate to and feel more connected to her colleague during these important life experiences. Participant 7 explained how her colleagues' husband "had just gotten his first jab because he was in ICU with Covid, and it was terrible. So those are milestones that we're really so excited about because we experienced how it was. It was touch and go basically with his health for like three weeks. He was in ICU and so just getting to the

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point where he's getting his first jab, got us so genuinely excited for them. Seeing her post them on social media platforms, was also really lovely to see".

Contrastingly, Participant 12 started working during the pandemic and was only able to spend one month in the office before going virtual. Participant 12 found social media to be instrumental to him when he was trying to build more personal relationships with his colleagues during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the participant described how he had to use social media to:

> ...draw people to show me their true selves. That's, I guess my short-lived experience of what social media has helped me with personally when it comes to engaging with people because you do get a sense of the person when you interact with them face to face, what ticks them off, what their like, what they liked doing as they tell you about these things. But if you don't have those engagements, then social media is a good place to find out more about them so that you can relate more to them and get closer to them.

Later, Participant 12 explained why he used social media to help him develop his personal relationships with his colleagues by explaining "when you need to build a more personal type of relationship. The only way to do that is by getting to understand what a person does outside of the professional realm".

These findings relate to recent literature which discussed the significant value that social media had for professional employees who were isolated from their work colleagues and forced to work remotely due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic has had significant implications for working environments around the world, with drastic restrictions in social interactions, many professional employees struggled to make the transition to working from home. This prompted many professional employees to seek out opportunities for social

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interaction on social media. In accordance with the above participants sentiment, Hall (2021) revealed how a sample of American adults *(N=1947)* began to use social media to develop and maintain their offline relationship. Mashud et al. (2020) found that individuals within Indonesia used social media to solicit support from friends, colleagues, and family members. In line with the findings, recent literature on the use of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic also discussed how individuals were intending to satisfy a sense of belonging through the support that their online social interactions provided them with (Hall, 2021; Pennington, 2021).

The findings reveal that the positive perception that comes from the participant's ability to relate to their colleague's social media content often encourages them to foster a relationship with these colleagues. Contrary to Goffman's dramaturgical approach to impression management, these participants describe how their colleague's backstage forms of self-representation on social media can have a positive influence on their perception of and relationship with these colleagues when they are able to relate to this content. This expands on the literature as it suggests how in some instance the disappearance of these "stages" can be beneficial. The findings demonstrate that the information that actors often limit from their "frontstage" can be useful in finding commonalities with one's colleagues that could have a favourable influence on their colleagues' impression of them (Butler & Matook, 2015; Hogan, 2010; Grudin & Meredith, 2009; Skeels & Grudin, 2009; Vitak et al., 2012). This extends on research about Goffman's dramaturgical approach to impression management as discussed in the literature review as it explains how the "audience" of work colleagues can be positively influenced by the "actors" or their fellow colleagues more personal backstage performances on social media (Hogan, 2010; Richey 2017).

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4.3 Enhanced sense of respect for colleagues

The goal of the performance in Goffman's dramaturgical approach to impression management is to leave the audience with a favourable impression of the actor. In accordance with the literature, the actor's success in creating a reputable impression is now reliant on their ability to effectively manage their online and offline performances (Aspling, 2011; Kien, 2015). The actor needs to remain cognisant of their frontstage and backstage forms of self-representation on social media whereby their performance becomes highly visible, their audience becomes multifaceted, and the situational cues that guide their social interactions with their audience no longer exist (Aspling, 2011; Hasib, 2009; Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2019; Schmidt et al., 2016). However, the findings also revealed that in some instances the actors were able to create a credible impression among their online professional audience with both their frontstage and backstage forms of self-representation. Seven participants highlighted how being exposed to specific social media content about their colleagues has the potential to enhance their respect for these colleagues. The participants explained how their exposure to their colleagues' social media content that was positively related to their personal and/or their professional lives enhanced their respect for and perception of these colleagues.

Four of the participants described how they had experienced an enhanced sense of respect for their colleagues after being exposed to their social media content that was positively related to their work. Participant 3 explained how he enjoyed seeing his colleagues post about their work lives stating, "I enjoy seeing this type of content, if they are sharing good stories, if they are sharing awards or achievements, that I am happy about and also if they are sharing information that benefits others in the industry".

Participant 9 believed that being exposed to his colleague's social media content that was positively related to their work lives could have a positive effect on his perception of these

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colleagues and enhance his respect for them. The participant stated “I think it's a good thing. You know, when you see posts about their achievements and just their work ethic, etc. I believe it's inspiring to see”. Participant 11 also felt that being exposed to positive social media content about their colleagues’ work lives could have a positive effect on their perception of these colleagues as well as their working relationship with them. Participant 11 explained, “it’s also based on the information in these posts, if it’s positive then you are more inclined to trust that person’s judgement and be open to discussing work and getting work advice from them”. Likewise, Participant 13 described how seeing a post about his manager’s achievement was inspiring and enhanced his respect for this colleague. Participant 13 explained:

> One manager, she got awarded as one of the top 50 CMOS in the country. I think that's a great achievement and I think that shows that a woman in tech, even though I'm not obviously a woman, but a woman in tech can also thrive in this industry. She’s from a sales background and now she's in marketing, so it also shows that you can change your direction and succeed, if you need to or want to.

Interestingly, Participant 8 described experiencing an enhanced sense of respect for and pride in her colleagues after seeing them post about their success at work on social media. The participant gave two examples of how her colleagues’ social media posts had positively influenced her perception of them and explained:

> So for example, this week, one of my colleagues was just appointed as the CEO of a major aviation network and there was actually a lot of pride around that. The other one, published a paper and is going to be speaking at an international conference, so again, that’s great!

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These participants described how their perception of their colleagues were positively influenced by their exposure to the social media content that was positively related to their work but more specifically their success at work. In line with the literature, the findings suggest that the actors were able to use their frontstage forms of self-presentation to persuade the participants in the audience to acknowledge them as an honourable character (Hasib, 2009; Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2019; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Schmidt et al., 2016).

Ollier-Malaterre (2019) found more than half of the American professional population are connecting with their colleagues on Facebook and experiencing an enhanced sense of respect and closeness with these colleagues. Schmidt et al. (2016) found that co-workers experienced an enhanced sense of respect for their colleagues and were eager to foster their relationship with them after being exposed to information about these colleagues' professional competencies and success on social media. The findings and literature suggest that the audience's exposure to their colleagues professionally reputable social media content could have a positive influence on their perception of them and facilitated their relationship with these colleagues (Hasib, 2009; Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2019; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Schmidt et al., 2016).

In a different way, four participants described how, in some instances, their exposure to their colleagues' social media content that was positively related to their personal lives also enhanced their sense of respect for these colleagues. Participant 1 explained how being exposed to a fellow colleagues' body building hobby on social media shocked her, but also enhanced her respect for this colleague stating that:

> It's interesting that when I befriended her, how my view, the points that I thought of her changed with the pictures and the competition pictures that she published and the

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> diets she follows. It was like amazing! You know, she's got a self-life completely different from our company, from working, you know the project team. It's amazing.

Similarly, Participant 11 explained how being exposed to certain information about her colleagues' personal lives could enhance her respect for these colleagues and positively influence her perception of them. Participant 11 highlighted:

> It could either make my perception of them better. If I see that they live, I don't know admirable lives or are people of integrity, you know that sort of thing.

Moreover, the participants described how the enhanced respect and subsequent positive perception that this gave them about their colleagues had motivated them to engage with and foster their working relationship with these colleagues. Participant 9 described how the values and morals that were reflected within some of his colleague's personal social media content was something that resonated strongly with him and subsequently enhanced his respect for these colleagues. Participant 9 went on to explain how this personal social media content had fostered the working relationships that he had with these colleagues by stating:

> When I see colleagues posting about their families because majority of times when you see posts, it's about how their families are and how many kids they have. That shows that on weekends they probably go out on picnics or whatever with their family. It shows that they have good family values and morals, and you know, someone who has those morals automatically for some reason, just seems like the right person, they give you a sense of loyalty and respect. This is someone you'd want in a company because at the end of the day in a company they become sort of like your family. You want people who are willing to go the extra mile for the company as well as for their family

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> and if they are able to do that at home it gives you a good feeling that they will be able to do that in their work role.

According to Goffman's dramaturgical model of impression management, the actor should separate their backstage forms of self-presentation from their frontstage performances (Goffman, 1959). The theory states that when the actor is exposing backstage information within their frontstage performance it can disrupt the impression that they are trying to impose on their audience (Aspling, 2011; Goffman, 2019; Hassenzahl & Uhde, 2021; Ollier-Malaterre, 2019; Roderick, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2016). Contrary to theory, the findings suggest that in some instances the participants were positively influenced by their colleagues backstage forms of self-representation on social media. Goffman's dramaturgical approach to impression management would find it inappropriate for actors to disclose personal information among an audience that includes professional colleagues as this would be considered backstage forms of self-presentation (Aspling, 2011; Goffman, 1959; Hassenzahl & Uhde, 2021; Ollier-Malaterre, 2019; Roderick, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2016). However, four participants felt that their respect for their colleagues increased following their exposure to their colleagues' personal social media content which they found to be admirable and morally aligned.

These findings expand on the foundations of Goffman's dramaturgical approach to impression management as the actors were able to positively influence their online audience's impression of them using the information that they disclosed in their online performance on social media. Consistent with the theory, the findings suggest that social media can facilitate professional online and offline relationships among colleagues provided that the actors are effectively managing their online performances to include favourable, professional frontstage forms of self-representation. Contrastingly, the findings suggest that the actor's disclosure of certain

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personal information among online audiences that include their professional contacts can have its benefits if it is well received.

4.4 Cultural insight

Goffman's dramaturgical approach to impression management describes how favourable impression management within a workplace context are dependent on the actor's ability to assimilate their behaviours with the expectations and norms within that social context (Goffman, 1959). However, this is hard to navigate within a South African workplace context in which a diverse range of professionals from different cultural backgrounds co-exist. The complexity of the South African workplace introduces a range of challenges for the actors in relation to understanding what cultural forms of expression would constitute their backstage and frontstage forms of self-representation. This makes it hard for professionals in the South African workplace to navigate their performances in terms of what cultural forms of self-expression to include in their frontstage performance and what to keep hidden in their backstage performances. This complexity is intensified on social media where the boundaries between the performers backstage and frontstage have become blurred (Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre, 2019; Ollier-Malaterre, 2022; Roderick, 2021). As a result, the social cues that normally guide the performer's ability to gauge what cultural information they need to keep private and what they can disclose becomes ambiguous among an online audience of personal and professional contacts (Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre, 2019; Ollier-Malaterre, 2022; Roderick, 2021).

Contrary to Goffman's dramaturgical approach to impression management, the findings indicate that the participants enjoyed and sought out their colleagues' backstage performances in relation to their cultural forms of self-representation. The data revealed that the participants'

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exposure to their colleagues' social media content increased their ability to understand and relate to their colleagues, particularly from a religious cultural point of view. The findings indicate that eight participants enjoyed being exposed to their colleagues' social media content that was cultural in nature for two reasons. Firstly, the participants appreciated the cultural insight that they acquired from their colleagues' social media content. This cultural insight allowed the participants to foster effective working relationships based on their improved ability to understand, relate to and interact with their colleagues. Secondly, the participants liked to use the cultural insight that they had acquired from their colleagues' social media content to learn more about and appreciate the differences and diversity that exists among their colleagues.

Five of the participants highlighted how being exposed to their colleagues' social media content that was cultural in nature be it similar to or different to that of their own culture has helped them understand, relate to and foster more effective relationships with these colleagues.

Participant 1 highlighted this sentiment by describing how her exposure to her colleagues' cultural social media content has helped her relate to this colleague on a deeper level despite their different religious beliefs and practices.

Participant 1 explained:

> I've got a friend, she's Indian and she's Hindu. I mean, we often talk about when we can go through hard times, when our project doesn't go well and we relate to our lives, what are the hardships in our lives. She'll relate to her God, her Hindu God and on her social page, she'll put the Hindu goddess, which is the Goddess of the Sun, the moon and the nature and she will comment on it, and I'll also comment on it. But even though we don't have the same beliefs in the same outcomes, we don't have the same religion, we don't have the same gods and we don't have the same lifestyle at all. But we have the

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> same values of what we want and how we want to achieve it. I can relate to her because she's got enough integrity to the way she lives and the values in her life. These are the same to the ones that I have but she's in a completely different community of life and yet when she does post those things, I can relate to them even though it's not my religion. But the quotes and the motivational statements still fit into my life, I can relate.

Participant 2 described how she enjoyed being exposed to her colleagues' cultural social media content that was both similar and different to her own culture as it made her feel more connected to these colleagues. The participant highlighted how discovering cultural similarities between herself and her colleagues on social media has positively influenced her perception of these colleagues by explaining:

> If it's similar cultures. The impact is that you feel like you're doing the same thing and you can relate to the person" and later added "similarities, influences me in a way where I feel like we have the same thought pattern, we're doing the same thing and a friendlier sort of thing.

Participant 2 also discussed how discovering cultural differences between herself and her colleagues on social media has helped her form a new and more accurately informed impression of her colleagues.

Participant 2 explained:

> When it's different cultures and they do their own sort of things in a different way. It's nice to see as well because it's different and you get to learn a different impression and you get to see them in a different light. So I feel like being exposed to both similarities and differences, it's a good thing.

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In addition to this, Participant 2 explained how this exposure to this cultural insight about her colleagues on social media had a positive influence on her perception of these colleagues and her relationship with them. The participant stated that:

> It definitely makes me feel closer, even if it's something different because I like to learn about new and different cultures. So that curiosity makes me feel like, okay, I can ask them about it afterwards and it makes you feel closer to them.

Similarly, Participant 10 explained how being exposed to her colleague's social media content gave her a positive perception of this colleague because she related to her religious beliefs. Participant 10 described "one person posted something about Jesus, and I thought oh nice that you're a Christian. That would be relatable and nice for me because I'm also Christian so that would be a positive thing".

Participant 11 and 12 described how the cultural insight that they had gained from their colleagues' social media content has helped them foster more effective professional and personal relationships with these colleagues. Participant 11 felt that social media enabled him to relate to and interact with his colleagues better because of the cultural insight that he gained from their social media posts. The participant explained:

> It's just a guideline so you know not to put upon the person that stuff that they don't do. You know, if I see that you're heavily religious in your posts and stuff like that, I'm not going to come at you about conspiracy theories and stuff like that. I suppose, yeah, that does influence how I interact with you. Yeah, more information does influence how we interact with each other, so people should post more so that we can know more about you.

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In a similar way, Participant 12 spoke about how social media has enabled him to gain greater insight and understanding into his colleagues' cultural beliefs and practices. The participant highlighted how this insight has helped him foster an effective personal and professional relationship with his colleague by explaining:

> I guess it goes back to just understanding a person just because I don't believe what you believe, and it just helps me guide conversations around that. So, I have a colleague who is openly Muslim and Muslims generally don't drink. So that helped me guide those interactions because if I wanted to go have a personal experience with this friend, for example, I wouldn't invite her to go for drinks. I would know her beliefs and practices because I have seen what she posts, and she wouldn't have to tell me.

The findings agree with the literature which highlights how professionals are increasingly using the information that they can acquire about their colleagues from their social media content to effectively develop and maintain their working relationships (Aspling, 2011; Hasib, 2009; Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2019; Schmidt et al., 2016). Swayer (2011) elaborated on the significant impact that social media had in promoting "cultural competence"; the ability to understand, communicate and interact ethically and effectively in personal and professional intercultural contexts. In line with the literature, the findings suggest that the participants exposure to their colleagues' cultural social media content has allowed them to gain cultural competence. This has allowed these five participants to interact with their colleagues effectively by understanding and respecting their different cultural norms and values. These findings are significant as they suggest that the backstage forms of cultural self-representation which professionals often hide from their frontstage performances at work can have a positive influence on their relationships with these colleagues.

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In a different way, three of the participants described how they enjoyed being exposed to their colleagues' social media content that was cultural in nature because it allowed them to learn more about and appreciate their colleagues' differences and diversity.

Participant 3 explained how he appreciates when his colleagues share information about their cultural beliefs on social media because he works with people from a diverse range of cultures which he always tries to understand. Participant 3 described how he uses the information within this social media content to learn about and attain a more in-depth understanding about his colleagues' differences and diversity. Participant 3 highlighted this when he said:

> I have contact with people from a variety of cultures. I embrace all cultures; I learn from all cultures, and I appreciate learning from all cultures. So, cultural content is not a defining factor in my opinion of colleagues or people. I don't believe that anyone's culture is superior or inferior to any of the others. So, I see it as a learning example, that you getting to know how different people have a different outlook in life based on their beliefs, based on their religion, based on their upbringing and when you dive deep into it, you realise that cultures are brought about in the manner in which that society needed to do things in order to survive and grow as a community and as an individual. That is always fascinating, and one always wants to learn from those.

Participant 6 agreed with the previous participants statement and explained how she enjoyed learning about her colleagues' different cultural beliefs and practices through their social media content. Participant 6 said:

> I tend to be accepting and open to any cultural differences. You know, I do have friends from all different ages, different cultures and I like it actually and I'm open to it. I like seeing the different ways in which people celebrate for example, their kids' birthdays or weddings and that sort of thing.

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In a similar way, Participant 9 also liked being exposed to his colleagues' social media content about their cultural beliefs and practices on social media. Participant 9 highlighted how social media had allowed him to gain a more in-depth understanding about the different cultures that exist among his colleagues by stating:

> I'm interested in some of the cultures that I have in the workplace and yes, we'll chat about it. You know, on WhatsApp, if I've seen someone's wedding and it's a cultural wedding and it's different to what I'm used to, we'll chat about it. However, I wouldn't say that it influences me in any way, it's more of an interest and just, you know, just gaining more understanding on how other cultures work.

These findings expand on the literature, which discusses how professionals are increasingly using social media to express and acquire knowledge about the different cultural opinions and perspectives that exist (Aspling, 2011; Hasib, 2009; Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2019; Schmidt et al., 2016; Swayer, 2011). Swayer (2011) discusses how social media has advanced online engagement with cultural information and strengthened understanding of different viewpoints. The blurring of an individual's backstage and frontstage on social media has advocated intercultural connectedness and dialogue which has also advanced intercultural harmony and understanding (Swayer, 2011). The participants' accounts concur with the literature in that they have used their colleagues' cultural social media content to understand and remain cognisant of the cultural differences that exist within their professional context.

The findings suggest that social media enables these participants to gain a more in-depth understanding about their colleagues' cultural differences. This cultural insight allows the participants to have more effective working relationships as it enables the participants to

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interact with their colleagues in a way that is informed by and respects their colleagues' cultural differences. These findings contrast with Goffman's approach to impression management in that the backstage forms of cultural self-representation which the actor is encouraged to hide from their professional frontstage performances often have a positive impact on the audience's perception of their colleagues. Additionally, the increased sense of understanding that this cultural insight encourages among the actors and their professional audience has had a positive impact on their relationships.

4.5 Interactional insight

Goffman's dramaturgical approach to impression management emphasises the importance of the actor's ability to strategically exclude their backstage, personal forms of self-representation from their frontstage performances at work. The literature found that social media has impeded the actor's ability to effectively manage the desirable impression that they are attempting to create because of the backstage forms of self-representation that they can disclose among their professional audiences on social media. In contrast, the findings indicate that the participants seem to be leveraging their colleagues' backstage and frontstage forms of self-representation on social media to positively influence their colleagues' impression of them. The data suggests that these professional contacts are strategically using the information that they were able obtain from their colleagues' backstage and frontstage performances on social media to foster their offline relationships with these colleagues. Six of the participants explained how social media enabled them to acquire useful insight about their colleagues which they used to have more effective interactions and subsequent relationships with these colleagues. These participants described how they were able to gain a better understanding of their colleagues and how to interact more effectively with them based on the insight that they had obtained about them on social media content.

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Two of the participants found that they were able to use their colleagues' social media content to effectively guide their interactions with these colleagues based on the new interactional insight and understanding that they had gained. Participant 5 described how he strategically uses the information that his colleagues share on social media to build a model of these colleagues that can help him understand them better. Participant 5 explained how this insight has helped him develop effective working relationships with his colleagues by improving his ability to interact with and influence them. The participant stated that:

> If someone is a Facebook friend of mine and also a colleague. I might learn about them through their social media posts but that is just because I want to get a better understanding of how this person operates so that I can interact with him at work in a certain way, so that I can influence them a certain way. But it's always in the context of okay, so I need to know what your likes and your dislikes are, so that I can build a rapport with you quickly. It's not because I'm going to be your friend or envision your life or something like that. It's just always strictly business. Yeah, so you just happen to make it easy for me to figure you out because you are posting personal stuff and what's going on in your life through social media. I'm just the person who is going to use that information to build a model of you.

Participant 12 also described how being exposed to his colleagues' information on social media has given him more insight about these colleagues which has effectively helped him navigate his interactions with them. Participant 12 believed that his exposure to his colleagues' social media content has had a positive influence on his working relationships with these colleagues by stating that*:*

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> I think all around it would be good, well the net effect would be positive because you have a greater sense of the type of person that you're working with. Like I was saying, if you know what would be triggers for them, you would avoid them and you would already know what these triggers are before I guess misspeaking.

Participant 12 reiterated this by highlighting that, “It gives me a type of reference that I can use to effectively engage with people on a professional level.”

The findings concur with the literature which found that professionals are ever more motivated to use social media to build and strengthen their professional relationships (Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre, 2022; Schmidt et al., 2016). This research expands on the literature as it describes how professional audiences are tactfully using their access to their colleagues’ backstage and frontstage forms of self-representation on social media to positively influence the actor’s impression of them. The data revealed that the participants are using the interactional insight that they gained from their colleagues’ social media content to manage their colleagues’ impression of them and fostering their relationship with these colleagues.

Four of the participants discussed how they were able to use the insight that they had gained about their colleagues from their social media content as a conversation starter. The participants described how their colleagues’ social media content had provided them with insight that they were able to use to broaden their engagements with these colleagues. The data reveals that these participants used the interactional insight that they had gained from their colleagues’ social media content to foster their relationship with them.

Participant 7 found that her exposure to her colleagues’ social media content had influenced her relationship with her colleagues in the sense that “we probably have a little bit

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more to talk about, so more effective interactions". Later, Participant 7 expanded on this sentiment by explaining:

> If I browse and see something funny that you've posted, I'll probably post a laughing emoji and when I see you say, oh, that was funny, or that really got me thinking. So, it just does, you know, widen up engagement just a little bit more.

Participant 8 and 10 both agreed that their exposure to their colleagues' social media content had provided them with useful insight about their colleagues. The participants felt that the interactional insight that they had learned from their colleagues' social media content had also helped them interact with and develop their relationships with them. Participant 8 highlighted this by explaining, "It gives me an opportunity to perhaps engage with them on a mutual topic that enhances the relationships". Participant 10 reiterated this sentiment by stating, "It helps you with that small talk you need to get through day by day or like building relationships with people and getting to know them better."

Furthermore, Participant 13 also revealed how the insight that he gained from his colleagues' social media content was a useful conversation starter. Participant 13 explained how this interactional insight had enabled him to broaden his engagements with his colleagues by stating that:

> As with certain posts, you can see what they like, and it does act as a conversation starter. In the sense that you can say "hey, did you see that post" or "I see you were at this place this weekend, did you enjoy it?"

This finding expands on the literature which found that professionals were motivated to use social media to connect with their professional contacts because it effectively promotes online and offline communication (Aspling, 2011; Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre, 2022; Schmidt et al.,

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2016). Aspling (2011) found that individuals use Facebook to connect with their colleagues as they see it as an effective communication tool. The participants leveraged the insight that they had acquired about their colleagues from their backstage and frontstage forms of self-representation on social media content to develop rapport with these colleagues. The data indicates that these participants' exposure to their colleagues' social media content was useful in that it provided them with interactional insight that helped them foster effective working relationships with these colleagues.

The findings suggest that the participants use the insight that they have obtained from their colleagues' backstage and frontstage forms of self-representation online to their advantage in persuading their colleagues of their favourable character. The participants seem to be using this interactional insight to help them maintain a positive impression among their colleagues and to maintain effective working relationships with them. This contradicts Goffman's dramaturgical approach as these participants who are "the audience" are using the information that their colleagues or "the actors" are presenting to them on social media to positively influence their colleagues, "the actors", impression of them. Therefore, the "audience" was able to use the interactional insight that they acquired from the "actors" social media content to tailor their frontstage performances with the "actor" and develop their relationships with them. These participants explained how they used their colleagues' backstage and frontstage forms of self-representation on social media to guide their interactions and conversations with their colleagues as a means of developing their working relationships.

4.6 The audience's motive for self-development

Goffman's dramaturgical approach to impression emphasises that people take on certain socially acceptable roles to control the impression they give others (Goffman, 1959).

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This is significant within traditional workplaces whereby impression management is critical for the professional employee's success in this context (Del Riego et al., 2012;Hasib, 2009; Kien, 2015; Schmidt et al., 2016). Professional workplaces often demand that the professional "actors" must tailor their performances to include only frontstage forms of self-representation often characterised by competence, integrity, and discretion (Del Riego et al., 2012; Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Roderick, 2020). Professionals are using social media to strategically establish and develop their relationships with their professional contacts that present themselves to be advantageous contacts that can benefit them professionally (Del Riego et al., 2012; Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Roderick, 2020). The literature found that professional audiences were motivated to connect with their colleagues when they shared professionally valuable content on social media (Del Riego et al., 2012; Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Roderick, 2020).

The findings align with the literature as the participants' exposure to their colleagues' frontstage forms of self-representation on social media had a positive influence on their perception of their colleagues and motivated them to develop their relationship with these colleagues. Three of the participants described how they like to use social media to increase their exposure to and engagement with their colleagues who they perceive to be valuable contacts within their organisation or industry. These participants use social media to broaden their engagement with these colleagues to ensure that they are continuously exposed to the valuable industry insight that they share on social media. The participants also explained how they found their continued engagement with these colleagues and their social media content to be beneficial for their own professional self-development.

Participant 3 highlighted this sentiment by stating:

> I choose whether I want to be associated with a person by the way they think, behave and act and in a manner that can bring upliftment to myself. Then, I will choose to stay

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> engaged with that person, be it on a personal level of engagement or on social media" and went on to explain "any social media posts that benefit the community at large or the industry in which we operate, I will look at and embrace and will want to be exposed to these people.

Moreover, Participant 3 gave an example of how his perception of a fellow colleague was positively influenced by their post on social media about his innovative achievements in their industry. The participant explained how he was motivated to stay engaged with and learn from this colleague after seeing the valuable industry insight that he was sharing on social media. Participant 3 clarified:

> I have had colleagues that have posted achievements that they have had by using new techniques in a sale environment or a development environment and I like to learn from it and try to emulate it especially if I find that it is something new and valuable to learn from.

Similarly, Participant 11 was motivated to broaden his exposure to and engagement with his colleagues' social media content when it contained valuable industry insight that allowed him to stay up to date with the latest projects. The participant highlighted that he liked to stay engaged with his colleagues who were sharing valuable work-related content on social media and stated that:

> If it's work-related, it's welcomed in that there may be information that I need to know as to what's going on workwise. Either I now need to action something or now I need to ask questions and stuff like that.

The participant elaborated on this by saying:

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> If it's about a new project, a new client then great. I might just like it, share it and stuff like that. If it's about a client that I was already busy with and its information that I didn't have then great because there's more information that I have access to.

These findings align with the literature that indicated that professionals are motivated to connect with their colleagues based on the "social capital" that they are seen to provide on social media (Del Riego et al., 2020; Hasib, 2009 Schmidt et al., 2016). Schmidt (2016) described "social capital" as the value that one's professional contacts can add to their social network in the form of information, ideas, and support. Hasib (2019) also found that social media allows for valuable knowledge and experience sharing among professional contacts. Hasib (2009) and Kien (2015) both highlight how professionals use social media to establish and develop their relationships with their colleagues that they perceive to be beneficial professional contacts. This expands on this literature as the participants explained that they use social media to connect with colleagues whose social media content left them with the impression that they can provide them with social capital that promotes their professional self-development.

In a different way, Participant 8 described how she liked to stay exposed to and engaged with her colleagues who were using their social media to share their successes in the industry. The participant discussed how she liked to promote their work on her social media to advantage these colleagues and herself via association. Participant 8 highlighted how seeing her colleagues post about their work achievements on social media enhanced her perception of them and her enthusiasm to engage with these colleagues by explaining:

> For me it is important because it's nice to know what they're busy with and if I can promote their work and their thinking in my network, I take great pride in that, you

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> know, almost like by association. If somebody posts a paper or something, then I like to promote that.

In a similar way, Participant 9 explained how seeing his colleagues post about their achievements at work had motivated him to increase his exposure to and engagement with these colleagues. The participant described how being exposed to his colleagues' posts about their successes at work had inspired him to work on his own self-development by stating that:

> It's a good thing. You know, when you see posts about their achievements and the just their work ethic, etcetera. I believe it's inspiring to see and you know it could lead to other opportunities, you never know who's looking at your posts. You could have something that someone needs or wants, you might have a certain skill that someone is looking for or requires. And just by posting your work achievements, things like that you could expose yourself to new opportunities.

Moreover, Participant 9 implied that he was motivated by the potential opportunities for self-development that might come from his continued exposure to and association with these colleagues, who he now considered to be valuable connections within his industry.

The findings support the literature which explores how professional employees are interested in using social media to strengthen their connections with like-minded professionals that are sharing their successes and are valuable associations (Hasib, 2009; Del Riego et al., 2012; Kien 2015; Schmidt et al., 2016). In accordance with Schmidt et al. (2016) the findings suggest that professional employees are using social media to influence their professional audience's impression of them by sharing information about their professional skills, knowledge and competencies with the goal of opening themselves up to opportunities for career development. Del Riego (2012) found that millennials are increasingly open to engaging with

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high executives on social media as they believe that this will open them up to greater opportunities for engagement that can lead to their professional career development.

The data aligns with the literature as it reveals that the participants were able to develop a positive perception of their colleagues when they believed that these colleagues' social media content was providing them with valuable industry insight. Furthermore, the participants' motivation to foster their relationship with their colleagues was based on the potential self-development that they associated with their continued exposure to and engagement with these colleagues on social media. These findings align with Goffman's dramaturgical approach to impression management in that these participants were able to develop a positive perception of their colleagues as a result of these colleagues' ability to effectively manage their frontstage forms of self-representation. This reveals that the participants were more motivated to foster a working relationship with their colleagues when they were able to maintain a professionally desirable form of frontstage self-representation on social media.

4.7 Negative Online and Real-life Interactions

The findings suggest that the professional participants' exposure to their colleagues negatively perceived social media content had the potential to create negative spill over onto their relationships with these colleagues in real life. Social media is increasingly seen to have a negative impact on professional employees' relationships with their colleagues because of the negative impression that their colleagues professionally inappropriate social media content had left them with (Aspling, 2011; Hasib, 2009; Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022). In accordance with Goffman's dramaturgical model, the findings suggest that the mixing of the actors' personal and professional audiences on social media has increased the potential risk that the professional actor will disclose unfavourable backstage forms of self-representation

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during their online performances (Aspling, 2011; Hasib, 2009; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022). The risk of exposing the actor's backstage forms of self-representation on social media is that this content can discredit, disrupt or destroy the credible impression that their online and offline frontstage performances have cultivated among their professional audience (Aspling, 2011; Hasib, 2009; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022). The majority of the participants suggested that their exposure to their colleagues professionally inappropriate social media content has had a negative ripple effect on their perception of these colleagues and their relationship with them in real life.

The participants described how having access to their colleagues' backstage forms of self-representation on social media that they perceived to be unfavourable in nature has often made them reluctant to engage with these colleagues beyond their working context. These participants cited that this negative online and real-life interaction was often associated with their colleagues' social media content that was characterised by explicitly rude content, offensive content, racist content, sexist content, negative content about the Covid-19 pandemic, adverse professional content, and overtly personal content. Many of the participants explained how their perception of their colleagues was negatively impacted by their inappropriate management of their social media content and, as a result, their inability to create an equally favourable impression among both their personal and professional audiences on social media.

The sub-themes of negative online and real-life interactions are adverse impression management and reduced sense of respect for colleagues which will be discussed in relation to discredited professionalism and reduced sense of personal respect for colleagues. The sub-themes will be explored below using accounts from the participants' interviews and examined in relation to the first two research questions.

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4.8 Adverse impression management on social media

The majority of the participants mentioned that there were certain personal and professional forms of online self-presentation which they found to be disreputable and unacceptable for a multi-contextual audience of professional and personal contacts on social media. These findings support Goffman's dramaturgical approach to impression management and expand on the negative impact that can come from the actor's inability to separate their backstage forms of self-representation from their frontstage performances at work (Goffman, 1959). The literature and findings suggest that social media has obscured the actors' ability to gauge what information should be categorised into their backstage and frontstage forms of self-representation among a mixed audience of professional and personal contacts on social media (Aspling, 2011; Hasib, 2009; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Schmidt et al., 2016). The professional audience is often left with a negative impression of the actor when their backstage forms of self-representation in a professional context are brought into their frontstage performances on social media (Aspling, 2011; Hasib, 2009; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Schmidt et al., 2016). Eleven of the participants did not approve of their colleagues' social media content when the level of personal and professional information that they shared was not equally appropriate for their personal and professional audiences. These participants explained how their perception of their colleagues and subsequently their relationship with these colleagues were negatively influenced by the exposure to their professionally inappropriate social media content.

Six of the participants explained how their perceptions of their colleagues were negatively influenced by their exposure to their social media content which they found to be overly personal and inappropriate. Participant 1 highlighted how he interpreted his colleagues' overtly personal content as backstage forms of self-representation on social media. The

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participant described his disapproval towards his colleagues' backstage performances by saying, "I don't always appreciate the level of information that they put online about their personal lives. So, I'll see it, but I won't comment on it because I might not be in favour of it".

Likewise, Participant 3 felt that his colleagues' personal matters were inappropriate to include in their online performances on social media. Participant 3 voiced his disapproval towards his colleagues sharing their backstage information on social media by stating "I don't approve of that at all, personal matters should be kept out of social media platforms. I believe personal matters should remain personal, so I don't approve of that". Participant 5 went as far as to describe how his perception of his colleagues were negatively influenced by his continuous exposure to content about their personal lives on social media. Participant 5 explained that "if the person posts a lot about their social life, I think that it's childish."

These findings reveal that the participants as the audience expect their colleagues as actors to manage the personal information that they disclose on social media to ensure that it is appropriate for both their professional and personal contexts. Participant 6 supported this idea when she explained:

> If somebody is not prepared to share that information in a discussion with them. Well then, I don't feel comfortable seeing this on their social media platforms and seeing information that they're not naturally sharing with us in the work environment.

This concurs with the literature which found that professionals are more inclined to disclose information about their private lives on social media which is inappropriate for their professional audience (Aspling, 2011; Hasib, 2009; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022). Similar to Goffman's dramaturgical approach to impression management, the participants' impression of their colleagues was disrupted by their exposure to their backstage forms of self-representation

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on social media (Aspling, 2011; Goffman, 1959; Hasib, 2009; Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Schmidt et al., 2016).

The participants indicate that there seems to be a negative interaction between their exposure to their colleagues' backstage forms of self-representation on social media and their interactions with them in real life. The findings revealed that the participants exposure to their colleagues' unfavourable social media content about their personal lives can have a negative impact on how they perceive these colleagues and subsequently their willingness to foster a relationship with them. Five of the participants described certain instances where their perception of their colleagues was negatively influenced by their overtly personal social media content and how this often had an adverse impact on their relationship with these colleagues. Participant 12 explained:

> I could imagine where some people, for example, have particular views that I may not particularly agree with but because it's their personal life and I am a colleague. You don't really mix the two, if you're not already in that space. So just understanding a person's views might kind of hinder or slow down working relationships.

Therefore, Participant 12 felt that his exposure to his colleague's social media content about their personal views could have a negative influence on his perception of and subsequent working relationships with his colleagues. Whereas Participant 5 was not comfortable with having access to detailed information about his colleague's personal lives on social media. Participant 5 explained that:

> If the person is going through a divorce, the whole world does not need to know the details about your ex-wife or what's going on there. So, that's something that will cause me to unfriend you. That's not the kind of information that's useful to me.

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The participant suggested that being exposed to his colleagues' backstage performances on social media had damaged his impression of this colleague and inhibited their online and real-life relationship. This could potentially have an impact on the participant's working relationship with these colleagues as he previously mentioned using the information that he learned about his colleagues on social media to develop rapport with them.

In a different way, Participant 2 explained how her relationships with her colleagues were negatively impacted by her exposure to their inappropriate personal social media content. Participant 2 highlighted how her future interactions with these colleagues had become uncomfortable as result of the adverse impact that their unprofessional posts have had on her perception of them.

Participant 2 stated that:

> I have seen some colleagues that have posted nude photos and things like that. So, it's just strange to see, I feel like it's a bit embarrassing when you try to talk to them, and you've just seen something really crazy like that.

This aligns with Goffman's dramaturgical model which discusses how the audience will experience discomfort when they are exposed to the actor's backstage forms of self-representation that conflicts with the impression that they had developed about them from their frontstage performances at work (Aspling, 2011; Goffman, 1959; Schmidt et al., 2016).

Contrary to the sub-theme of cultural insight that was discussed earlier in this chapter, two participants cited feeling uncomfortable when they were exposed to certain information about their colleagues' different religious beliefs and practices on social media. Participant 10

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explained how she could potentially develop a negative perception of her colleagues after being exposed to detailed posts about their different religious beliefs and practices on social media.

Participant 10 elucidated that:

> I'm just very serious about religion and I don't really tolerate other religions. It's just I don't like it when people, I don't know how to say this without sounding ugly… If I see a post of, you know, like some cultures they worship statues or things with many heads. I don't want to see those things. I think that's weird. That's very cultish. No, thank you. I don't want to see things about ancestors and castration rituals, I just don't want to see weird things that I think are very dodgy and almost offensive to me. Not offensive to me, but I just don't like seeing that sort of stuff. It makes me not want to have any sort of relationship with them.

Although, Participant 10 previously mentioned that she had developed a positive perception of her colleague and wanted to foster a relationship with them after being exposed to their social media content about their shared religious beliefs and practices. Participant 10 also revealed that seeing her colleagues sharing detailed information about their diverse religious beliefs on social media could potentially have an adverse impact on her perception of these colleagues so much so that she would avoid having any relationship with them.

Similarly, Participant 7 described being open-minded when it came to seeing information about his colleagues' different cultural beliefs and practices on social media. Participant 7 also explained that if he took offense to any of his colleagues' social media content that was cultural in nature, he would remove them from his social media platforms. Participant 7 highlighted the negative impact that this type of social media content could have on his perception of his colleagues and his subsequent relationship with them by saying:

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> No I have a very open mind. If I see things I don't agree with, like I said, it depends on whether I find it interesting. If I find it offensive and I feel like this person obviously has a problem, then I will unfriend the person.

This finding is significant as it suggests that in some instances cultural posts can be beneficial for colleagues' relationships while there are other instances when sharing cultural information on social media can have negative implications for these relationships. Once more showing the two-way influence that the participants' exposure to their colleagues' social media content can have on their perception of these colleagues and their relationships with them in real life.

Additionally, the findings show that the participants also expect their colleagues to manage the impression that they are creating regarding the information that they share on social media about their work lives. The participants expect their colleagues to manage all the social media content that they share about their work lives and their personal lives to ensure that the content aligns with their frontstage forms of self-representation that are appropriate for such public online platforms. The data indicates that the participants found it disreputable and unacceptable for their colleagues to share any social media content that could have a negative impact on their organisation. These findings align with the notion of the "team" in Goffman's model, a set of individuals who work together to align and maintain a single performance based on the desirable conduct as defined by their social context (Goffman, 1959). The "team members" are reliant on one another's ability to maintain cooperation with the teams' frontstage performances as other team members' inability to align their frontstage conduct with the rest of the teams can destroy the whole team's performance (Goffman,1959). According to Goffman's model, the team relies on several preventative techniques to avoid disruptions to

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their performance, namely "dramaturgical loyalty", "dramaturgical discipline" and "dramaturgical circumspection" as discussed in the literature review.

The findings support Goffman's notion of the "team" as the participants suggest that they rely on their colleagues to present their organisation in a positive light on social media. The participants expect their team members to maintain their "dramaturgical discipline" and "dramaturgical loyalty" to the team's frontstage performance when performing online (Goffman, 1959). The data reveals that the participants rely on their colleagues as team members to manage the impression that they are creating about the organisation on social media by ensuring that the work-related information that they share online is always positive.

The majority of the participants emphasised that they would not tolerate any of their colleagues sharing any form of social media content that puts the organisation's reputation into disrepute. Five of the participants indicated how their perception of their colleagues were negatively affected by their inability to manage the professional information that they share on social media. These participants expect their colleagues to ensure that they are managing the professional impression that they are creating about themselves and by extension their organisation on social media. Participant 4 supported this when he explained how he felt about seeing posts about his colleagues' work lives on social media. Participant 4 indicated that, "As long as it's not impacting the image of the company negatively, I don't think I have a problem."

Participant 7 was okay with her colleagues posting about their work lives on social media but explained that:

> So long as you're not blatantly putting the organisation into disrepute by specifically saying, "oh, company X is like this and that or the company that I work for…". So long as it's light content. You know these days, we've got like memes that talk about work

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> life, integration, or balance. That's the norm. You know, when you really being disrespectful and painting the organisation in a bad light, I think for me that's a borderline that cannot be crossed.

Participant 9 agreed explaining "I prefer that it's positive because I don't believe in putting down, disgracing your company or anything like that. I don't believe in things like that."

In a similar way, Participant 10 explained that if colleagues post about their work lives, "they have to represent the company in a good way or in a positive light". Participant 11 emphasised his disapproval towards his colleagues sharing social media content that depicts the organisation in a negative light. Participant 11 highlighted that, "in a Scenario where someone is sharing negative stuff about work then that wouldn't be welcome". Participant 6 contradicted these participants to some extent as she felt that her colleagues should not post anything about their work lives on social media unless they are promoting the business. Participant 6 emphasised that:

> I can't say that I agree with people posting what's going on in their work life on their personal platforms because it's too open to the public. Unless, of course, if they're going to be saying nice things about the company. I think it should be consistent, they should not be talking about any issues or what's going on in their work life or to include the company name, unless it's for business promotional purposes. Yeah, in my opinion it should not be on those personal platforms.

These participants highlighted that they expect their colleagues to manage the professional information that they share online so that they can uphold the organisation's professional reputation on social media. These findings relate back to the negative interaction

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that social media can have on the professional employee's real-life interactions and relationships. The participants described how their perception of their colleagues would be negatively affected by their inability to represent themselves and the organisation in a positive light on social media. As a result, the participant's exposure to their colleagues' backstage forms of self-representation on social media can have a negative impact on their relationships with these colleagues in real life. Participant 3 emulated this when he explained what type of content was intolerable and would lead him to remove a colleague from his social media network. In addition to family matters, Participant 3 listed the following intolerable social media content, "bringing down the competitors, bringing down the opposition, airing out dirty laundry about other people be it a colleague or competitor, that type of behaviour."

Participant 10 highlighted the negative impact that their colleagues' professionally inappropriate social media content has had on their perception of these colleagues and future relationship with them. Participant 10 explained that:

> I've seen someone post something and they are always speaking badly about the company because they think you know that no one's going to see what they're saying. Well, no one important is going to see what they are saying. I think it's really negative and I don't know that their character is a bit weird.

The participant went on to explain how this had influenced her relationship with this colleague by saying "I probably wouldn't want to spend that much time with them anymore. In this instance, I would just try keep it professional". All the above participants mentioned that they would not tolerate their colleagues' professionally inappropriate social media content. The participants' perception of their colleagues was negatively impacted by the exposure to their social media content that disrupted the organisations "team" performance. The participants

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indicated that they did not feel comfortable fostering their relationship with their colleagues who were unable to remain dramaturgically disciplined and loyal.

The participants stress that their colleagues need to maintain the impression that they have created in their professional context on social media by managing their professional and personal forms of self-representation to match these frontstage performances. These findings conform with Goffman's dramaturgical model as they suggest that the participants want their colleagues to treat social media as a frontstage performance where they seek to create a desirable impression that is appropriate for both their personal and professional audiences. Additionally, the participants expect their colleagues to align their frontstage performances with the other team members in their organisation who seek to seek to persuade their public online audience of their organisation's credible stature (Goffman, 1959). Consequently, the participants felt that their colleagues' inability to manage their social media content for a multi-contextual audience could have a negative impact on how they are perceived and how the participants interact with these colleagues in real life.

4.9 Reduced sense of respect for colleagues

This sub-theme namely a reduced sense of respect for colleagues is intricately linked to and largely a result of the previous sub-theme of adverse impression management on social media. The rise of social media use among professional employees has introduced challenges for these actors when attempting to navigate their frontstage and backstage performances across multiple contexts and audiences (Aspling, 2011; Del Riego et al., 2012; Schmidt et al., 2016; Swayer, 2011). In accordance with Goffman's dramaturgical model, professionals are ever more expected to use consistent frontstage forms of self-representation among both their online and offline audiences to ensure that there is no conflict between the impression that the

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actor is creating online and, in their workplace, (Aspling, 2011; Del Riego et al., 2012; Goffman, 1959; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Swayer, 2011). The participants indicated that there were certain personal and professional forms of online self-presentation that they found inappropriate and, as a result, this had a negative impact on their respect for these colleagues at both a professional and personal level. The findings indicate that the participants' sense of respect for their colleagues was negatively influenced by the adverse impression that backstage forms of self-representation had given them about these colleagues. Eleven of the participants have described how this negative exposure has reduced their sense of respect for their colleagues and limited their willingness to have a relationship with these colleagues in future.

4.9.1 Discredited professionalism

The growing transparency that social media has encouraged across multiple life contexts has complicated professional employees ability to separate their role as a company representative from their backstage performances (Aspling, 2011; Del Riego et al., 2012; Schmidt et al, 2016; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Steinfield et al., 2012; Swayer, 2011).As a result, today's professional employees' are representatives of their organisations in all areas of their life and are expected to align their conduct with professionalism in both their front and backstage performances be it online or in real life (Aspling, 2011; Del Riego et al., 2012; Schmidt et al, 2016; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Steinfield et al., 2012; Swayer, 2011). The findings concur with Goffman's dramaturgical model in that the participants' exposure to their colleagues' backstage performances on social media have influenced them to discredit the professional impression and respect that they had for these colleagues. Eight of the participants discussed how the professional impression that they had of their colleagues became discredited following their exposure to their professionally inappropriate social media content. The participants

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explained how their perception of their colleagues as trusted professionals was negatively influenced when they were exposed to their backstage forms of self-representation on social media that featured matters reserved for the workplace, reputationally damaging content and matters that conflict with their professional role commitments. The participants indicate that there seems to be a negative interaction between their exposure to their colleagues' professionally inappropriate social media content and their ability to respect, trust and maintain professional relationships with these colleagues in real life.

Three of the participants cited experiencing a reduced sense of respect for their colleagues after seeing their colleagues sharing professionally privileged information on social media that they felt was not appropriate for a public audience. The participants mentioned that they did not agree with their colleagues sharing content about work-related matters and issues on social media platforms. The participants described how being exposed to this content left them with an unprofessional perception of their colleagues and made them question their respect for these colleagues going forward. Participant 8 explained how her perception of her colleague was negatively influenced by the backstage information that they shared about work-related matters within their frontstage performances on social media. The participant described how this had caused her to discredit her colleagues' professionalism by explaining that:

> I've also had colleagues who you know have slated decisions and stuff on social media about the organisation and about other colleagues. That makes me sad and makes me regard them as less than professional, you know, that they've taken to the social media to air their grievances.

Participant 1 and 11 both gave detailed examples about how their exposure to their colleagues' unprofessional social media content had negatively influenced their relationships

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with them in real life. The participants also emphasised the negative effect that their colleagues' inappropriate social media content had on their professional reputation and relationships within their organisations. Participant 1 gave an example of this by stating:

> I had a colleague that had gone on social media, on Facebook. She posted a comment about our senior management that was quite horrible, she didn't use his name but the scenario that she commented on, we all knew who she was talking about.

The participant elaborated further by saying:

> She wasn't happy how certain outcomes had turned out with the manager. So, she didn't tell him, she just put it on Facebook. That was horrible and I just thought that's not you so why do you do that. She didn't stick around at the company for very long after that, but it wasn't a very nice experience.

The participant went on to explain how her exposure to her colleagues' backstage forms of self-representation on social media has had a negative impact on her respect for this colleague as a professional and their subsequent relationship going forward. Participant 1 revealed that her relationship with this colleague changed because of the damage that their professionally inappropriate social media content has done to her impression of them.

The participant clarified:

> So it became more work-related where I had to participate with her at work in projects. But it was just all-around work, we never had any social interactions because I could see that she might have taken some social comment and turn it onto a social media splash, like she did with our manager. So yes, it did change my perception even though it happened once. She left eventually; she wasn't very favourable.

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The participant emphasised that her exposure to her colleagues' unfavourable social media content did influence her interactions with this colleague in real life by justifying, "So it definitely does influence the outcome of how I dealt with that person going forward".

Similarly, Participant 11 also explained how his exposure to his colleagues' inappropriate social media content about their workplace issues has had a negative influence on his and his fellow colleague's professional impression of this colleague. The participant explained how his exposure to his colleagues' unprofessional backstage conduct on social media had negatively impacted his ability to respect and trust this colleague as a professional.

Participant 11 described:

> One of our colleagues a while ago, had an issue with the boss or the boss had to take them on for not doing certain objectives that were assigned to them. They went and vented on social media about that. Obviously, word got to the boss and when they got back to the office, they were really just written off as a person that can be trusted. And whenever they were dealt with, it had to be mentioned or made clear that this is not an outside situation, it's work-related.

In addition to this, Participant 11 gave a personal example of how his personal relationship with his colleague had ended after they had shared inappropriate information about their work-related issues on social media. Participant 11 has described how his personal and professional relationship with his colleague was negatively impacted by the unfavourable impression that their backstage forms of self-representation on social media had left him with.

The participant explained:

> I had a situation where a work issue went onto social media and friendships ended because we were more than colleagues. Friendships ended because of the negative

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> perception of what had gone down at the office and having taken that and put it on social media. So it never really ends well in that aspect.

The participant added that:

> At times, relationships can stop right there because of situations that are taken onto social media platforms. Again, if it's a negative or positive situation where this case it was negative, and relationships basically fell out. Even now, it's as if we were never friends.

The participant emphasised that his colleagues' inability to separate their backstage information and behaviours from their frontstage performances on social media has had a negative impact on the respect that he has for this colleague at both a personal and a professional level.

Goffman's dramaturgical approach to impression management is largely centred around the actor's ability to distinguish the public from the private and gauge what information and conduct is appropriate to share in public within their "frontstage performance" and what is better suited to remain private within their "backstage performance" (Aspling, 2011; Schulman, 2017). The findings expand on Goffman's notion of the "team" in impression management as these participants expect their colleagues to remain dramaturgically loyal and disciplined on social media (Aspling, 2011; Goffman, 1959). In accordance with the theory and literature, the participants suggest that they rely on their colleagues to safeguard the impression of their workplace and their "team members" on social media. The participants expect that their colleagues will conceal privileged information about what goes on in their backstage at work from entering their frontstage performances on social media (Aspling, 2011; Goffman, 1959; Hasib, 2009; Del Riego et al., 2012).

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The participants had developed an unprofessional impression of their colleagues when the backstage content that they shared on social media had the potential to disrupt the favourable impression that the organisation and their fellow "team members" seek to preserve with their professionally aligned online and offline frontstage performances. The participants' relationships with their colleagues were negatively influenced by their inability to trust that their colleagues would not share any privileged workplace information among an inappropriate online audience on social media. In line with the theory, the findings suggest that the participants had lost their ability to trust their colleagues because of their lack of dramaturgical loyalty and discipline within their online performances (Aspling, 2011; Goffman, 1959).

The prevalence of social media in all aspects of life presents several threats to the actor and their employer's professional reputation especially when their audiences are exposed to objectional backstage information about them in their online performances (Aspling, 2011; Del Riego et al, 2012; Hasib, 2009; Ollier-Malaterre, et al., 2013; Steinfield et al., 2012). Del Riego et al.'s (2012) concept of objectional content aligns with Goffman's backstage forms of self-presentation as it is understood as any information that positions professional employees and potentially their employers in an unfavourable light and includes any form of disreputable and revealing evidence. These findings expand on Goffman's dramaturgical model as the participants found that their colleagues' professional reputations became discredited by the risk that their backstage forms of self-representation had on the reputation of their organisation in online and offline public spaces. Three of the participants described how certain inappropriate content that their colleagues shared on social media had the ability to implicate their professional reputation among their colleagues, within their organisation and in their industry.

Three of the participants explained how their colleagues' credibility among their professional contacts was damaged when their social media content had the potential to

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discredit their employer's reputation. Participant 3 explained how his colleagues' professional credibility was negatively impacted by their inability to manage the backstage information that they disclosed to their public audience on social media. Participant 3 mentioned "I know of someone who was removed from the board of directors because of an inappropriate post" and went on to explained "it was a racial connotation, and the board of directors did not take to it lightly and the person was removed from the board". Participant 8 described a similar instance where his colleagues professional reputation was discredited by their reckless disclosure of inappropriate backstage forms of self-representation on social media. The participant explained:

> A very senior person, a CEO. I don't know it's like he lost it and he started airing a lot of his boardroom nonsense, his issues with his executives and with the board on social media quite openly, hostilely, and aggressively. This was so much so to the extent there was actually a post that he posted at about two o'clock in the morning and the next day, he was actually removed from his position. You know, it had been building up and building up. So yeah, his reputation was totally shot, not just locally but even internationally. I mean, he represented our industry and our country at a lot of international forums.

Differently, Participant 9 described how one of his colleagues' professional reputation had become discredited among his fellow colleagues as well as his current and future employers because of his reckless disclosure of inappropriate backstage conduct on social media. The participant stated:

> We had a technician, and all our technicians get offered company vehicles which all have company branding. One of the technicians was caught during the weekend, on a

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> Saturday in his gown, in a company vehicle, rolling marijuana in his car. Obviously, a picture was taken, and it brought very bad publicity for our company as a whole.

He later added:

> As much as our industry is very large, the word of mouth goes around very quickly. However, with our technician well for obvious reasons we had to let him go. Obviously, word got around about how he behaved in the workplace, and I think he found it very difficult to find a job in the high-ranking companies such as those within the top ranks. I think he is back on his feet, but you know just because of that image that was taken it's made it very difficult for him to sort of progress his future. This is because people generally have a negative outlook on him now.

The findings align with literature which emphasises how the rise of social media usage places expectations on professional employees to become representatives of their organisation in all spheres of life (Aspling, 2011; Del Riego et al., 2012; Hasib, 2009). In accordance with the literature and findings, this is especially true when the actor can be easily affiliated with the organisation in the uniform that they wear, the company car that they use or even their role as a spokesperson for the organisation such as the "CEO" (Del Riego et al., 2012). Del Riego (2012) gave a similar example to our findings of a flight attendant who was fired for posting provocative pictures in her uniform. This flight attendant's professional credibility was tarnished because of the unfavourable public impression that her unprofessional backstage forms of online self-presentation had left on the company. The findings indicate that the negative perception and reputational damage that comes from the audience's exposure to the actors' professionally inappropriate social media content has negatively impacted their relationships with their colleagues, their organisation, and potential future employers.

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These participants discussed how their colleagues' online and offline relationships were negatively impacted because of the reputational damage associated with them and their social media content. This is explored in the literature which found that organisations are increasingly using social media to evaluate whether their existing and prospective employees conduct on social media could pose a potential risk to the organisation's reputation (Aspling, 2011; Del Riego et al., 2012; Hasib, 2009; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022). As suggested in the findings, the professional employees' reputations had become discredited within their industry because of their previous misconduct on social media (Aspling, 2011; Del Riego et al., 2012; Hasib, 2009; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022). The literature and findings also highlight how there is an expectation for their colleagues to manage the impression that they are creating through their social media content due to the negative ripple effect that this can have on their audience and the organisation by association (Aspling, 2011; Del Riego et al., 2012; Hasib, 2009; Hogan, 2010; Grudin & Meredith, 2009; Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018).

Additionally, the findings concur with Goffman's notion of the "team" that relies on their fellow colleagues' dramaturgical loyalty and discipline in effectively managing the impression that they are creating of the organisation using their performances on social media. The participants suggest that their perception of their colleagues was negatively influenced by the lack of dramaturgical loyalty and discipline seen in their colleagues' performances on social media (Aspling, 2011; Goffman, 1959; Shulman, 2017). The actor's professional audience of colleagues and employers were reluctant to have a relationship with them when their online performances contained backstage forms of self-representation that had the potential to disrupt the favourable impression that their "team members" work to maintain of the organisation in their online and offline performances (Aspling, 2011; Goffman, 1959; Shulman, 2017).

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The transparency that social media has allowed between the professional employees personal and professional lives has shown to have negative consequences for their personal privacy, their reputations, and their forms of self-representation (Coupland et al.,2016; Del Riego et al., 2012; Elison, et al. 2012; Hogan, 2010; Grudin & Meredith, 2009; Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). The use of social media can become problematic for professional employees engaging in impression management as the disclosure of information to inappropriate audiences can expose the audience to discrepancies that can disrupt the professional impression that their frontstage performances try to promote (Aspling, 2011; Del Riego et al., 2012; Schulman, 2017). Two of the participants described how their colleagues' inadequate management of the impression that they were creating on social media had caused a negative collapse between their personal and professional contexts. This exposed the participants to discrepancies between the impression that they have of their colleagues from a work context and the impression that they were able to develop from their backstage social media content. The participants found that this exposure effected their ability to trust and respect their colleagues as professionals. Participant 2 gave two examples of this, stating:

> I can give you an example of a certain situation that happened when a colleague actually applied for special leave. But, when you went through her Instagram page, she was busy having a holiday in Cape Town. I don't feel really like bad about it, but it's not a good thing. It's not professional and it doesn't look good.

The participant went further to give another example of how her professional impression of her colleague was negatively influenced by her to their backstage forms of self-representation in their online frontstage performance. The participant explained:

> I have another example, so we have this disclosure agreement that we need to sign at work and if any colleague is engaging in something which is not work-related, they

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> have to actually declare that they are working for something or doing something else which is other business related. A colleague of ours actually does have a business as such and when you look at the amount that they post, you feel like the amount of time that they take in actually promoting their business and they are not doing their job. That would be a negative example.

The participant went on to add how this made her feel like her colleague was investing more time into their own business to the extent that their work for the company was neglected. Participant 2 stated that this made her feel like her colleague was, “not being professional and not being honest”.

In a different way, Participant 7 explained how her colleagues’ professionalism was discredited when she was unable to manage the content that others posted about her on social media. Participant 7 gave an example of the negative impact that this context collapse had caused for this colleague’s professional reputation by describing:

> One of the ladies just went missing in action, like unavailable. But I don't think she remembers that myself and another colleague of mine, who are both senior management have her on social media. She went to a spa day and the office didn't know where she was. She didn't post anything but her friends who went with her tagged her in posts at this spa day and we were like, Why is she lying? Why didn't she just take leave? You know, she wasn’t at work. So, you have to be in the office, but you didn't go to the office. The office doesn't know where you are, but you and your friends went to a spa day and then you didn't post anything about it because you knew that we are all your friends. So they take pictures, and they tag you for your day out. It's those small things that can actually get you into trouble.

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The participant went on to state:

> I think it did negatively change my position because for me, it's straightforward. If you've got something planned, take a half day, take leave. Oh, but don't try and windle your way out. When we see something like this we begin to think, how can we trust you 100%? That element of trust, that's broken.

The participants found that at times their colleagues' professionalism became discredited when their social media content contradicted the professional impression that they had worked to curate during their real-life frontstage performances. In line with the literature, the participants felt that their colleagues' inability to manage their social media content in accordance with their frontstage forms of self-representation led to a negative spill-over between their personal and professional lives (Coupland et al.,2016; Del Riego et al., 2012; Elison, et al. 2012; Hogan, 2010; Grudin & Meredith, 2009; Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). The participants' exposure to their colleague's social media content that was better suited to their backstage forms of self-representation often left them with a negative perception of their colleagues as professionals. The findings suggest that once the participants were exposed to these discrepancies, they were unable to trust their colleagues as professionals which in turn had a negative effect on their working relationship with these colleagues. This relates to Goffman's dramaturgical theory as the participants cited experiencing a sense of discomfort in discovering conflicting discrepancies between the impression that their colleagues had persuaded them to believe and that which the more authentic glimpses into their private lives on social media had left them with (Aspling, 2011; Goffman, 1959; Del Riego, 2022).

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4.9.2 Personal respect

The literature found that individuals are more inclined to share more informal, personal information about themselves on social media that can be affiliated with their backstage forms of self-representation at work (Aspling, 2011; Goffman, 1959; Del Riego, 2022; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). The risk of mixing individual's professional and personal audiences on social media is that it allows their professional audiences to gain knowledge about their different opinions, views and conduct that they are not ordinarily exposed to as it may be inappropriate for their professional context (Aspling, 2011; Del Riego et al., 2012; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Swayer, 2011). In accordance with Goffman's dramaturgical model, the findings suggest that the participants' personal impression of their colleagues was negatively impacted by their exposure to their backstage forms of self-representation on social media. Six of the participants described how they were often opposed to their colleagues sharing strong opinions about controversial and taboo topics that are not always well received on social media and particularly among a professional online audience. The participants discussed how their perception of their colleagues was negatively influenced by their social media content that featured rude, offensive, racist, sexist, persecutory or adverse Covid-19 material. These participants explained how being exposed to these types of inappropriate social media content has reduced the personal sense of respect that they have for their colleagues as well as their willingness to have a relationship with them.

Participant 3 discussed how his personal sense of respect for his colleagues was negatively influenced by their backstage social media content by explaining, "Any nonsense has no place for me in my social media outlook, so any rude, degrading, racism, gender-based nonsense. All of those negative aspects, I will not tolerate, and I will not have part of my following". Participant 8 described the types of inappropriate, backstage posts that would influence the participant to remove their colleagues from their social media and explained:

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> I think racism and sometimes it's the Covid racism rather than overt racism that gets to me. You know, it's racism for the sake of racism, I'm just trying to get my words correct. I mean, you can say something without realising that it's racist, or feminist or offensive. But I think the second or third time or once you look at their engagement you also get the idea of whether it's done maliciously or not. It's a grey area, it really is. But normally racist remarks, overtly sexual, feminist remarks or explicitly sexual things.

Participant 3 gave an example of how his exposure to his colleagues' backstage forms of- self-representation on social media has influenced his relationships with these colleagues by saying:

> I have had certain colleagues who are constantly posting inappropriate information either from a race perspective or rude and unacceptable discussions that is sexual, or gender-based. These people do not have too much leeway with me, first time, second time and they are off, and I disengage with them. If I disengage with them on a social media perspective, I will disengage with them on a personal perspective as well.

Similarly, Participant 10 stated that "If it's like negative or inappropriate, I wouldn't want to have any sort of relationship with that person". The participant elaborated on this sentiment by later explaining, "anything offensive or explicit like racist, sexist, or just rude. I don't like rude people so I probably wouldn't want to be their friend or have a relationship with them outside of work".

Interestingly, Participant 8 discussed how in some instances their colleagues' inadequate management of their social media content exposed them to discover discrepancies between these colleagues' backstage and frontstage forms of self-representation. The participant discussed how these discrepancies reduced the personal respect that she had for this colleague and led her to question her trust in this colleague.

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Participant 8 explained:

> Some of my male colleagues are perhaps a little bit patriarchal and a little bit condescending perhaps without even realising and you know, not really believing in the female cause. And then I've kind of wondered whether what they've said or what they've professed to stand for, whether it's just a cover up. I find that if you're very careful with social media and you read between the lines, you can somehow discover more about the person. Especially on Twitter, if you just go and look at the person's likes, you can actually get a better picture of who they are than if you look at their tweets. So they might tweet all these wonderful things about woman empowerment but then if you go look at what they are liking which is not so prominent but it's exactly the opposite.

Participant 8 later emphasised "It brings that element of distrust or that sort of disappointment. And then you kind of wonder whether they are what they say they are". The participants' relationship with their colleagues were negatively impacted by their inability to trust the impression that these colleagues maintain in their professional context in comparison to the impression that they have created on social media.

The participants' accounts expand on Goffman's dramaturgical model of impression management when applied to social media as the participants discuss how they view their colleagues' online and offline performances as one and the same. The negative impression that the participants developed of their colleagues from their backstage forms of self-representation on social media extended into their impression of these colleagues in real life. Additionally, the impression that the actors tried to create using their frontstage performances in real life became invalidated by their audience's exposure to their backstage forms of self-representation

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in their online performances (Aspling, 2011; Goffman, 1859; Hassenzahl & Uhde, 2021; Ollier-Malaterre, 2019; Roderick, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2016; Shulman, 2017). The research indicates that the permanence of social media can impede professional employees' ability to uphold a favourable impression especially when they are frequently using it to post content aligned with their more informal, personal views (Aspling, 2011; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022). This is explored in the findings whereby the participants suggest using their colleagues' social media record to check the integrity of their frontstage performances against the regularity of their backstage forms of self-representation within their online performances. The participants indicated that their inability to trust the integrity of their colleagues' frontstage performances had a negative impact on their respect for these colleagues and their willingness to have a relationship with them.

Three of the participants explained how they disagreed with some of their colleagues' aggressive approach when voicing their opinions about certain topics on social media. The participants explained how this had a negative impact on their perception of their colleagues and their respect for these colleagues. Participant 8 described how her respect for her colleagues was negatively influenced by her exposure to their social media content on:

> Bullying, or harassment of a person because of what they look like or because of what they believe or even the whole vaccinations stuff. You know, I just believe we all make our own decisions based on our own research and information. Nobody's right, nobody's wrong and nobody has the right to bash somebody because they've chosen to vaccinate or not to vaccinate.

Participant 10 had similar feelings about colleagues who post aggressive content in relation to the Covid-19 vaccination roll out by stating:

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> I'm okay with people posting about it. I'm okay with it up to the extent that no one infringes upon others' rights or tries to offend anyone else. I think we all have the choice. I'm on the side of getting the vaccine and I have gotten one shot already. Yeah. So I'm okay with people posting about getting the vaccine. I'm not okay with people tearing each other down on social media like calling people ignorant or stupid. It's like I can't convince someone else to do something against their own will. So, I think it's fine as long as they're like promoting getting the vaccine or sharing their perspective, but I don't like people bringing other people down.

Participant 4 explained how her exposure to her colleagues' aggressive social media content had a negative impact on her respect for this colleague and their existing relationship and described this sentiment when saying:

> An ex-colleague, who posted about the COVID-19 vaccines. How everybody should be taking it and how anybody who doesn't want to take it, is stupid. I just read it, I scrolled up and I was like, I'll just take you off of my Christmas card list. Because it's a matter of choice. There is no use to come out on social media slinging, no matter what the subject, oh, Donald Trump is a fool or Biden is a fool, President Cyril is a fool whatever. There is no need to come out in such an aggressive way. For me when people come out like that, I just switch off and I remove you from my life because there's no middle ground with people like that.

The participant justified how this changed her perception of this colleague by explaining how, "... this person is inflexible, that this person cannot be reasoned with, and this is somebody that I don't want to be associated with".

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Contrary to the previous sub-theme of discredited professionalism, these participants discussed how their exposure to their colleagues' content, which they felt to be inappropriate for social media, had a negative influence on their personal sense of respect for these colleagues. The participants suggest that their exposure to their colleagues' backstage forms of self-representation on social media had enabled them to develop a more authentic, less desirable impression of them that they did not respect. In line with Goffman's dramaturgical model, the findings suggest that the audience's exposure to the actors' backstage forms of self-representation on social media had the ability to undermine their frontstage performances (Aspling, 2011; Goffman, 1959; Hassenzahl & Uhde, 2021; Ollier-Malaterre, 2019; Roderick, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2016; Shulman, 2017). The findings reveal that the reduced sense of respect that the participants had experienced following their exposure to their colleagues' backstage forms of self-representation had often caused them to not want to have a relationship with these colleagues in real life. In a similar way, Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2022) found that in some instances professionals experienced an increased sense of dislike for their colleagues after being exposed to their social media content. The data suggest that the participants expect their colleagues to treat social media as a frontstage performance by only sharing information that is favourable among both their personal and professional contacts.

4.10 Online and offline boundary management behaviours

The increased lack of boundaries that social media induces among professional employees' personal and professional lives has pressured them to actively manage these online and offline boundaries to safeguard their favourable impression across contexts (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2019). The theme of online and offline boundary management behaviours pertains to the third research question in this study and describes the coping mechanisms/tactics which the participants use to deal with their exposure to their colleagues' social media content. This theme is largely linked to the effects that the participants' exposure to their colleagues'

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social media content can have on their perception of these colleagues but also their relationship with them going forward. The majority of the participants alluded to the fact that the online and offline boundary management behaviours that they utilised were also prompted by their own motives for impression management among their online audience. The participants felt that as the audience they became more aware of the need to manage the online and offline boundary management behaviours that they utilised as actors on social media. This was as a result of their first-hand exposure to the implications that their colleagues' social media content had on their impression of and relationship with these colleagues. The online and offline boundary management behaviours that the participants used links back to their need to preserve a desirable impression through their social media content which also aligns with their frontstage forms of self-representation in real life.

The prominent online and offline boundary management behaviours that the participants cited using will be discussed in the sub-themes below namely disassociation, compartmentalisation, audience boundary management, content boundary management and hybrid boundary management. The sub-themes of audience boundary management, content boundary management and hybrid boundary management align with three of the four online boundary management behaviours found in Ollier-Malaterre's theoretical framework (Hogan, 2010; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Ollier-Malaterre & Rothbard, 2015). Contrary to the previous themes discussed above, this theme will be discussed in relation to the online and offline boundary management behaviours that the participants use as actors on social media. The exception of this being the sub-themes of disassociation and compartmentalisation which will be examined in relation to the online and offline boundary management behaviours that the participants use as the audience on social media for their own online impression management. Although, the sub-themes will be described in isolation, it is important to note that many of the participants cited using a variety of these online and offline boundary

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management behaviours interchangeably depending on the situations that they were found themselves in.

4.11 Disassociation

The professional employees' choice to mix their personal and professional interactions has become complexified by social media whereby there is greater transparency and permanency concerning what people share in less curated ways to a wider public audience (Aspling, 2011; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Hassenzahl & Uhde, 2021; Roderick, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2016; Shulman, 2017). Four of the participants felt the need to disassociate themselves from their fellow colleagues who conducted themselves in an improper manner on social media to ensure that they are preserving a reputable impression online. These participants expressed the need to remove their colleagues from their online audience by unfriending or blocking these colleagues on social media to prevent their exposure to their perceived reprehensible social media content. The participants mentioned how they did not want the negative reputation that was attached to these colleagues because of their unfavourable social media content to become linked back to them as an individual and a professional. The participants felt the need to manage the colleagues that they associate with both online and offline as actors in their audience to ensure that they are not putting themselves at risk of potential reputational damage via association with their colleagues' backstage forms of self-representation on social media or in real life.

Participant 3 highlighted this sentiment when stating "I have actually requested specifically that certain people remove me from their mailing list and address books to keep me away from those posts and keep me away from those things".

The participant went further to explain:

> One of the things that I am very careful of is sometimes, you are touching these screens and you touch the wrong icon, and you could be posting something that you totally

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> disagree with and suddenly it goes out into the network and people may think well this guy is also associated with this content and it was an honest mistake. So, I don't want to even be exposed to possibly making mistakes, where something of this type may be posted out.

Comparably, Participant 6 explained:

> If somebody was casting racial remarks or making racial comments on any of the social media platforms. I would very quickly stop and certainly if they're in my friend circle, I think I would probably, what is it unfriend them? Because I would also not want to be associated with that person and I don't want anybody else to think I'm associated with that person for what they're saying.

Participant 8 explained how being exposed to her colleagues' inappropriate social media content would influence her to disassociate from this colleague and their backstage forms of self-representation online by saying, "If it's somebody whose opinion I really don't value or if the post is of such a nature, I would probably just walk away from it, you know, unfriend, block and move on". Participant 8 reiterated this sentiment stating that, "If there's a contentious issue and my colleagues are posting about it, I tend to not want to get involved because I don't want people to think that by association, I agree". Participant 11 explained how he would disassociate from his colleagues online, if he found them posting disreputable social media content by stating, "You tend to shy away from those people, you don't really engage much with them".

These four participants found that as the online audience, they became a referent group, and this exposed them to the potential negative spill over from their colleagues' (the actors)

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disreputable social media content onto their reputations. The participants mentioned having to utilise the online and offline boundary management behaviour of disassociation to ensure that their reputations do not become tarnished by being associated with certain colleagues due to their backstage forms of self-representation on social media. The participants' sentiments align with the literature which describes how the increased visibility of social media opens the audience up to greater risk of being associated with their online professional and personal contacts as well as their conduct on social media (Aspling, 2011; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Hassenzahl & Uhde, 2021; Roderick, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2016; Shulman, 2017. Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2022) found that connecting with people is made much more noticeable on social media than in real life as there is often a digital record of this connection. These findings expand on the notion of the "team" in Goffman's dramaturgical model as the participants rely on their colleagues to manage their frontstage performances to exclude backstage forms of self-representation and maintain an equally favourable professional and personal impression on social media (Aspling, 2011; Goffman, 1959; Hassenzahl & Uhde, 2021; Ollier-Malaterre, 2019; Roderick, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2016; Shulman, 2017).

The participants rely on their online professional contacts to maintain dramaturgical loyalty and discipline while performing on social media to effectively safeguard the impression that they are creating about themselves as well as their audience via association among a public audience. The audience relies on the good conduct of their actors on social media as by association their online performances can disrupt the audience's frontstage performance on social media and in real life.

Additionally, the online and offline boundary management behaviour of disassociation concurs with Goffman's dramaturgical technique of "dramaturgical circumspection" which highlights that people are selective in who they allow to become a "team-member" because they rely on their dramaturgical loyalty and discipline for the preservation of their own performance

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(Aspling, 2011; Goffman, 1959; Hassenzahl & Uhde, 2021; Ollier-Malaterre, 2019; Roderick, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2016; Shulman, 2017). The findings agree with this notion in that the participants described having to disassociate from their colleagues or "team-member" on social media when their colleagues' backstage forms of self-representation could threaten the impression that they were trying to create with their online and offline frontstage performances. The participants emphasised that they chose to disassociate from their colleagues by unfriending them, blocking them and limiting their engagements with them both online and in real life when their backstage forms of self-representation presented a risk to their public impression or reputation. In line with the literature, the participants chose to disassociate from their colleagues as a means of "dramaturgical circumspection", to protect their own frontstage performances aimed at favourable impression management from being discredited by association with their colleagues' lack of dramaturgical loyalty, discipline and ineffective impression management (Aspling, 2011; Goffman, 1959; Hassenzahl & Uhde, 2021; Ollier-Malaterre, 2019; Roderick, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2016; Shulman, 2017).

4.12 Compartmentalisation

Goffman's dramaturgical model of impression management highlights that an individual will be unsuccessful in impression management should they fail to separate their backstage forms of self-representation from their frontstage performances (Aspling, 2011; Goffman, 1959; Hassenzahl & Uhde, 2021; Ollier-Malaterre, 2019; Roderick, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2016; Shulman, 2017). Contrary to Goffman's theory, seven of the participants preferred to purposefully separate the impression that their colleagues' social media content may have left them with from impacting the impression that they have developed about their colleagues in real life. The participants cited feeling the need to compartmentalise their colleague's social media content to avoid the negative impact that can come from discovering contradictions in

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the impression that they had developed of their colleagues in real life. These participants explained how they did not allow their exposure to their colleagues' social media content to influence their relationships as they often chose to avoid or scroll past their backstage forms of self-representation on social media which they found to be unfavourable. The participants often mentioned avoiding this unfavourable backstage content and accepting their colleagues' freedom of opinion and expression within reason on social media.

Participants 2, 11 and 13 chose to compartmentalise their opinions of their colleagues' social media content to ensure that it did not conflict with and influence their impression of these colleagues. Participant 2 described how she did not allow her colleagues' social media content to influence her impression of them, stating that, "It's nice to see but it's not something where I'm like, Oh, I didn't like this, So I feel something different about you". Similarly, Participant 11 highlighted his approach to his colleagues' social media content, "It's just interesting information being put out there. It's not really for me to judge or have any type of feelings about". Participant 11 later maintained that "If somebody posts something that you don't like and it's on your review list and you know that it's something that you don't like you can skip it". Participant 13 also utilised this approach when saying, "Everyone has their own opinions, and we can't obviously judge them or anything like that".

The participants prefer to compartmentalise and avoid their colleagues' backstage forms of self-representation on social media that they were opposed to so as to not let it effect their impression of them and relationship with these colleagues going forward. Participant 1 highlighted this point by saying:

> I actually don't allow it to change or if I've got a relationship with them, I have my own mindset about them. So, what they post very often doesn't bother me, it doesn't influence me to continue or not to continue. It just doesn't influence me at all. I just take

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> it as it's their life, it's their freedom but it's just nice to know what their viewpoint is. Whether it's offensive or not offensive, if it's not to them and it is to me, I just avoid it and I just ignore it.

Participant 1 added that:

> If they published something that I don't believe or I'm not in line with the way they think, that's their choice, I won't comment on it. I'll just actually avoid making any comments, unless it's brought up when we get together as a session for the office or an office meeting, but it doesn't influence me at all.

Participant 4 explained how she preferred to ignore and not be influenced by her colleagues' backstage forms of self-representation on social media that she did not agree with. The participant said:

> I have a gay colleague and friend. He is always posting stuff that I don't really have an opinion on. So, I scroll on by. So, I suppose in a way, you can say, I am influenced because I'm not interested. I would probably go "agh whatever" and scroll on by. He's still a good friend of mine but I don't necessarily agree with his life choices.

Participant 9 also highlighted the need to compartmentalise his colleagues' backstage forms of self-representation on social media to ensure that it did not impact his impression of them in the real world. The participant expanded on why he did not allow his colleagues' social media content and the impression that this left him with to influence his working relationship with them. Participant 9 explained:

> You've got to be professional about things. As I said, if I've seen my colleagues do some ridiculous things on the weekend, yes, I will chat to them about it. If it's funny, it's funny

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> and if it was crazy, I would probably say something like that was mad man. But you know what, there's a time and a place for everything in a work environment. You know, when it's time to work, we put our personal lives aside and you work and get whatever needs to get done, done. You as a person also needs to be professional and understand that people are humans. When everybody gets to work, we all put on a mask, we all have to be seen as being all prim and proper. At the end of the day, we're all drowning and we're just trying to make it through the day.

Participant 7 supported this idea by saying:

> I always say on social media platforms, you just need to let people be who they are and not bring your own biases and values into it. I try to always remind myself that social media is a platform. If you don't like a person's content, you swipe and you get over it.

Seven of the participants used compartmentalisation as an online and offline boundary management behaviour to allow them to maintain professional working relationships with their colleagues. The participants' ability to compartmentalise their colleagues' social media content allowed them to avoid the discomfort that can come from the interaction of these potentially conflicting impressions that they can form of their colleagues online and in real life. In a similar way, Del Riego et al. (2012) found that a sample of part-time millennial employees in Canada that were also studying towards their undergraduate degree were not willing to compromise or adjust their participation as actors on social media despite knowing the transparency of their content to a widely mixed online audience. The actors in the literature concur with our participants in the audience as they expect their professional audience to ignore what they post and refrain from judging them across their online and real-life performances (Del Riego et al., 2011). Accordingly, the participants chose to compartmentalise their colleague's social media

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so as to not allow the professional impression that they have of them to become discredited by their exposure to their backstage forms of self-representation on social media.

Contrastingly, due to the widespread transparency, permanency, and accessibility of information on social media it is irrational to expect people to refrain from judging professional employees based on their performances on social media. The organisation cannot ignore their employees' backstage forms of self-representation as by association these can result in potentially large organisational risks. The organisation has reasonable economic and legal justification to judge their professional employees' backstage forms of self-representation on social media due to the far-reaching negative impact that this can have on their public reputation, trade secrets, working relationships and environment (Aspling, 2011; Del Riego et al., 2012; Hogan, 2010; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Ollier-Malaterre & Rothbard, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022).

Interestingly, the findings suggest that the participants seem to use disassociation and compartmentalisation interchangeably. The findings suggest that the participants' choice to compartmentalise their colleagues' backstage forms of self-representation as opposed to disassociation from their colleagues and their backstage forms of self-representation was based on the extent to which they felt that this could negatively impact their reputation. The participants preferred online and offline boundary management behaviour was aligned to their "dramaturgical circumspection" and the caution that they felt they needed to approach their team members and their backstage social media content with as a means of preserving their frontstage performances and impression.

4.13 Audience boundary management behaviours

Goffman's dramaturgical model highlights that the key to successfully impression management is the actor's ability to keep their audiences separate so as to actively manage

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their access to their backstage forms of self-representation. In accordance with Ollier-Malaterre's audience boundary management behaviour, actors seek to safeguard their professional colleagues' impression of them and respect for them by restricting their professional audiences access to their backstage information on social media. The majority of the participants explained how social media platforms led to increasingly blurred boundaries between their professional and personal lives. The participants as actors seek to control which contacts that they allow to become part of their audience on social media. Five of the participants prefer clear segmentation between their professional and personal contexts by restricting their professional colleagues access to their social media content. The participants utilise audience boundary management behaviours to carefully manage the impression that their colleagues can formulate about them by limiting their access to their social media. This allows the participants to carefully manage the information that their colleagues have access to about them by ensuring that they only know what the participants chose to share about themselves within a working environment.

Participant 1 explained why she preferred to restrict her colleagues access to her personal social media platforms by stating:

> I'm very selective. So there are certain people that have a completely different lifestyle from myself, and different beliefs and I work with because I have to work with them. But I don't let them on my social media page as I don't want them to know what I've done on the weekend or who my friends are, who I connect up with and what I do, and I don't discuss it during working hours either. So yes, I am very selective of who's allowed to get onto my page. I'm very much an introvert in the sense that I don't want people that aren't in my life, to know more than what they need to know from a working environment.

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Similarly, Participant 6 described how she purposely excludes her work colleagues from her personal social media by saying:

> When I get friend requests from anybody within the work environment, I tend to reject it. Unless I'm actually a friend of theirs outside of work. I don't think it's necessary for work colleagues to know what's going on in my life, other than what I choose to share with them when I'm at the office or talking to them.

Participant 7 highlighted how she had become more attentive to who she allowed to have access to her social media platforms by explaining:

> I think there's a particular entranceway into my socials, you cannot just be a colleague, without having a bit of a relationship and then you decide to invite me on social media. I'm not going to accept you, even though I don't have much activity happening on my social media, but it's just the fact that this is also my semi-private life.

Participant 12, supported this need to control her audience on social media by stating, “On Instagram, I have a fully private account so I can control who views my content so that I know exactly who is viewing my content.” Moreover, Participant 7 revealed how her colleagues are becoming increasingly more aware of the need to manage and restrict their social media audiences when describing, “My team doesn't even allow me to see their status on WhatsApp, let alone have me on their Facebook”.

The findings concur with Ollier-Malaterre’s audience boundary management behaviours which suggests that professionals keep their professional audiences separate from their audience on social media to ensure that their professional audiences only have access to the more favourable forms of self-representation that the actor wants them to see. Roderick (2020) alluded to the fact that professional employees chose to limit their professional

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audiences access to their online presentational resources because of the pressure that this audience places on the actor to always position themselves in a professional light on social media. Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2022) found millennial employees preferred adopting audience boundary management behaviours because they did not approve of their professional contacts having access to information about them that was not appropriate or intended for them.

Interestingly, Participant 9 explained how he makes a conscious effort to keep his professional and personal life separate on social media. The participant described why he restricts his professional contacts access to his social media by stating:

> I've got a rule against that, I prefer to keep my work life and personal life completely separate. I do not follow or allow any of my colleagues to follow me on my personal socials because who you are at office and who you are on the weekends are two completely different people. You know, some people when they have access to your personal information, they sort of feel like a sense of entitlement or they feel like they know you on a different level. Especially if they are reporting to you or they are in a managerial role, they may look down on you when they see what you do on the weekend. And if you've got your subordinates seeing your personal life, you know it's hard to maintain a certain level of respect that you may require in the office as this may sort of waver.

Participant 9 elaborated that his decision to utilise audience boundary management behaviours was based on his need to maintain a respectable impression among his colleagues. The participant explained:

> This is the reason as I said, why I don't allow my colleagues to follow any of my social media profiles. This allows me to enjoy my weekends, to relax and enjoy having a few drinks with my friends. At the same time, I'm still young so I may do stupid things. I

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> know that if I walk into the office on a Monday and my colleagues have seen what I've done then they may look at me differently and they may not have the same level of respect for me and vice versa. If your work ethic in the office should drop, then immediately they will probably look at your personal life and then they focus on what's going on in your personal life when instead there could be a different situation happening in office. As I said it's all about respect and respect to your fellow colleagues, subordinates, and managers. If you're in a managerial role and your subordinates have seen you behave in an unprofessional manner during the weekend, how do you expect them to respect you on a weekday basis?

Although Participant 9's dominant online and offline boundary management behaviour is audience boundary management, he also argued that there are exceptions. Participant 9 explained:

> There are some colleagues that we do have a special relationship with, and you can create a private friendship with. If there is that sort of connection then that's when I decide okay, well, you are welcome into my life because I feel that we've got a lot of things in common, same interests. Yeah, and if we can work together and still remain professional, I guess that's when I go cool, I'll accept you.

However, the participant explained how their ability to remain professional is the governing factor even when connecting with these colleagues online.

The findings align with the literature in that professionals are more inclined to restrict their employers, subordinates or managers access to their social media so that they are not able to develop a negative impression of them based on their social media content (Hoffmann &

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Suphan, 2016; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Ollier-Malaterre & Rothbard, 2015). The findings and literature suggest that there is a need to maintain a certain level of professional stature and respect among their subordinates which was hard to do if they had access to their personal backstage forms of self-representation on social media. The findings expand on Goffman's dramaturgical model as the participants restrict their professional audiences access to their performances on social media as a means of safeguarding their dramaturgical loyalty and discipline. This is in line with Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2022) who suggests that the actors practice dramaturgical circumspection by deleting and restricting certain professional contacts access to their social media to maintain dramaturgical loyalty.

The participants restrict their professional audiences' access to their social media content to ensure that this will not disrupt their professional impression of them in real life. This is seen in the literature whereby professionally are increasingly deleting, blocking, or rejecting their colleagues as contacts in their audience on social media to restrict their access to their backstage information that is not intended for them (Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Roderick, 2020).

The findings reveal that the audience boundary management behaviours that the participants utilise align with Ollier-Malaterre's theoretical framework of online boundary management behaviours (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Ollier-Malaterre & Rothbard, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022). The participants are utilising audience boundary management behaviour to ensure that there is a clear segmentation between their professional and personal life contexts by restricting their professional contacts access to their social media content. This allows them to manage their colleagues' impression of them by ensuring that they only have access to their frontstage forms of self-representation in the workplace. In accordance with Ollier-Malaterre's theoretical framework, the participants are driven by the respect and liking that they seek to preserve among their colleagues by using audience boundary management

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behaviours (Hoffmann & Suphan, 2016; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Ollier-Malaterre & Rothbard, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022).

4.14 Content boundary management behaviours

In accordance with Goffman's dramaturgical model, the actors need to manage the content that they share with their audiences to ensure that it is appropriate and create a desirable impression among their intended audience (Goffman, 1959; Schulman, 2017). The literature and findings, suggest that there is an increased need to effectively manage the content that professionals are sharing about themselves to a mixed audience of personal and professional audiences to ensure that it is creating a favourable impression among both public audiences (Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Roderick, 2020). As actors, the participants want to influence the impression their colleagues can develop about them by regulating the information that they share on social media. Three of the participants were open to the integration of their professional and personal contacts on social media because they are highly cognisant that the content that they share needs to be appropriate and favourable for both audiences. These participants chose to actively manage the social media content that they share as opposed to controlling their audiences on social media. This allows the participants to ensure that they are using favourable forms of self-presentation on social media and creating a desirable impression among both their personal and professional contacts.

Participant 8 emphasised the importance of remaining attentive to the nature of the content that they shared among a largely public social media audience of both professional and personal contacts. Participant 8 mentioned being less cautious about who has access to their social media because they are attentive to the type of content that they share stating:

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> Most of my Facebook posts are public and they're more, I seek to inform and to dispel myths rather than actually putting my own opinion out there. In terms of Twitter, my tweets are not protected as my account is open. But I do think I don't allow people to tag me in posts, and it's the same on Facebook.

The important element that Participant 8 also speaks to, is the fact that she actively manages the content that both herself and others can share in relation to her on social media.

Participant 2 described how being exposed to their colleagues' inappropriate social media content made her more aware of the potential impact that her own social media content can have on the way that she is perceived. Participant 2 explained why she came to adopt more content boundary management behaviours by saying:

> On a personal level, when I look at things like that it makes me reluctant to share any sort of information, posts, and things because you see how other people react. So it's not you but others, maybe your friends or your other colleagues react adversely. So, it makes you reluctant to actually share that sort of information on these platforms, just in case your other colleagues see, and they react adversely to you.

Participant 7 mentioned that being exposed to the potential and adverse ripple effect that social media content can have for professionals and organisations has encouraged her to become more cautious about what she shares on social media. The participant explained:

> I've been very cautious of social media. I've seen people having their companies being tagged because of what they've said, it might be racial, it might be talking trash about females, you know, what I mean? and to a point whereby it's been escalated.

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Interestingly, Participant 7 cited using audience boundary management and content boundary management behaviours. This indicates that the participants are increasingly cognisant of the potential impact that social media can have on the way that they are perceived and respected by his professional contacts.

The findings concur with literature which emphasises that professionals often lack control over how their audiences interpret their social media content and chose to adopt content boundary management behaviours to present a "faux" version of themselves that is equally favourable among their personal and public audience on social media (Hoffmann & Suphan, 2016; Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Ollier-Malaterre & Rothbard, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022; Roderick, 2020). In line with the literature and Goffman's dramaturgical model, the participants chose to control the type of information that they share with their public audiences to ensure that it does not present them in an unprofessional light. The participants are dramaturgically loyal and disciplined to ensure that their audience only views the admirable frontstage forms of self-representation while keeping the backstage forms of self-representation hidden (Aspling, 2011; Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022).

The participants adopting content boundary management behaviours seek to preserve a positive impression among both their professional and personal contacts through the social media content that they share. The participants using this online boundary management behaviour were cognisant to the fact that their backstage forms of self-representation on social media are not private and so they utilised their social media as a frontstage context which they often used for self-enhancement (Hoffmann & Suphan, 2016; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Ollier-Malaterre & Rothbard, 2015). The findings align with Ollier-Malaterre's theoretical framework in that these participants are driven by self-enhancement as they strategically manage their social media content to achieve an increased sense of respect and liking among

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their professional and personal contacts (Hoffmann & Suphan, 2016; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Ollier-Malaterre & Rothbard, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022).

4.15 Hybrid boundary management behaviours

The participants who adopt hybrid boundary management behaviours, seek to maintain a favourable impression among their colleagues by strategically managing both their audience and the content that they share on social media. Two participants explained how they actively segmented their professional and personal audiences on social media to tailor the social media content that they shared among both these audiences. This allowed the participants to manage the information that they disclosed to their professional and personal audiences to ensure that the information is favourable and appropriate for its designated audience.

Participants 4 and 10 and explained how they attempt to manage the impression that their colleagues can formulate about them by tailoring their social media audiences to strategically exclude their colleagues from specific content that could have an unfavourable impact on their perception of them. Participant 4 explained how she tried to manage her colleague's perception of them by managing how their content is shared to specific and appropriate audiences stating:

> If I post something that I think is going to upset one of my colleagues, then I actually select a group where I exclude them because it's all about perception.

She later added:

> I've got two settings. So I've got one, which is friends and then I've got one with friends, except so and so. When I'm going to post something and I know that certain people are not going to like it, then I choose that option. If it's a meme or whatever, that is not going to offend anybody then I just post it to all friends. I am very careful about how and what I post.

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In a similar way, Participant 10 described strategically managing her social media to control and limit the impact that this content can have by saying, “I block my stories from certain people”. The participant elaborated as to why she chose hybrid boundary management behaviours by explaining:

> So I think, you know, it's very important that I don’t have to worry about who sees what. I guess, for me if anyone found me some way and they send me follow requests or whatever. I would probably accept them and I’ll just block them from seeing my status or posts, if I didn't want them to see.

The findings relate back to Goffman’s dramaturgical model of impression management as discussed in the literature review by showing how social media forces the professional employees to deliberately manage their social media conduct to ensure it is reputationally appropriate for a broad audience (Paliszkiewicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016; Richey et al., 2017; Tashmin, 2016). The findings align with Goffman’s notion of dramaturgical discipline whereby the participants are cognisant of their mixed audience and they reflect on how their audience will respond to their performance before sharing content on social media (Aspling, 2011; Goffman, 1959; Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre, 2022; Schulman, 2017). The findings concur with Aspling (2011) in that, when the professionals were unsure of how their professional audience would perceive their backstage forms of self-representation on social media and they would restrict their access to this information while keeping them in their broader audience.

These participants aim to manage and create a positive impression among both their professional and personal contacts by purposefully segmenting their audiences and their social media content. This allows the participants to regulate the information that they share and

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ensure that the social media content that is suited for their backstage and frontstage forms of self-presentation are being disclosed to their appropriate contacts. Similar to hybrid boundary management behaviours, the findings support Ollier-Malaterre's theoretical framework as the participants utilise hybrid boundary management behaviours to try to manage their audience's impression of them to increase the respect and liking that both their professional and personal contacts have for them as the actor on social media (Hoffmann & Suphan, 2016; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Ollier-Malaterre & Rothbard, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2022).

Contrary to Ollier-Malaterre's online boundary management theoretical framework, the participants only suggested using three of the four online boundary management behaviours. This could be as a result of the participants' attempts to manage the impression thay they are creating through their social media content. The findings suggest that open boundary management behaviour is less preferrable because of the participants' exposure to how highly problematic their colleagues' backstage forms of self-representation on social media could become for theirs as well as their organisation's public reputations. The participants' perception of their colleagues was adversely impacted by their colleagues' uncensored disclosure of their personal and professional information across both their personal and professional audiences on social media and the low degree of respect and liking that this has proven to show from their experience in the audience. This aligns with the literature which describes how professional audiences often experience a sense of discomfort when their colleagues were unable to control their frontstage performances and essentially the impression that they were creating with including their inappropriate backstage forms of self-representation in their online frontstage performances (Aspling, 2011; Goffman, 1959; Kien, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre, 2022; Schulman, 2017). Additionally, many of the participants indicate that when they allow their colleagues access to their social media this is often motivated by "self -enhancement" and not "self-validation". The actors who adopt open boundary management behaviours are motivated by

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self-verification whereas the participants are seeking to gain “self-enhancement” by increasing their respect and liking among their colleagues as seen in the themes and sub-themes of positive online and real-life interactions. The findings suggest that the participants use of open boundary management behaviours would be counterproductive to their desired self-enhancement and would open them up to the potential risks as discussed in the themes and sub-themes of negative online and real-life interactions.

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CHAPTER 5: LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter will discuss the identified limitations of the current study. Included are recommendations for future research as well as future recommendations for organisations.

5.1 Limitations

The limitations identified in the current study include: the qualitative research design, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the research, the self-report nature of the semi-structured interviews and the potential interpretation bias involved in the use of thematic content analysis. The qualitative research design of the current study was the first limitation. Qualitative research methods are time consuming and often make use of smaller sample sizes which cannot be used to generalise to the larger intended population. The sample in this study was made up of a diverse range of 13 professional and skilled employees working in the South African corporate environment. The researcher decided to conduct 13 interviews in the interest of ensuring diversity in the sample despite having reached data saturation after conducting ten interviews. The generalisability of these research findings to professional and skilled employees in the South African corporate environment is limited by the sample size being too small. Nonetheless, the researcher decided to use qualitative research methods to attempt to achieve a more in-depth understanding of professional and skilled employees in the South African corporate environments perceptions about their colleagues based on their social media content; the potential effects this may have on their relationships with their colleagues; and the different ways that they try to manage the potential impact of their colleagues social media content on their working relationships. The reason for this being that there is very limited previous research done on this topic in the South African context.

The second limitation was that this research study was conducted during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic introduces a number of difficulties for the researchers when conducting the current research study including: the researcher’s access to potential participants, the increased interruptions during online interviews and the potential influence of the pandemic’s social restrictions on the participants’ perceptions. The Covid-19 pandemic included several strict restrictions on social interactions with a nationwide lock-down being enforced, most people were confined to their homes. The researcher found it increasingly difficult to access participants during the Covid-19 pandemic despite the efforts made to distribute the research poster about the study on Facebook and LinkedIn, requests made to acquaintances matching the study's intended sample to share the information about this study

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with their network of potential participants and requests made to two organisations for permission to access their employees. The participation response rate was slow and limited. The 13 participants interviewed were the only participants fitting the study's inclusion criteria that volunteered to take part in the research. This limits the diversity of the sample despite achieving a somewhat diverse composition of participants in terms of gender, age, race, tenure, and occupation. The Covid-19 lock often created several interruptions during the online interviews being conducted. Firstly, the participants were often distracted by factors at home including their families and their work. Secondly, the participants' internet connections were often disrupted. In some instances, this limited the researcher's ability to hear and see the participant clearly. Thus, limiting the researcher's ability to gauge important verbal and non-verbal cues such as changes in the participants vocal pitch, facial expressions and bodily gestures that are important for interpreting the participant's reaction. The third limitation was the frequent disruption of the interviews due to the occurrence of loadshedding in South Africa whereby strategic electricity cuts are implemented. There were several occasions where interviews were interrupted and had to be rescheduled due to loadshedding. All these factors impact the researcher's ability to conduct effective interviews with the participants.

Additionally, the social restrictions enforced by the Covid-19 pandemic had the potential to impact the participants' perception of social media. The Covid-19 pandemic forced most professional and skilled employees in the South African corporate environment to work from home and abruptly limited their interactions with their colleagues. The interviews were conducted during a period where the participants had limited in-person interactions with their colleagues and some participants mentioned using social media to remain connected with their colleagues. It is possible that the participants reported perceptions and online boundary management behaviours may differ post Covid-19. This may limit the credibility and transferability of the findings in this study to a post Covid-19 context.

The self-report nature of the semi-structured interviews was another limitation in the current study. The participants may not have answered the interview questions honestly but rather in a way that they thought would be socially desirable. Despite, the researcher's attempt to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the potential response bias of the participants may be attributed to their reluctance to voice their unfavourable perceptions of their colleagues' social media content, the impact of this on their workplace relationships and their unfavourable online boundary management behaviours. Therefore, limiting the credibility of the findings in this study.

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The fifth limitation in the current study was that it was hard to discern which particular social media platforms the participants were referring to in their reports. Although, the participants answered question 1.1 at the start of the interview, which asked, "what are the most common social networking cites that you participate in?". This gave a general sense of the social media platforms that the participants prefer to engage in. However, the participants often spoke about their experiences on social media in a general sense and did not give specific reference to which social media platforms they were discussing. This may limit the transferability of the findings in this study.

The final limitation was the use of thematic content analysis to examine and create themes related to the research questions in the current study. Thematic content analysis relies on the formation of themes relative to the research questions which are fundamentally based upon the researcher's interpretation of the interviews. Thus, the findings are based on the researcher's subjective interpretations that can be skewed by their own predispositions. This has the potential to influence the credibility and dependability of the research study. The researcher attempted to uphold the dependability of the study by continuously consulting their supervisor to assess and critique the interpretation and formation of the research findings. The researcher actively made use of a reflexive journal to continually ensure that their own individual biases and opinions were not impacting the interpretation and reporting of the research findings.

5.1.1 Theoretical limitations

Goffman's dramaturgical approach to impression management was the overarching theory that supports this research. This provided the theoretical basis upon which the interviews were constructed, analysed and understood in relation to how the participants perceive, categorise and react to their colleagues' social media content. The participant reports are seen to reinforce Goffman's concept of backstage and frontstage forms of self-representation and how the appropriate regulation of these amongst certain public and private audiences is integral to successful impression management. The findings suggest that in most cases the participant's perception of and relationship with their colleagues were both positively and negatively influenced by their colleague's success or lack there of in managing their social media content to leave their online audience with a favourable impression of them.

However, it is important to note the theoretical limitations of applying Goffman's dramaturgical approach to the current study. The first limitation was that Goffman's

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dramaturgical model was conceptualised for face-to-face interactions and does not account for the complexity of impression management on social media where the boundaries between the actor's frontstage and backstage become blurred. Furthermore, Goffman's dramaturgical model of impression management does not seem to account for diversity in the same audience's perceptions of what constitutes backstage and frontstage forms of self-representation. This was a limitation in the current research study which was conducted in a South African corporate context where professional and skilled employees from a diverse range of racial, cultural, religious and social backgrounds exist. As seen in the current study, Goffman's dramaturgical model does not account for the different interpretations of what constitutes backstage and frontstage forms of self-representation in a diverse South African population.

The theoretical framework by Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013) on online boundary management provided the basis upon which the interviews were created, examined and understood in relation to the approaches/tactics which participants use to try to manage the potential effects of their exposure to their colleagues' social media content. The findings reinforce Ollier-Malaterre et al.'s (2013) notion that the participants preferred online boundary management behaviours depend on two aspects: (1) their predisposition towards "segmenting" versus "integrating" their personal and professional lives online and (2) the intended goal behind choosing their preferred online boundary management style whether it is for "self-validation" or "self-enhancement". Furthermore, the findings suggest that the participants' chosen online boundary management behavioural style spoke to the degree of "respect" and "liking" that they seek to uphold within their online and often their offline audiences.

Nevertheless, Ollier-Malaterre et al.'s (2013) theoretical framework was limited in its application within the current study as it is conceptualised based on the online boundary management behaviours that the individuals adopt as "actors" on social media. Contrary to the focus of the first two research questions, the third research question was analysed through the lens of the participants and the online boundary management behaviours that they chose to adopt in relation to their position as "actors" on social media. Furthermore, the theory does not account for the flexibility between these online boundary management behaviours which the participants often gave nod to.

5.2 Recommendations for future research

The first recommendation was for future research on this topic to use a mixed method research design to improve the credibility of the findings. The use of quantitative and

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qualitative research design would allow for mixed methods of data collection to be used such as focus groups, interviews, and self-completion questionnaires. This would allow the researcher to take advantage of the strengths in both qualitative and quantitative designs and mitigate the biases inherent in each by allowing for the "triangulation" of the findings (Creswell, 2014). The use of quantitative methods would increase generalisability of the findings by increasing the sample size so that it is more representative of the population of professional and skilled employees in the South African corporate environment. While the qualitative research methods would still allow for the collection of in-depth detail that is imperative to this research topic. Future research could conduct interviews and focus groups with participants to understand the main themes that arise and use this to guide the construction of a self-completion questionnaire that can be shared with a larger more representative sample. Future research could examine this research topic in a post Covid-19 context whereby social interactions are not limited by the Covid-19 restrictions and professional and skilled employees are back to working from the office. It would be interesting to compare the findings of the current research with similar research done in a post pandemic context to see if there are any significant differences in the participants' reports.

The current research focus is quite broad, and it could be beneficial for future research to explore intersectionality particularly within a diverse context such as South Africa. Another recommendation was for future research on this topic to better understand how the diverse intersecting identities that exist within the South African corporate environment such as race, gender, culture, religion, and age could influence the participants' perceptions and experiences. Future research could examine whether professional and skilled employees in the South African corporate environment's perceptions of their colleagues' social media content and their relationship with these colleagues are influenced by their diverse identities. Perhaps, such research could also explore whether intersecting identities could influence the approaches/tactics that the participants might utilise to manage the potential effects which may arise from their exposure to their colleagues' social media content.

It could be beneficial for future research to be done using impression management theories that account for diversity in the audience and their interpretations of what constitutes favourable impression management. Thus, future research could try to use or conceptualise impression management theory that is applicable to the South African corporate environment where a diverse professional and skilled employees coexist.

Additionally, future research should be done into conceptualising a theoretical framework on that focuses on the online boundary management behavioural styles that

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individuals adopt as the “audience” on social media. It could be beneficial to understand the approaches/tactics that the audience adopts to try and manage the effects of their exposure to their colleagues’ social media content.

5.2.1 Future recommendations for organisations

The first recommendation for future organisations was that effective, broad-based social media policies should be developed and regularly implemented throughout every company. These policies should clearly stipulate the expectations of the organisation on the employees’ expected conduct and participation on social media. The policy should stipulate what type of information and that they are not permitted to share online such as discriminatory content, organisationally classified/confidential information, disreputable content that can be affiliated with the organisation and information that includes the company branding without the prior consent of the organisation (Del Riego et al., 2016; Kaul et al., 2015). Furthermore, these policies should include the inappropriate forms of conduct on social media that will not be tolerated such as evidence of substance abuse with company branded uniform, online bullying or harassment and the participation in socially or politically scandalous activities or views that can be associated with the organisation (Del Riego et al., 2016; Kaul et al., 2015). The organisations social media policy should clearly stipulate the repercussions associated with being found guilty of infringing the policy and ensure that such action is actively taken to address such cases as stipulated in the policy. Future organisations should remain cognisant of the evolving nature of social media and continuously update such policies to remain on top of these changes.

Secondly, future organisations should ensure that employees are regularly trained and made aware of the social media policy that exists, the expectations of their conduct when participating on social media and the corresponding repercussions that can come from their inability to adhere to the policy (Del Riego et al., 2016; Kaul et al., 2015). The employees should be trained on the social media policy should any changes or updates be made to the existing policy. The organisation should make it well known that the employees will be subject to regular monitoring of their social media content to ensure that they align with the social media policy (Del Riego et al., 2016; Kaul et al., 2015). Furthermore, organisations should train their employees on social media etiquette by explaining what constitutes appropriate social media conduct and participation. In this training, the company should outline the long-lasting repercussions that their employees’ inappropriate social media conduct can have on

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their professional reputation amongst their colleagues, within their organisation and even within their industry (Del Riego et al., 2016; Kaul et al., 2015). Additionally, the organisation should justify the reputational damage that their employees' inappropriate social media content and conduct can have on the organisation and its long-term success (Del Riego et al., 2016; Kaul et al., 2015).

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APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

PSYCHOLOGY

THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)

Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050 · Tel: 011 717 4541 · Fax: 011 717 4559 · E-mail: psych.SHCD@wits.ac.za

Consent to participate in the research study

Exposure to colleague's social media content and workplace relationships

This study aims to investigate the effects which exposure to one's colleague's social media content may have on one's perceptions of their colleagues, the dynamic of one's relationship with their colleagues as well as the potential strategies which one may utilise to manage the potential effects which may arise from this exposure.

I,..... voluntarily consent to partake in this research study by Tiffany Dias. I was well informed about the nature of this research and I recognise what is required for my participation within this research study.

I consent to the following:
(please tick the relevant boxes)

• I recognize that my participation is entirely voluntary and if necessary, I maintain the right to withdraw at any time throughout the research process without any form of potential repercussion (i.e. without any benefits or disadvantages).	Yes	No
• I recognize that I can choose not to answer any questions that I feel I do not want to answer without the need for an explanation.	Yes	No
• I recognise that the information which I disclose for the purposes of this study will remain confidential. I also agree to the fact that any identifying information which is disclosed for the purpose of this research study will remain anonymous and will be replaced with pseudonyms for example, Participant 1 or Participant 2.	Yes	No
• I consent to allowing the researcher to record my interview and to store this recording on a password protected laptop for the duration of the research study. I acknowledge that following the completion of this research study that my original interview recording will be destroyed.	Yes	No
• I recognise that my interview will be transcribed by the researcher.	Yes	No
• I consent to allowing the researcher to use quotes from my interview so long as these quotes are anonymised.	Yes	No
• I consent to allowing the researcher to securely store the information I have provided for the purpose of this research study in an anonymised format on the password protected laptop and hard drive of the researcher and their supervisor. I also recognise that the purpose of storing this information is for prospective future academic use within other research projects. I agree to these conditions so long as these projects obtain ethical clearance and my information is anonymously disclosed and utilised with these projects.	Yes	No

Name of participant:_____ Name of researcher:_____
Date:_____ Date:_____
Signature:_____ Signature:_____

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APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

PSYCHOLOGY
THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)

Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050 · Tel: 011 717 4541 · Fax: 011 717 4559 · E-mail: psych.SHCD@wits.ac.za

Good day

My name is Tiffany Dias and I am currently a student at the University of the Witwatersrand, studying towards obtaining my master's degree in organisational psychology. As a requirement for my degree, I am currently conducting research under the guidance of my supervisor, Prof Fiona Donald. My research is aimed at investigating the effects which exposure to colleagues' social media content may have on informal workplace relationships. I am especially interested in seeing how being exposed to your colleagues' social media content may influence your perception of these colleagues, the dynamics of your relationships and the possible strategies you may use to handle the potential effects which may arise from this exposure. I specifically want to explore this from the perspective of professional and skilled workers within the corporate environment in South Africa. If you are currently a professional or skilled worker within the South African corporate environment, who is over the age of 18 and has access to a suitable device and internet that will allow you to participate in an online interview on Zoom or Microsoft teams, I would like to invite you to participate in my research study.

Your participation would require that you partake in an online interview which is estimated to take place within the next 2 to 3 weeks and will go on for about 45-60 minutes. We will schedule a date and time which is most convenient for you to take part in the interview. I will send you a link, which you can then use to access the video conferencing platform of your choice (Zoom or Microsoft Teams) on the scheduled date and time of the interview. I would like to request your permission to record the interview using the facility provided by the platform upon which the interview will take place. This recording will be stored in a secure folder on my password protected laptop to uphold the security of your data. The recording will only be accessible to myself and my research supervisor. I would like to request your permission to store the transcribed interview contents of your interview indefinitely on my external hard drive for potential future use in research projects. All forms of identifying information will be removed from the interview transcripts content before it is permanently stored on my external hard drive which will remain in a locked safe at my place of residence. The original interview recordings will be destroyed following the completion of this research study.

Your participation within my research study is entirely voluntary and there are no benefits or disadvantages to participating or not. You maintain the right to withdraw your participation at any time. During the interview, you may elect not to answer any questions. The information which you disclose to me will remain strictly confidential throughout my research project as your identity will be protected by a pseudonym (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2 etc.). Personal details (such as your name, contact details and place of employment) will remain anonymous and will not be revealed to any persons other than myself and my supervisor.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any queries. If you have any concerns regarding the ethics of this study, please contact the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical): 011 717 1408; Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za. If you wish to receive a summary of the research findings, please email me and I will send you an executive summary on completion of the study.

Yours sincerely

Tiffany Dias (Researcher)
Tiffdias97@yahoo.com

Prof Fiona Donald (Research supervisor)
Fiona.Donald@wits.ac.za / 011 717 4507

C1 - Internal use

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW GUIDE
PSYCHOLOGY
THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)
Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050 · Tel: 011 717 4541 · Fax: 011 717 4559 · E-mail: psych.SHCD@wits.ac.za

Interview Guide
Exposure to colleagues' social media content and workplace relationships

- Good day, how are you doing today?.
- First and foremost I would like to thank you for taking part in my study.
- As you know from my email and the participant sheet, I am doing research on the influence which the social media content that one's colleagues post may have on their workplace relationships.
- Before, I carry on I would just like to ensure that you are comfortable and happy to move on with the interview?
- I would like to remind you of your rights as explained in the consent form, that you have the right to withdraw at any time without any risk of repercussion. I would like to assure you that your identity will remain anonymous and all the information that you disclose will be treated confidentially. If for any reason you should like to terminate the interview or dismiss a question, you have the right to do so.
- I would like to request your permission to record this interview.

Demographic questions

- **Before we start the interview, I would like to get some background information so that I will be able to describe my sample in my research report.**
  1. What is your current occupation?
  2. How much work experience do you have?
  3. What is your highest level of education?
  4. What race are you?
  5. How old are you?
  6. How long have you worked in your current organisation?
  7. What is your gender? (Male/female/non-binary)

Interview questions

1. How often do you participate on social networking sites?

1.1. What are the most common social networking sites that you participate in?

1.2. What do you commonly use social media networking sites for?

1.3. How frequently do you use social media to post information about yourself?

1.4. How frequently do you use social media to engage with and observe other people's posts?

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2. How do you feel about having access to information about colleagues on social media?
3. How do you feel about seeing information about colleagues' personal lives on social media?
4. How do you feel about seeing information about colleagues' work lives on social media?

5. How do you feel the exposure to your colleagues' information on social media has influenced your perceptions of them?

5.1.1. Please could you give me some examples of how the exposure to your colleagues' information on social media has positively influenced your perceptions of them?

5.1.2. Please could you give me some examples of how the exposure to your colleagues' information on social media has negatively influenced your perceptions of them?

6. How does exposure to your colleagues' information social media influence your relationship with them?
7. How does the type of content your colleagues post on social networking sites influence your willingness to form/maintain informal workplace relationships with these colleagues? (e.g. Posts with offensive material; inappropriate material or posts with achievements; family life; significant life experiences)
8. Please can you tell me about situations you may have encountered where your colleagues' reputations may have been affected by their social networking posts?
9. How do you believe the social media content that others may have posted in connection with your colleague may influence your relationship with them? (i.e., content posted by their friends, family or other connections).
10. How did you deal with the influences of this exposure to your colleagues' social media at work?
11. How do manage the privacy settings you have on your social media content? (e.g.: Do you have an open online profile where anyone can see the content that you post or do you have privacy setting that restrict who has access to your social media content)
12. How do determine what professional connection requests you accept or decline on social media?
13. How do you determine which professional contacts you will connect with on social media?

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14. Please can you tell me about situations where your cultural similarities or differences might have influenced the impressions you form of your colleagues based on their social media posts?

    14.1. How did this influence your perception of your colleagues?

    14.2. How did this influence your relationship with your colleagues?

- Thank you again for taking the time to participate in my study. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me. If you would like feedback about the study please contact me and I will provide you with a summarised report of the final findings in the research study.

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APPENDIX 4: Participant Rejection letter

PSYCHOLOGY
THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)

Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050 · Tel: 011 717 4541 · Fax: 011 717 4559 · E-mail: psych.SHCD@wits.ac.za

Good day

Thank for you showing interest in participating in my research. While I would have liked to have interviewed you, I am unable to as the study is small and I am trying to include people from as many sociodemographic and cultural groups as possible, and unfortunately I already have a number of participants who are similar to you in some respect (e.g., ethnicity, age, gender).

Thank you once more for your time and interest in my research study. Should you have any concerns or queries, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the contact details provided below.

Yours sincerely

Tiffany Dias (Researcher)
1387907@students.wits.ac.za / 0636829667

Prof Fiona Donald (Supervisor)
Fiona.Donald@wits.ac.za / 011 717 4507

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APPENDIX 5: Permission request to gain access to organisation letter

PSYCHOLOGY
THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)

Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050 · Tel: 011 717 4541 · Fax: 011 717 4559 · E-mail: psych.SHCD@wits.ac.za

Dear (name of person)

My name is Tiffany Dias and I am currently an organisational psychology master's student at the University of the Witwatersrand. As a requirement for my degree, I am required to conduct research that is aimed at investigating the effects of exposure to colleagues' social media content on informal workplace relationships. I am especially interested in seeing how being exposed to colleagues' social media content may influence perceptions of these colleagues, the dynamics of relationships and the possible strategies employees may use to handle this. I specifically want to explore this from the perspective of professional and skilled workers within the corporate environment in South Africa.

I would like to ask your permission to approach the employees in your organisation, particularly those working as professional and skilled workers partake in my research study. I would kindly like to request that you distribute the following link xxx to your employees which serves as an invitation to participate in my research study. This link contains a participant information sheet, providing them with all the information about my research study. The participants will need to meet the inclusion criteria and will need to partake in a 45-60 minute online interview to participate in the study as stipulated in the information sheet.

The interviews will be recorded and stored in a secure folder on my password protected laptop, which will only be accessible to myself and my research supervisor. I would like to store the transcribed interview contents indefinitely on my external hard drive for potential future use in research projects. All forms of identifying information will be removed from the interview transcripts before it is permanently stored. The original interview recordings will be destroyed following the completion of this research study.

Participation is entirely voluntary and there are no benefits or disadvantages to participating or not. Employees maintain the right to withdraw their participation at any time and may elect not to answer any questions. The information disclosed will remain strictly confidential throughout my research project and employees identity will be protected by a pseudonym. All personal details (such as the name, contact details and place of employment) will remain anonymous.

This research may assist South African organisations in becoming more attentive to and understanding the effects which social media posts may have on their organisational culture within this diverse corporate workforce. Please feel free to contact me if you have any queries. For any ethical concerns, please contact the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical): 011 717 1408; Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za. Should participants request feedback, an executive summary of the research findings will be emailed to the participants on completion of the study.

Yours sincerely

Tiffany Dias (Researcher)
Tiffdias97@yahoo.com

Prof Fiona Donald (Supervisor)
Fiona.Donald@wits.ac.za / 011 717 4507

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The effects of social media posts on workplace relationships

WITS UNIVERSITY



Calling all South African professionals in the corporate environment

What my research entails?

I am particularly interested in investigating whether the participants exposure to their colleagues' social media content has the potential to influence their perception of and relationship with their colleagues.

What will participating entail?

A 45-60 minute online interview with myself on Microsoft teams or Zoom

If you believe that you would be a suitable candidate and you would be willing to volunteer as a participant in my research study.

or

If you would like to find out more about my research study.

Please email: Tiffany Dias (tiffdias97@yahoo.com)



Thank you in advance :)

APPENDIX 7: ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE:	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MAORG/21/01**
PROJECT TITLE:	Exposure to colleagues' social media content and workplace relationship.
INVESTIGATOR	Dias Tiffany (1387907)
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	SHCD/Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	20 June 2021
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	Low Risk
EXPIRY DATE	31 December 2023

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 26 June 2021 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Dr Colleen Bernstein)

cc: Prof. Fiona Donald (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

_____ **Signature**

Date 26 / 06 / 2022

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

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