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Evolving border theory and self-regulation theory for a mobile phone generation

White, Edward Peter Greenwood

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ABSTRACT

The global adoption of mobile phones has fundamentally changed life as we know it. This study hopes to understand if mobile- and/or smartphones have changed the way in which work and home domains are constructed and what the consequences are on the individual's work-family balance. More importantly, are individuals able to self-regulate the flow of communication from the work into the home domain via a mobile- and/or smartphone in order to maintain the intricate work-family balance. To determine the plausibility/feasibility of this hypothesis, the study builds on Clark's (2000) Border theory with respect to work-life balance and border violations, bearing recent technological advances in mind, through the incorporation of Bandura's (1986) self-regulation mechanism to explain the border management mechanism. To determine the validity of this hypothesis, a mixed-methods study was conducted which utilised a managerial participant sample recruited from South Africa in three phases; a pilot study (N = 30); a primary sample of a further 227 managers; and in-depth follow-up interviews with 27 managers and their partners. To determine the relationship between self-regulation and mobile phone usage for after-hours work in the home domain, Pearson's correlation coefficients were used. The relationship between self-regulation and work-family balance was further explored through moderated multiple linear regressions, using a model from Baron and Kenny (1986), which created further explorative points which were investigated in the 27 interviews. The interviews were conducted to determine if individuals understand their after-hours mobile phone usage for work purposes and this was analysed via thematic content analysis (TCA).

There was evidence for relationships between self-regulation and the time spent on organisational work within the work day and at home (after hours), which results in an impact on the development of work-family conflict. The relationship between the mobile phone use for work can be attributed to self-regulation, which implies that self-regulation is an intermediary mechanism. Moderated multilinear regression, unexpectedly, showed that individuals with low (deficient) self-regulatory ability, facilitated work ubiquitously with their mobile phones while simultaneously increasing their own self-esteem, as it supported their own work-family balance. The interviews uncovered three different border-keeper groups (border-expanders, border-adapters, and border-enforcers). The outcomes of this research indicates that mobile- and/or smartphones have the ability to alter the border construction between the work and home domains as well as the intricate balance between them.

Keywords: Work-family balance, Border theory, Mobile phones, Smartphones, Self-regulation, Self-esteem, South African managers