

Effects of social networking site addiction and digital stress on employee outcomes – cross-cultural evidence

Cross Cultural &
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Abstract

Purpose – The use of mobile devices, such as to access social media, is pervasive in both private and work settings. It can lead to problematic behaviors, including social networking site addiction (SNSA) and digital stress (DS). To provide evidence on how SNSA and DS relate to employees, this research tests their associations with downstream variables across two cultures.

Design/methodology/approach – More than 700 German and Japanese employees completed an online survey. Multigroup structural equation modeling in AMOS tests the relationships between SNSA and digital stress and downstream variables.

Findings – Both SNSA and DS are linked to employee psychological strain, which is related to work performance and life satisfaction; work performance is also positively associated with life satisfaction. The negative relationship between strain and performance is more pronounced in Japan than in Germany. However, the other associations appear consistent across cultures, suggesting that SNSA and DS represent universal challenges for employees and organizations.

Research limitations/implications – This study includes German and Japanese employees. Continued research might address other countries (e.g. less-developed economies) and take a more differentiated view of employee occupations (e.g. low-vs. high-tech jobs).

Practical implications – Organizations must recognize the negative outcomes related to employees' excessive uses of social and digital media; develop ways to assess employees' SNSA and DS; and implement measures to conquer SNSA and DS.

Originality/value – In addition to reiterating the detrimental association of SNSA and DS with employees' perceived strain and two important downstream variables, this article adopts an explicitly cross-cultural approach to test these relationships.

Keywords Digital stress, Life satisfaction, Psychological strain, Social networking site addiction, Work performance, Social and digital media

Paper type Research article

1. Introduction

For today's employees, the use of mobile devices and social media is often a matter of course. By 2035, almost 80% of the global workforce will be made up of "digital natives" who have never lived without digital technology (McCrindle, 2025). Due to the embeddedness of mobile devices and social media in people's lives, their use often transcends the boundaries between private and work spheres, and growing evidence suggests some negative associations of such developments (e.g. Tarafdar *et al.*, 2020; Van Zoonen *et al.*, 2016). In particular, social networking site addiction (Moqbel and Kock, 2018; Ponnusamy *et al.*, 2020) and perceived



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digital stress (Hall *et al.*, 2021; Zhan *et al.*, 2025) both result from the extensive, cumulative uses of social media across private and work settings, though these two outcomes are conceptually distinct. *Social networking site addiction* (SNSA) refers to psychological dependence on the use of social media, which interferes with other important activities and is negatively related to behavioral outcomes (Moqbel and Kock, 2018). Perceived *digital stress* (DS) is “the stress and anxiety that accompanies notifications from and the use of information and communication technologies enabled through mobile and social media” (Hall *et al.*, 2021, p. 231). Thus, the former refers to compulsive overuses of social media driven by psychological dependence, while the latter reflects an emotional response to the pressure and overload caused by digital communication. Yet both concerns might be related to similar employee outcomes, to varying extents. Specifying these relationships, as well as their potential variation across diverse cultural settings, thus represents an important target for both research and managerial practice to develop effective policies to address SNSA and DS.

The extant literature has already established strong empirical evidence of their negative relationships with work-related outcomes. For example, Yu *et al.* (2023) find that excessive use of social media at work is linked to information, communication and social overload. Majid *et al.* (2020) highlight the negative relationship between SNSA and task distraction and Moqbel and Kock (2018) reveal that SNSA is linked to increased task distraction and lower positive emotions, which in turn are linked to lower job performance. This is in line with Liu *et al.* (2022) who reveal that social media is negatively associated with job performance by causing work interruptions, a relationship strengthened by social media dependency. Javed *et al.* (2019) concur that it directly relates to job performance and indirectly through task distraction. According to Zulfiqar *et al.* (2023), SNSA has a negative relationship with employees’ cognitive performance too. With regard to technology-related stress, Wang *et al.* (2023) link it to increased work exhaustion, which in turn is negatively related to employee well-being. Specifically exploring DS, Fischer *et al.* (2021) also confirm that employees’ perceptions of it are associated with feelings of exhaustion and diminished job satisfaction. With a study of public administrators, Wrede *et al.* (2021) determine that digitally stressed workers feel overwhelmed and are more likely to quit; when they consider employees who work from home at least occasionally, Wrede *et al.* (2023) also find heightened levels of DS.

In developing these critical insights, we contribute to the literature by examining the simultaneous associations of SNSA and DS with downstream variables. Assessing the outcomes of SNSA and DS simultaneously seems pertinent because of their conceptual distinction. Each stressor has unique associations, which may contribute differently to employees’ perceived strain. Addressing this research gap, we draw on the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989). Even though COR theory has been applied widely in the literature (e.g. Halbesleben and Wheeler, 2015; Zivnuska *et al.*, 2019), we aim to increase its external validity and broaden its applicability across contexts by testing COR theory in relation to new constructs (i.e. simultaneously investigating SNSA and DS), measures and settings (Lucas, 2003; Lynch, 1999). By investigating German and Japanese employee samples, we provide a theoretically meaningful test of COR theory under varying cultural conditions and thus a “theoretical replication” in a new and culturally diverse context (Lucas, 2003).

Further, prior research calls for more “cross-cultural comparative studies, incorporating employees from diverse countries” (Huang *et al.*, 2024). Specifically with regard to cross-cultural research in the field of social and digital media stress among employees, previous literature is limited. Gao and Shao (2024), for example, emphasize the relevance of the cultural context in the relationship between problematic social media use and employee outcomes, noting a lack of operationalized geographic diversity research. Fu *et al.* (2023) observe a scarcity of research applying COR theory to examine health consequences related to technology use. In sum, despite growing interest in social and digital media stress at work, research remains scarce that simultaneously adopts a cross-cultural perspective and applies COR theory to examine technology-related employee outcomes.

We aim to address this gap by developing and testing a model that links employee SNSA and DS to life satisfaction, through psychological strain and work performance, and testing this model among German and Japanese employee samples. Germany and Japan, with some of the largest digital populations of Internet and social media users (Statista, 2025a), represent suitable cases for a cross-cultural investigation of the effects of SNSA and DS on employees' private and work lives because despite some cultural similarities, they exhibit fundamental differences in culturally embedded orientations toward achievement, hierarchy, relationships and the separation of work and private life (Hofstede, 2026; Trompenaars, 1993).

As prior organizational research has shown (e.g. Ariza-Montes *et al.*, 2017; Bhagat *et al.*, 2010; Michel *et al.*, 2023; Zeglal and Janbeik, 2019), and based on German and Japanese employee samples, we confirm that both psychological strain and work performance serve as key mediators in the relationship between stressors and outcomes. Our studies further reveal that both SNSA and DS are associated with psychological strain, which, in turn, is directly and indirectly (through work performance) related to life satisfaction. Notably, the negative relationship between psychological strain and work performance is more pronounced in Japan than in Germany. However, all other associations, especially those involving SNSA and DS, remain consistent across German and Japanese samples, suggesting that the harmful effects of SNSA and DS on employee outcomes might transcend culture.

Consequently, our study makes three main contributions. First, we simultaneously investigate how SNSA and DS relate to key employee outcomes. Second, we provide a theoretical replication of the COR theory in a new, culturally diverse context (i.e. German and Japanese employees). Third, we contribute to cross-cultural research on employees' social and digital media stress. To establish these contributions to research and practice, we provide the conceptual background for the predicted downstream effects of SNSA and DS next, followed by an explanation and discussion of the empirical results.

2. Literature and hypotheses

Broader management and organizational research has examined the effects of technology-related stress on employees (e.g. Wang *et al.*, 2023; Yu *et al.*, 2023). For example, Yuan *et al.*'s (2025) meta-analysis highlights the negative relationship between technology-related stress, psychological strain and job performance. Moreover, prior studies show that excessive social media use is associated with lower positive emotions and more frequent work interruptions, which are, in turn, negatively linked to job performance (Liu *et al.*, 2022; Moqbel and Kock, 2018). Table 1 provides an overview of prior research focusing on employees' digital stressors and highlights that cross-cultural research, as well as the simultaneous consideration of SNSA and digital stress, remains underdeveloped.

2.1 Conservation of resources and job stress as a universal phenomenon

According to COR theory, individuals are fundamentally motivated to protect their resources to avoid resource losses and to acquire new ones (Hobfoll, 1989). Thus, individuals experience dynamic resource gain and loss processes that can strengthen and mitigate each other. While resource gains can facilitate further gains, initiating resource gain spirals, resource losses tend to impede the acquisition of other resources, thereby triggering resource loss spirals (Halbesleben and Wheeler, 2015; Hobfoll, 2001, 2011).

Because the extensive use of social and digital media can be linked to negative outcomes such as fatigue (Labban and Bizzi, 2022) and drained resources (Zivnuska *et al.*, 2019), SNSA and DS reflect conditions in which resource conservation efforts fail, resulting in individuals experiencing resource loss. Following the dynamic and cyclical nature of COR theory, SNSA and DS can thus initiate a resource loss spiral, triggering further detrimental effects on psychological and physiological resources.

Table 1. Research on employees' digital stressors

Author(s)	Theory	Sample	Cross-cultural	Stressors		Outcomes	Findings
				SNSA	DS		
Fischer et al. (2021)	–	N = 1,998 employees (U.S.)	X	X	✓	Emotional exhaustion, innovation climate, job and user satisfaction	DS is positively related to emotional exhaustion and negatively related to innovation climate, job satisfaction and user satisfaction
Labban and Bizzi (2022)	Distraction-Conflict theory	N = 286 employees (U.S.)	X	✓	X	Happiness, attentiveness, fatigue, guilt, networking behaviors, counterproductive work behaviors	Social media use before work is linked to happiness and attentiveness, which in turn are positively related to networking behaviors. Social media use during work is associated with higher fatigue and guilt, which are in turn related to counterproductive work behaviors
Liu et al. (2022)	Computer-mediated communication interactivity theory	N = 556 employees (China)	X	✓	X	Communication quality, work interruptions, job performance	Social media interactivity is associated with higher communication quality, which is positively related to job performance; however, it is simultaneously associated with more work interruptions that are negatively related to deteriorate job performance. A high dependency on social media amplifies both the positive and negative association with job performance
Moqbel and Kock (2018)	Social cognitive theory	N = 276 English-speaking employees (87% from the U.S.)	X	✓	X	Task distraction, positive emotions, work performance, health	Greater SNSA is linked to higher task distraction and lower positive emotions. In turn, task distraction is linked to lower work performance, while higher positive emotions are associated with both work performance and health
Wang et al. (2023)	Job Demands-Resources	N = 235 employees (China)	X	X	✓	Work exhaustion, workplace knowledge diversity, employee well-being	Work exhaustion mediated the relationship between technology-related stress and employee well-being, knowledge diversity attenuated this indirect effect

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Author(s)	Theory	Sample	Cross-cultural	Stressors		Outcomes	Findings
				SNSA	DS		
Yu et al. (2023)	Stressor-strain-outcomes framework	N = 422 employees (China)	X	✓	X	Information overload, communication overload, social overload, emotional exhausting, job performance	Excessive use of social media at work is associated with higher information, communication, and social overload. Information and communication overload are positively related to emotional exhaustion. Additionally, information and social overload are negatively related to job performance
Yuan et al. (2025)	Transactional Theory of Stress	Meta-Analysis with 67 studies, 63,100 employees	X	X	✓	Psychological strain, job performance	All dimensions of technology-related stress (overload, invasion, complexity, insecurity, and uncertainty) are positively related to strain. Job performance is negatively associated with all dimensions except uncertainty
Zivnuska et al. (2019)	Conservation of Resources	N = 326 employees (U.S.)	X	✓	X	Work-family balance, job burnout, work performance	SNSA is negatively related to work-family balance, while social media reactions are positively related to job burnout. Work-family balance is positively associated with work performance, whereas job burnout is linked to negative outcomes
This Study	Conservation of Resources	N = 735 employees (448 Germans and 287 Japanese)	✓	✓	✓	Psychological strain, work performance, life satisfaction	Both SNSA and DS are positively related to employee strain, which in turn is negatively related to work performance and life satisfaction; performance is also positively linked to life satisfaction. Findings are consistent across cultures, with the negative relationship between strain and work performance being stronger in Japan than in Germany

Note(s): SNSA = social networking site addiction, DS = digital stress
Source(s): Authors' own creation

Because people use mobile devices and visit social media sites both at work and in their personal lives, SNSA and DS represent boundary-spanning stressors (Grotto and Mills, 2023) and are thus likely to induce further resource reduction or loss in both work and private life. However, the extent to which boundary-spanning stressors exert similar or different effects across cultures remains underresearched.

Gao and Shao (2024) emphasize the importance of cultural context in shaping the relationship between problematic social media use and employee outcomes. Against this background, this study focuses on Germany and Japan. Both countries exhibit large populations of Internet and social media users (Statista, 2025a) and share cultural similarities, such as a culture of restraint, marked by a comparatively low emphasis on leisure and gratification (Hofstede, 2026), while differing substantially in other culturally embedded orientations. Japan represents a less individualistic society and exhibits higher levels of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, achievement motivation and long-term orientation compared to Germany (Hofstede, 2026). Additionally, Japanese culture places greater importance on interpersonal relationships than on formal rules, views work and private life as more closely linked, and tends to attribute status more to age and organizational position and less to individual performance than German culture (THT Consulting, 2026; Trompenaars, 1993). As social and digital media have been shown to relate to interpersonal relationships, work-life boundaries and status and recognition (Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas, 2016; Marsh *et al.*, 2022; Meythaler *et al.*, 2025), these cultural dimensions are especially relevant when investigating the relationships between SNSA and DS and employee outcomes.

However, in dominant narratives describing the relationships of job-related stress and employee well-being and performance (Huth and Chung-Yan, 2023; Marzocchi *et al.*, 2024), surprisingly little evidence exists to suggest that addiction–outcome or stress–outcome relationships vary across cultures. Rather, (job) stress, as a general construct, might constitute a universal phenomenon that adversely affects people regardless of their culture. For example, Hashim (2003) compared two student samples, coming from African and Western countries and studying in China, and found no differences in their perceptions of interpersonal, intrapersonal, academic or environmental stressors. In describing the stress perceptions and coping styles of more than 3,200 adolescents in Turkey, Italy and Germany, Haid *et al.* (2010) emphasize their similarities, such that across all three countries, the participants use active coping styles to deal with future-related stressors. Specific to employee samples, in their effort to identify stress differences among nearly 35,000 employees from southern and central Europe and Sweden (northern Europe), De Smet *et al.* (2005) uncover gender and occupational-level differences but few regional differences, suggesting that culture is not predictive of employees' stress level. Küçük and Konuk (2023) recruit more than 700 employees from Turkey and the United Kingdom and find that employees' stress in the form of task conflict with their managers is negatively associated with employees' job satisfaction, with no difference between cultures. Finally, in a meta-analysis, Hoobler *et al.* (2021) compare employees from African and Western countries and find no differences in job outcomes, such as work–family conflict. Therefore, we offer predictions regarding the relationships of SNSA and DS with downstream variables, but do not anticipate cultural differences between Germany and Japan.

Specifically, we theorize that SNSA and DS have the potential to deplete employees' resources, resulting in resource loss spirals manifested in psychological strain that is negatively associated with both their work performance and life satisfaction.

2.2 Stress and psychological strain

Consumers' social media use clearly have reached new peaks: As a global average, people spend 141 min per day per person on social media, an increase of 30 min per day since 2015 (Statista, 2025b). Such intense usage can readily transform into compulsive–addictive behavior, as is widely observed and reported in connection with social media (e.g. Miranda

et al., 2023). The combination of such compulsive behavior with perceptions of digital stress is likely to co-occur with psychological strain, which manifests as unpleasant psychological and emotional states (Xiao, 2024). Strain can result from different demands and persistent challenges, whether at work or in private spheres, because people must invest their time, energy and attention, as types of resources, to cope with them (Naseer and Raja, 2021).

As noted, we propose that SNSA and DS represent individual-level stressors relevant to employee outcomes. If they exhibit addictive, compulsive behavior in relation to social media, it is reflected in a person's tendency to be constantly concerned about social media and excessive time spent on related activities (Moqbel and Kock, 2018). According to COR theory, this tendency and its associated behaviors can lead to an individual experiencing reduced resources, ultimately resulting in psychological strain. Existing research acknowledges some negative relationships between SNSA and important employee outcomes. For example, Moqbel and Kock (2018) show that SNSA is associated with employees being distracted from job tasks, An *et al.* (2023) empirically link excessive social media use to employee anxiety and job stress, and Charoensukmongkol (2016) demonstrates that intensive social media use at work relates to emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, persistent DS can be linked to anxiety and depressive symptoms among younger users (Nick *et al.*, 2022); we postulate that these negative associations are not limited to younger demographics or clinical symptoms but also extend to work and nonwork variables among adult employees. Based on COR theory and strong support in the literature for the notion that different types of stress can be linked to psychological strain (e.g. Lyngdoh *et al.*, 2021; Weiss, 1983), we predict that both SNSA and DS are positively related to employees' psychological strain.

H1. (a) SNSA and (b) DS are positively related to psychological strain.

In turn, employees' psychological strain is negatively linked to both employees' work performance and life satisfaction. Funke *et al.* (2026) have already established a relationship between DS and employees' quitting intentions. Past research further identifies psychological work strain as a bridge that allows stressors to undermine work performance (e.g. Shinn *et al.*, 1984; Tang and Vandenberghe, 2021), measured by employees' work behaviors and outcomes (Cheng and Gu, 2022). Also, with regard to life satisfaction, which is considered a key indicator of subjective well-being and an important outcome in management literature (Erdogan *et al.*, 2012), psychological strain relates to lower levels among employees (Martin *et al.*, 2024; Zhao *et al.*, 2020). Among a sample of university faculty, for example, Xu and Wang (2023) find that different job stressors are associated with burnout, which is negatively related to their life satisfaction. This is in line with existing research building on COR theory, which links resource loss resulting in stress to reduced employee outcomes such as work performance and satisfaction (Hochwarter *et al.*, 2008; Walsh, 2011; Wright and Cropanzano, 1998).

In summary, we argue that both SNSA and DS are linked to psychological strain because employees must exert effort and invest resources to deal with their social media-related behavior and cope with SNSA and DS. We theorize that psychological strain is related to work performance through a resource depletion mechanism, such that it has a negative relationship with work performance and life satisfaction.

H2. Psychological strain is negatively related to (a) work performance and (b) life satisfaction.

2.3 Work performance and life satisfaction links

Organizational behavior literature provides evidence that people derive pleasure and strength from their work (Aziz and Zickar, 2006), that work performance and a sense of achievement are associated (Shi and Zheng, 2025), and that pleasurable work experiences are linked to increased life satisfaction (Zhao *et al.*, 2016). Conversely, the inability to work, or work

effectively, can wear people down over time. Even holding financial situations and other individual characteristics constant, unemployment relates to reduced life satisfaction (Aysan and Aysan, 2017). However, this evidence should not be taken to mean that employment *per se* promotes life satisfaction. Rather, only pleasurable work experiences, which lead to or coincide with high levels of work performance, can do so (Cai *et al.*, 2024; Erdogan *et al.*, 2012; Hagmaier *et al.*, 2018). Thus, for example, Morales-García *et al.* (2024) link employee work performance to life satisfaction through the mediation of work engagement.

Work performance represents an important organizational outcome measure, which arguably could be undermined by both work-related and nonwork stressors (Edwards *et al.*, 2007). In turn, work performance can be associated with critical employee outcomes. As Miner (2015) advances, employees' work performance is linked to the achievement of their goals, including life satisfaction. Drawing on these insights, we posit that:

H3. Work performance is positively related to life satisfaction.

3. Method

To test our hypotheses that employee psychological strain independently and serially mediates the associations between SNSA and DS and employee work performance and life satisfaction, we conducted two surveys among German and Japanese employees. These two countries rank high among nations with the largest digital populations of Internet and social media users (Statista, 2025a). Both Germany and Japan are also facing the challenges of aging workforces (Prakash, 2024), who might be particularly prone to the negative effects of excessive social media use. Also, their populations indicate relatively high life satisfaction scores (Helliwell *et al.*, 2024), suggesting that any adverse effects on life satisfaction would be of interest.

We recruited smartphone-owning employees through nationally reputable crowdsourcing platforms, namely Clickworker.de (Germany) and NTTCom (Japan). The use of crowdsourced data is widespread, and prior research indicates that this mode of data collection can yield reliable and high-quality data (Goodman and Paolacci, 2017; Walter *et al.*, 2019). Although samples obtained from crowdsourcing platforms tend to be more diverse and thus more representative than typical student or snowball samples (Kees *et al.*, 2017), it must be acknowledged that the risk of nonrepresentativeness cannot be fully precluded.

To determine an appropriate sample size, we conducted an *a priori* power analysis using an online calculator for covariance-based structural equation modeling (SEM; Soper, 2025), which builds on the assumptions of Cohen (1988) and Westland (2010). The recommended minimum sample size for our SEM (medium anticipated effect size of 0.25, statistical power level of 0.9, and a significance level of 0.05) was $N = 265$ per group, which we defined as the lower bound for our data collection. Given research-economic constraints, the crowdsourcing platforms were instructed to recruit approximately 450 German and 300 Japanese participants, resulting in an initial sample of 477 German and 309 Japanese employees. After removing outliers and respondents who failed the attention check question [1] (29 in Germany; 22 in Japan), the final sample consisted of 448 German respondents (63% men; mean age = 38.4 years, SD = 10.16) and 287 Japanese respondents (87% men; mean age = 53.4 years, SD = 10.22). The higher proportion of men in the Japanese sample and its relatively high average age reflect the national reality of the country's workforce composition, as also evidenced by studies based on representative data (Drabe *et al.*, 2015). The structural inequality between Japanese male and female employees is illustrated by men's higher labor force participation rate (72%), compared with women's (55%) (World Bank Group, 2024). In addition, Japan ranks 118th in the Global Gender Gap Index (Germany ranks 9th) and, with only 15.5% women on boards of directors, is among the OECD countries with comparatively low representation of women in top management positions (Germany: 37.2%; World Economic Forum, 2025). In addition, people aged 50–54 years, constitute the largest age group (approx. 8.6 million out of 69.6 million) within Japan's total labor force (Statista, 2025c).

Although we seek to assess their SNSA and DS levels and analyze the associations with their psychological strain, work performance and life satisfaction, we asked these respondents to answer demographic questions first, doing so means that we can capture the demographics of respondents who did not complete the survey and compare that group with those who did so, as a relevant check for nonresponse bias. The comparison indicated it was not an issue.

The measures of the latent constructs come from existing scales and were anchored at 1 (“never” or “strongly disagree”) and 7 (“always” or “strongly agree”). In particular, to measure SNSA, we used five items inspired by Turel and Serenko (2012) for DS, we relied on nine items from Funke et al. (2026). The psychological strain measure featured three items from Stich et al. (2019). For work performance, we took four items from Williams and Anderson (1991). Finally, we measured life satisfaction with three items from Diener et al. (1985).

4. Results

To test the hypothesized relationships (Figure 1), we used multigroup structural equation modeling in AMOS version 29. We first conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the measurement model to confirm the factor structure with five latent model variables: SNSA, DS, psychological strain, work performance, and life satisfaction. The model with all factor loadings freely estimated, across both countries, offers a satisfactory fit ($\chi^2 = 1053.94$, $df = 466$, $\chi^2/df = 2.26$, comparative fit index [CFI] = 0.96; Tucker–Lewis index [TLI] = 0.95; root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = 0.04). The standardized factor loadings in this unconstrained model were all substantial and statistically significant, ranging from 0.58 to 0.97 across countries.

The CFA also confirmed the reliability and convergent and discriminant validity of the five latent constructs. Cronbach’s alpha values ranged from 0.87 to 0.96, composite reliabilities (CR) from 0.87 to 0.95, and the average variances extracted (AVE) from 0.47 to 0.87; only the DS construct in the German sample falls slightly below the 0.5 threshold (see Table 2). The AVE value could be increased to exceed 0.5 if we excluded two DS items with loadings below 0.6 (i.e. DS_1 and DS_8), but such an exclusion would undermine the conceptual breadth of the construct and come at the expense of content validity (Clark and Watson, 1995). In addition, according to Hair et al. (2019), a CR value above 0.7 indicates strong internal consistency. In both samples, all constructs exceeded this threshold (see Table 2), suggesting that despite the AVE value being slightly below the recommended threshold of 0.5, convergent validity can be assumed (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Shrestha, 2021). We therefore decided not to drop any items. In both the German (and Japanese) samples, we find the highest correlations between SNSA and DS, at 0.82 (0.55), and the lowest between SNSA and life satisfaction, at -0.2 (-0.05). We further assessed discriminant validity using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT; Henseler et al., 2015). All HTMT values (see Appendix) fell below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (Voorhees et al., 2016), thereby confirming discriminant validity.

We also adopted several remedies to avoid the risk of common method variance (CMV), including encouraging respondents to answer spontaneously and honestly. We also informed

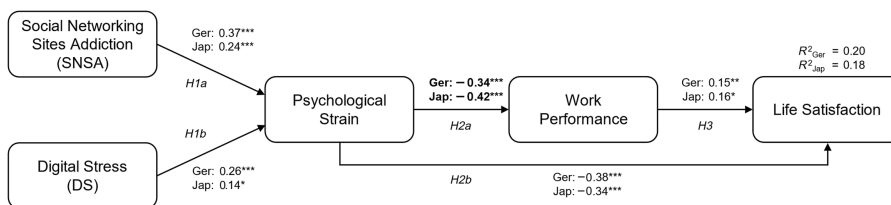


Figure 1. Conceptual model and results. **Note(s):** Standardized path coefficients in bold indicate significant differences between the countries. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$. **Source(s):** Authors’ own creation

Table 2. Constructs and assessments

Items		Germany	Japan
<i>Perceived Digital Stress</i>		$\alpha = 0.90, CR = 0.89,$ AVE = 0.47	$\alpha = 0.92, CR = 0.91,$ AVE = 0.53
DS_1	Most of my friends approve of me being constantly available online	0.58	0.67
DS_2	I am nervous about how people will respond to my posts and photos	0.73	0.69
DS_3	I feel nervous about how others will respond when I post new updates on social media	0.68	0.66
DS_4	I fear my friends are having more rewarding experiences than me	0.68	0.84
DS_5	I fear that others have more rewarding experiences than me	0.66	0.81
DS_6	I have to check too many notifications	0.72	0.65
DS_7	It feels like there is always a reminder – like a flashing light or buzz – that there is some other message that I need to attend to	0.78	0.85
DS_8	I feel lost or “naked” without my phone	0.60	0.76
DS_9	I am constantly checking my phone for messages/ notifications	0.74	0.60
<i>Social Networking Site Addiction</i>		$\alpha = 0.92, CR = 0.92,$ AVE = 0.71	$\alpha = 0.94, CR = 0.94,$ AVE = 0.77
SNSA_1	I sometimes neglect important things because of my interest in social media	0.85	0.79
SNSA_2	My social life has sometimes suffered because of me interacting with social media	0.87	0.92
SNSA_3	Using social media sometimes interfered with other activities	0.89	0.98
SNSA_4	When I am not using social media, I often feel agitated	0.84	0.84
SNSA_5	I have made unsuccessful attempts to reduce the time I interact with social media	0.74	0.85
<i>Psychological Strain</i>		$\alpha = 0.87, CR = 0.87,$ AVE = 0.68	$\alpha = 0.87, CR = 0.87,$ AVE = 0.69
PS_1	Difficulty in making decisions	0.79	0.76
PS_2	Feeling unable to cope	0.87	0.97
PS_3	Having difficulty concentrating	0.83	0.75
<i>Work Performance</i>		$\alpha = 0.91, CR = 0.92,$ AVE = 0.74	$\alpha = 0.96, CR = 0.97,$ AVE = 0.88
WP_1	On average, how often do you feel you fulfill responsibilities specified in your job description?	0.83	0.92
WP_2	On average, how often do you perform the tasks that are expected of you in your job?	0.81	0.93
WP_3	On average, how often do you feel you adequately complete assigned duties?	0.90	0.95
WP_4	On average, how often do you feel you meet formal performance requirements of your job?	0.91	0.94
<i>Life Satisfaction</i>		$\alpha = 0.91, CR = 0.91,$ AVE = 0.77	$\alpha = 0.95, CR = 0.95,$ AVE = 0.87
LS_1	In most ways my life is close to my ideal	0.87	0.90
LS_2	The conditions of my life are excellent	0.87	0.96
LS_3	I am satisfied with my life	0.89	0.93

Note(s): Reported values are rounded to two decimal places; unrounded values were used for all statistical analyses. CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted

Source(s): Authors' own creation

them that there were no right or wrong answers (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). As tests for the potential presence of CMV, we calculated another measurement model in which all indicators loaded onto a single construct. Its fit was much worse than that for our model with five constructs ($\chi^2/df = 14.02$, CFI = 0.54; TLI = 0.49; RMSEA = 0.13).

For measurement invariance, we follow Steenkamp and Baumgartner's (1998) approach, testing three levels of measurement invariance (i.e. configural, metric, and scalar invariance) using a series of multigroup CFA. Configural invariance, a minimum requirement, allows all loadings and intercepts to be freely estimated. Significant standardized factor loadings above 0.5 and satisfactory absolute model fit criteria (RMSEA ≤ 0.05 , SRMR ≤ 0.08 , CFI ≥ 0.95 ; Steenkamp and Maydeu-Olivares, 2021) indicate its presence (see Table 3). Next, metric invariance was tested by constraining factor loadings across countries; both absolute and relative fit criteria ($\Delta RMSEA \leq 0.015$, $\Delta SRMR \leq 0.03$, and $\Delta CFI \leq 0.01$; Steenkamp and Maydeu-Olivares, 2021) were met, confirming metric invariance. For scalar invariance, intercepts were constrained to equality, and the model satisfied all absolute and relative fit criteria ($\Delta RMSEA \leq 0.015$, $\Delta SRMR \leq 0.01$, and $\Delta CFI \leq 0.01$; Steenkamp and Maydeu-Olivares, 2021), supporting scalar invariance. Following Hair *et al.* (2019), at least metric invariance is required to examine group differences in the relationships between constructs, which we have established, permitting us to proceed with our analysis.

Having determined the suitability of the measurement model and ruled out CMV, we can estimate the structural model (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988) in AMOS, using standard maximum likelihood estimation. The DS construct joins the structural model as a composite variable; that is, we average the DS items to form a composite measure, because this construct includes the most (nine) items and has high reliability, and because our interest lies in identifying the importance of DS in general, rather than its specific dimensions (Petrescu, 2013). Overall, the structural model fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 431.96$, $df = 190$, $\chi^2/df = 2.27$, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.04). The standardized factor loadings in the unconstrained model were all substantial and statistically significant, ranging from 0.74 to 0.98 across both countries.

Figure 1 displays the conceptual model with all the hypotheses we tested and the path coefficients.

When we performed multigroup structural equation modeling to test the associations of SNSA and DS with the downstream variables, the results show that SNSA is positively related to psychological strain in both Germany ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < 0.001$) and Japan ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$). DS similarly has a positive relationship with psychological strain in both countries ($\beta_{Ger} = 0.26$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta_{Jap} = 0.14$, $p < 0.05$). These findings support both H1a and H1b. Moreover, the implications of psychological strain are consistently adverse across countries, as indicated by its negative associations with work performance ($\beta_{Ger} = -0.34$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta_{Jap} = -0.42$, $p < 0.001$) and life satisfaction ($\beta_{Ger} = -0.38$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta_{Jap} = -0.34$, $p < 0.001$), in support of H2a and H2b. Finally, as we predicted in H3, work performance is linked to life satisfaction in both Germany ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.01$) and Japan ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 3. Measurement invariance

Model	χ^2	df	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	Δ RMSEA	Δ SRMR	Δ CFI
Configural invariance	1053.944	466	0.041	0.0486	0.959			
Metric invariance	1103.738	485	0.042	0.0499	0.956	0.001	0.0013	0.003
Scalar invariance	1211.641	500	0.044	0.0516	0.950	0.002	0.0017	0.006

Note(s): RMSEA = root mean squared error of approximation, SRMR = standardized root mean squared residual, CFI = comparative fit index

Source(s): Authors' own creation

In addition, to examine differences in individual path coefficients between the German and Japanese samples, we estimated five models (one for each path) in which the corresponding regression paths were constrained to equality across groups. Comparing these constrained models with the unconstrained model allows us to assess whether the respective relationships are moderated by country. Table 4 shows that only the relationship between psychological strain and work performance is moderated by culture, with the negative association being weaker for German than for Japanese employees ($\Delta\beta = 0.08$, $\Delta\chi^2 = 4.08$, $p < 0.05$).

Taken together, these results provide support for the notion that compulsive, excessive social media use among working adults sets in motion a chain of mechanisms that results in diminished life satisfaction.

5. Discussion

Social media use *per se* is not detrimental, but once it reaches excessive or compulsive levels, it is associated with poorer employee work outcomes and well-being, which co-occur with psychological strain. Two manifestations of excessive, compulsive social media use, SNSA and DS, have not been investigated simultaneously with regard to their relationships with employee-related downstream variables, and accordingly, we also lack specific insights into whether these relationships vary across cultures. This research is premised on the assumption that social media use spans all areas of life, depletes individuals' resources and is consequently linked to critical work and nonwork outcomes.

In addressing these issues, we propose and test a model based on COR theory that links employee SNSA and DS to life satisfaction and work performance through psychological strain. With studies conducted among respondents in both Germany and Japan, our research provides a meaningful test of COR theory under varying cultural conditions (i.e. a theoretical replication) and demonstrates that psychological strain associated with SNSA and DS is negatively related to work performance, which in turn is linked to life satisfaction; psychological strain also exhibits a direct association with life satisfaction. The findings regarding the relationships between social and digital stress (i.e. SNSA and DS) and the studied outcome variables are consistent across both German and Japanese employee samples. However, the negative relationship between psychological strain and work performance differs significantly in magnitude between the two countries, with Japanese employees exhibiting a stronger relationship. This disparity may be explained by differing cultural values. Germany's individualistic culture and lower uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2026) may enable more adaptive coping strategies that weaken the relationships between psychological strain and employee outcomes. Conversely, the closer integration of work and private life, along with a stronger relational (vs. rule) orientation in Japan (THT Consulting, 2026), may

Table 4. Multigroup analysis with culture as a moderator

Path	Standardized path coefficient (β)		$\Delta\beta$ ($\beta_{\text{Ger}} - \beta_{\text{Jap}}$)	$\Delta\chi^2$ ($\Delta\text{df} = 1$)	p
	Germany	Japan			
DS \rightarrow PS	0.26***	0.14*	0.12	1.45	0.23
SNSA \rightarrow PS	0.37***	0.24***	0.13	0.73	0.39
PS \rightarrow WP	-0.34***	-0.42***	0.08*	4.08	0.04
PS \rightarrow LS	-0.38***	-0.34***	-0.04	0.002	0.97
WP \rightarrow LS	0.15***	0.16*	-0.01	0.001	0.97

Note(s): DS = digital stress, SNSA = social networking sites addiction, PS = psychological strain, WP = work performance, LS = life satisfaction *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Source(s): Authors' own creation

intensify the repercussions of psychological strain associated with social and digital media. These results contribute to the limited cross-cultural research on social and digital media stress among employees.

Further, the life satisfaction of employees is a critical antecedent of organizational functioning and performance (e.g. [Chughtai, 2021](#); [Haar and Roche, 2010](#)), so any determinants of this relative outcome require scholarly consideration, as well as attention from human resource managers. As we detail next, employees' growing mobile and social media use across work and nonwork domains can be problematic for encouraging key employee outcomes, especially life satisfaction, which in turn implies some pertinent theoretical and managerial implications.

5.1 Theoretical implications

The frequent use of mobile and social media at work is linked to increased stress levels ([Tarafdar et al., 2020](#)) and life-to-work conflict ([Van Zoonen et al., 2016](#)), which in turn relates to organizational outcomes. According to a report by [Payscale \(2023\)](#), U.S. employees' mental health concerns, including stress and overload, represent the third most powerful productivity drain following high turnover and insufficient pay. When the boundaries between private and work spheres become increasingly blurred, due to the omnipresence of social and digital media, stress resulting from private uses of such media can exert a stronger negative impact on psychological and behavioral work outcomes than technology-related stress arising from work contexts ([Nastjuk et al., 2023](#)). Therefore, examining the potentially harmful outcomes of technology and media use should not be restricted to work versus nonwork contexts. Just as private and work lives are blurred, we address boundary-spanning relationships between SNSA and DS and employee outcomes related to both their work and their lives in general.

To contribute to the literature on the detrimental associations of technology and media use in organizational settings, which has shown that SNSA is negatively associated with employee work performance ([Javed et al., 2019](#)) and linked DS to increased quitting intentions ([Funke et al., 2026](#)), we examine the simultaneous associations of both SNSA and DS with perceived strain as a boundary-spanning variable. Acknowledging the pertinent literature's view that life satisfaction is a critical aspect of subjective well-being ([Erdogan et al., 2012](#)), we account for how perceived strain is directly and indirectly (via work performance) linked to life satisfaction.

Our findings empirically support COR theory ([Hobfoll, 2001, 2011](#)) and related literature (e.g. [Zivnuska et al., 2019](#)), by demonstrating that SNSA and DS, both conditions in which resource conservation efforts fail, can trigger resource loss spirals, which in turn are associated with further resource depletion and adverse outcomes. Specifically, we find that both SNSA and DS are related to perceived psychological strain, which subsequently is negatively associated with work performance and life satisfaction. Moreover, the positive relationship between work performance and life satisfaction indicates that losses in one resource domain can induce additional losses in other domains, thereby reinforcing the resource loss spiral proposed by COR theory.

Beyond supporting the assumptions of COR theory, our study also extends its application. First, by investigating how technology use is linked to individual resource depletion across multiple domains, we address the lack of research applying COR theory to examine technology-induced associations with health outcomes, such as psychological strain ([Fu et al., 2023](#)). Second, by examining German and Japanese samples, we provide a theoretical replication in a culturally diverse context. This theoretical replication under varying cultural conditions strengthens the external validity of COR theory.

Focusing on the link between the work environment and employee outcomes across cultures, our research also contributes to management literature. For example, [Le et al. \(2023\)](#) investigate strategies to reduce employee turnover intentions by fostering job pride through different dimensions of the meaning of work. They find that for employees in an individualistic

country (i.e. the United States), job pride is negatively linked to turnover intentions, but no such effect arises among employees in a collectivistic country (i.e. Vietnam). [Zeng and Chen \(2020\)](#) explore the relationships among organizational dissent, employee burnout and work–family balance using data from employees in China (collectivistic) and Finland (individualistic). They report that employees experiencing emotional fatigue (a dimension of burnout) are less likely to voice their concerns openly to management but are more likely to express their dissatisfaction to peers. National culture influences these relationships, such that Finnish employees exhibit different patterns of dissent and burnout than their Chinese counterparts, reflecting cultural variations in workplace communication and expectations. In contrast to such evidence of cross-cultural differences in work-related relationships and outcomes, we find consistent associations between SNSA and DS and adverse outcomes across Germany, an individualistic country, and Japan, a collectivistic one ([Hofstede, 2026](#)). This suggests that these problematic behaviors and symptoms might afflict employees, regardless of their culture.

By identifying psychological strain and work performance as variables that account for the relationships of SNSA and DS with life satisfaction, we help clarify the mechanisms linking both work- and nonwork-related antecedents to employees' life satisfaction (e.g. [Hsieh and Huang, 2017](#)).

5.2 Managerial, policy, and social implications

Organizations need to be cognizant of how employees' excessive, compulsive social and digital media use can affect their work and nonwork outcomes. More broadly, organizations must make proactive efforts to identify factors that increase employees' psychological strain and thus indirectly diminish their work performance and life satisfaction. As society's social and digital media use continues to evolve, and companies undertake ongoing digital transformations ([Zhang and Wei, 2025](#)), it is of great relevance for companies to gain an understanding of the unique, potential consequences of combined SNSA and DS among their employees. To support employees and prevent negative outcomes, organizations should monitor employees' SNSA and DS, and identify and implement measures to reduce them or weaken their relationships with employee outcomes. Many organizations already regularly survey employees about job satisfaction and other work-related factors ([Huebner and Zacher, 2021](#)); we recommend integrating measures of SNSA and DS into these surveys (e.g. annual employee surveys), so that employers can monitor their levels and fluctuations, such as over time or across different organizational areas or hierarchical levels. Employees who use social and digital media as part of their work (e.g. frontline service staff, marketing personnel) arguably might be more prone to SNSA and DS and in need of more management support.

Having established that SNSA and DS exist, managers could target individual employees or departments with appropriate interventions, including encouraging employees to participate in digital detox courses ([Anderson et al., 2024](#)) or providing awareness-raising and supportive training that promotes more mindful uses of social and digital media. Managers also could emphasize the value of distraction-free work to discourage employees from constant engagement, though such arguments might not convince all employees, especially if their jobs require (work-related) social media usage, such as to develop and launch new products ([Hazzam et al., 2022](#)). In such cases, organizations might introduce clear policies regulating the use of personal digital devices during work hours to limit social media exposure to a minimum.

Thus, more realistic measures of the association between SNSA and DS and psychological strain and life satisfaction might acknowledge that it is difficult to completely untether employees from social and digital media during work hours. To support employees prone to SNSA and DS though, managers might help them develop and adopt coping strategies for other stressors, such as demanding work tasks ([Ito and Brotheridge, 2003](#)), which can exacerbate perceived SNSA, DS, and their potential outcomes. When social and digital media

use is necessary to complete work tasks, employers should offer training to improve the efficiency of those on-the-job uses, so that they can reduce the time spent on these platforms and lower the risks of inducing addictive behaviors and stress.

As the strength of the relationship between psychological strain and work performance differs significantly between Germany and Japan, we recommend that organizations, particularly those operating across multiple cultural contexts, design culturally sensitive interventions. For example, employee training and digital well-being initiatives should account for culture-specific reactions to psychological strain and promote culture-specific coping mechanism to maintain work performance, rather than adopting a “one-size-fits-all” approach.

The observed negative links of SNSA and DS with employee outcomes also highlight the need for political interventions. Governments could provide guidelines to help organizations reduce employees’ SNSA and DS and encourage responsible social and digital media use. In addition to actively supporting companies in advancing digitalization to increase efficiency and competitiveness, governments should also consider the human side of digitalization by allocating resources through funding programs and subsidies for employee training. Such initiatives could promote competent and responsible use of social and digital media while simultaneously raising awareness of the risks of addiction and DS.

Finally, as SNSA and DS are boundary-spanning conditions, our findings extend beyond the workplace and support the notion that stress-induced negative outcomes at work, such as decreased work performance, can spill-over into employees’ private lives and can relate to their overall life satisfaction. Previous research suggests that high levels of life satisfaction within a society are associated with various societal benefits, including lower healthcare costs (Goel *et al.*, 2018) and higher productivity (DiMaria *et al.*, 2020). Consequently, life satisfaction is important not only in its own right but also because it is linked to key social outcomes. This suggests that the relationships between SNSA and DS and life satisfaction, in conjunction with psychological strain, are of societal relevance. Accordingly, social awareness campaigns could help individuals recognize early symptoms and correlates of SNSA and DS and promote preventive coping strategies (e.g. social and digital usage limits, time management, need for digital detox) while also increasing public awareness of SNSA and DS.

5.3 Limitations and future research

This cross-cultural study involves German and Japanese employees. Although these two countries differ in important respects, they are both economically advanced and among the richest in the world. Observing similar associations of SNSA and DS in these two culturally distinct countries thus offers robust evidence, but it could be strengthened further by integrating other countries. Specifically, cultural and work-related differences could be taken into account when modeling SNSA, DS and their downstream variables. For example, Germany leans more toward individualism than Japan, so German employers might encourage more individual initiative and personal responsibility, whereas Japanese workplaces likely prioritize teamwork and collective goals (Hofstede, 2026). They also exhibit differences in their work cultures. In Germany, employees call in sick relatively frequently, averaging 15–20 days a year, which is nearly three times the European Union average of approximately 8 days annually (The Economist, 2025). In contrast, Japan has a relatively low employee absenteeism rate, such that only about 1.1% of working days are lost to absenteeism each year (Chimed-Ochir *et al.*, 2019; Cooper and Lu, 2016). We call for efforts to extend these considerations to other countries, and especially economically less well-developed ones.

In gathering responses from employees, we did not distinguish them by occupations or hierarchical levels, so we cannot determine if SNSA and DS might be more pronounced in certain jobs. A key consideration is whether the relationships that we find hold true in both low-tech and high-tech jobs, which tend to involve varying demands for information and communication technology uses.

Finally, we propose a parsimonious model that links SNSA and DS to life satisfaction through perceived strain and work performance; ongoing research should examine the effects of SNSA and DS as they relate to other variables. For example, it might be insightful to investigate how users' digital well-being (Vanden Abeele and Nguyen, 2024) interacts with SNSA and DS to influence downstream variables. To expand our conceptual model, studies could also integrate additional variables that may help account for the observed associations. Heidemeier and Moser (2019) show that work performance is positively associated with job satisfaction, especially among employees with a strong performance-goal orientation; it also can bring about positive emotions like pride (Webster *et al.*, 2022) and is related to hope (Valero *et al.*, 2015), which potentially drive life satisfaction.

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Appendix

Table A1. HTMT Ratios

	Digital stress	Social networking site addiction	Psychological strain	Life satisfaction
Social Networking Site Addiction	0.82/0.60			
Psychological Strain	0.57/0.28	0.58/0.34		
Work Performance	0.24/0.29	0.31/0.41	0.34/0.42	
Life Satisfaction	0.23/0.13	0.21/0.05	0.43/0.36	0.28/0.29

Note(s): The values before (after) the slash pertain to Germany (Japan)
Source(s): Authors' own creation

Note

1. "It is very important that you read all the questions carefully. Please click here 'Strongly agree'."

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