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## Social Media and Work: A Framework of Eight Intersections

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This article presents a review of areas in the existing research where social media and work intersect. After delineating the two terms “social media” and “work,” the article proceeds to outline 8 conceptualizations describing different types of intersection between these two domains: (1) social media *before* work, (2) social media *instead of* work, (3) social media *for* work, (4) social media *about* work, (5) social media *as* work, (6) social media *under* work, (7) *work for* social media, and (8) social media *after* work. The article goes on to discuss how these different conceptualizations might give rise to (empirical) differences in how individuals experience social media and work, and how the two themes provide different analytical foci. The article finishes with a conclusion on how research should be sensitized to a world of post-social media work.

*Keywords: social media, work, boundary management, identity work, enterprise social media, literature review*

The study of social media in everyday life is well-researched. It has often focused on social media as a category that is assumed to be largely “personal” (as opposed to “professional”) in the lives of everyday users. Recently, however, the study of the intersection between social media and work has become a subject of interest for scholars from many fields. The nature of work is undergoing massive ontological shifts (Scholz, 2017; Standing, 2011) and epistemological and ethical reconsiderations (e.g., Graeber, 2018; Paulsen, 2014), while at the same time being acknowledged as a clear source of meaning and import in people’s everyday lives (Gregg, 2011; Hochschild, 1997). These changes are often related to new technologies and standards becoming embedded in everyday life, and in the domain of work in particular (e.g., Beckman & Mazmanian, 2020; Duffy, 2017; Gregg, 2011; Precarity Lab, 2019). The phenomenon of social media is one of the most widely discussed technological developments in recent years, and examples of how they have reshaped everyday life are manifold.

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However, there seems to be little agreement on *what* exactly constitutes the intersection of social media and work. Are social media always a type of unpaid exploitation (e.g., Andrejevic, 2011)? Are they only a distraction in the realm of work (e.g., North, 2010)? Are they a venue of general professional expression (e.g., Johnson, 2017)? Are they a way to make a living (Duffy, 2017)? Or are they perhaps a venue through which work itself may unfold (e.g., Ellison, Gibbs, & Weber, 2015)? These are all valid questions that ultimately result in different understandings of the intersection of social media and work. This article provides a much-needed overview of these discussions, laying out the different conceptualizations of the relationship between social media and work as complementary, and potentially informing one another.

In this research review, I identify eight distinct intersections assumed or suggested by previous research. I propose that these intersections can be used as a useful conceptual tool for untangling different individual experiences of the intersection(s) between work and social media and for delineating different research interests. Following the understanding that social media are generally assumed to pertain to the domain of the "personal" (Lomborg, 2012, p. 417), I then examine the different roles the intersections between social media and work may play in people's lives. In the discussion section of the article, I put forward a list of suggestions for how these different intersections may in turn provide the theoretical basis for further empirical research.

### **Background and Purpose**

In many parts of the world, digital media have become foundational for personal and professional life. One effect of this is that individuals constantly have to choose the appropriate media for any given situation in their everyday life and are often left with the task of deciding how available they should make themselves in different contexts, given that mobile devices now allow people to be available virtually all the time (Helles, 2013; Mazmanian, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2013). A large proportion of everyday work in highly digitized countries takes place across a host of media (Fast & Jansson, 2019). Here, work functions include online identity management (Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard, & Berg, 2013), boundary management (Mazmanian et al., 2013), practical coordination (Lomborg, 2014), and sociability (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2010). All of this has led to discussions of how different domains of life (e.g., work and personal life) relate to each other in the current media landscape.

In the present research review, I will focus on the level of "social media," as opposed to digital devices or the mobile Internet more broadly. I do this for three major reasons. Firstly, social media embody a middle ground between the materiality of specific devices and the ephemerality of communication *as such*. Secondly, unlike other boundary-crossing technologies, such as e-mail, social media are often perceived of as migrating *from* the domain of the personal *into* the professional, rather than the other way around (North, 2010). Thirdly, social media are a much-debated topic in both everyday life and research (Lomborg, 2017), while at the same time they make up a foundational part of the "real-name Web" (Hogan, 2013, p. 290). This has led to huge diversity in the identity management being performed on and across these platforms (cf. Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; van Dijck, 2013). This will inevitably feed into how their relation to work may be constructed.

### **Methodology and Approach**

This study is a *hermeneutic* research review, a genre which “capitalises [*sic*] on the continual deepening of insight that can be obtained by critical reflection on particular [studies] in the context of a wider body of work” (Greenhalgh, Thorne, & Malterud, 2018, p. 3). More specifically, in proposing the eight intersections below and reflecting on the assumptions made in the existing research, the article proceeds as a *critical interpretive synthesis* of the existing literature on social media and work, insofar as it provides an integrative framework of disparate research discussions (cf. Dixon-Woods et al., 2006). In line with the approach taken by critical interpretive synthesis, the focus is not so much on fixed systematic approaches, but rather on a process which is “iterative, interactive, dynamic and recursive” (Annandale, Harvey, Cavers, & Dixon-Woods, 2007, p. 465).

The iterations were made through the gradual development and refinement of the intersections, which ended up being eight in number, although there were far fewer at the start. The interactivity was achieved through presenting tentative frameworks to peers for critique and suggestions. Finally, the dynamic and recursive nature of the study was evident in the fact that the framework was often overhauled entirely when new information came to light—for example, once the concept of “digital labor” started to appear unequivocally in the search, the framework went through an extensive overhaul to account for this.

The initial source for developing the intersections as a framework was made up of a total of 45 existing research review articles. Of these, 14 were about social media in organizational life, and 13 were about social media in relation to specific professions or industries. Fifteen were reviews of broader social media research, and three reviewed the research on older adults and social media. All the articles were retrieved via Google Scholar. From this base, I proceeded to iterate on the conceptualizations, making more tailored searches for studies as needed.

Before proceeding to describe the eight intersections, I will outline the underlying operational delineations of “social media” and “work.”

### **Social Media: A Delineation**

As has been pointed out, the term “social media” is strictly speaking akin to “nonsense” (Lomborg, 2017, p. 8), since it implies that other types of media by definition lack a social dimension. Perhaps a more accurate, albeit more colloquial (but still academically acceptable), use of the term “social media” is as an umbrella term for some Web-based applications and services that emphasize user-generated content (Bechmann & Lomborg, 2013) and many-to-many communication (Jensen & Helles, 2017). In other words, this review is thus mostly to do with what Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) call “social network sites” and “content communities” (p. 62). While social media sites have antecedents in services such as Internet Relay Chat and BBS’s, I also regard them as forming an integral part of the “real-name Web” (Hogan, 2013, p. 290). This “real-name” feature will become central to the discussion of professional and personal identity management, which is a central theme of several of the intersections I present below.

Aside from unspecified, proprietary platforms, the examples I cite will mainly come from Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WeChat, YouTube, and LinkedIn. The longevity and market penetration of the above-mentioned platforms has led to them being the subject of much research across various fields. However, the following intersection conceptualizations will be *platform agnostic*, while still making use of these sample texts. This is in recognition of the fact that while some platforms may clearly be aimed at either the professional or the personal (e.g., Dutta, 2010), others may have the potential to become a hybrid of these (Archer-Brown, Marder, Calvard, & Kowalski, 2018). These tensions in particular will be the subject of discussion once definitions of the intersections have been provided.

### **Work: A Delineation**

"Work" might be an even trickier term to nail down than "social media." Broadly speaking, *the activity of work* as "the carrying out of tasks that produce values (of economic, cultural or social kind) that allow people to make a living within their specific context" (Fast & Jansson, 2019, p. 9). My conception of work here is as a *context in itself*. Understood in this way, a person can not only *do* work, but also be *at* work. For the purposes of this article, I will therefore approach "work" as a *domain of activities*. This means that *work* can refer to both specific tasks and the context within which these tasks occur. Work may contain one or more distinct *jobs*, an important point to recognize in light of the changes to the jobs market(s) associated with new media (Duffy, 2017; Scholz, 2017; Srnicek, 2017).

Why not the term "labor" instead of "work"? I have two major reasons for this. Firstly, while I find "labor" to be an adequate description of the *activity* of work, I find it to be an imprecise description of a *domain of life*. Secondly, while it has perhaps been diluted over time (Gandini, 2021), the tradition of viewing activities on social media as labor per se is a distinct line of inquiry, as will be shown below. Scholars discussing this intersection are often highly sensitive to activities usually associated with nonwork being appropriated as work (e.g., Jarrett, 2015).

What exactly is work as a domain distinct from? Beigi, Shirmohammadi, and Otaye-Ebede (2019) locate 48 different terminologies for the work–nonwork dichotomy. This should indicate that delimiting "work" will mean very different things to different people. Nonetheless, it seems uncontroversial to say that the barriers which separate work from other areas of life can be psychological, spatial, temporal and/or emotional (Nippert-Eng, 1996). I concede that a clear division of the domains of work and personal life cannot be assumed (see Gregg, 2011; Hochschild, 1997). However, for the reasons stated previously, I will continue with this assumption and deal with any problems it raises as they come up.

### **The Eight Intersections**

The eight conceptualizations, or intersections, are named and structured according to when and how social media intersect with the domain of work:

- 1) Social media *before* work
- 2) Social media *instead of* work
- 3) Social media *about* work

- 4) Social media *for* work
- 5) Social media *as* work
- 6) Social media *under* work
- 7) *Work for* social media
- 8) Social media *after* work

These intersections are *not* paradigms that have replaced one another in chronological order. Evidence for all these intersections can be found in recent research. Furthermore, these eight intersections are not mutually exclusive. Different social media may be conceptualized as belonging to different categories, or a single social medium may in some way serve a function in multiple intersections.

### ***First Intersection: Social Media Before Work***

Is it possible to imagine a rigid separation between social media and the realm of work, where social media is an entirely nonprofessional activity? If so, in this imagined scenario, a person may have a presence on one or several social media platforms, none of which are used for professional purposes, nor are they in any way explicitly linked to the person's professional identity or their workplace. Even if we could imagine this, there is plenty of research attesting that this separation is far more permeable than it might otherwise seem. This research provides the foundation for this initial intersection between social media and work. One very obvious manifestation of this is in the use of "cybervetting" procedures in recruitment processes (Jacobson & Gruzd, 2020, p. 175). Here, recruitment personnel may scan and vet potential candidates' online presence—including presence on social media—to evaluate their fit for a given position, or indeed before they are offered *any job at all* (Melton, Miller, Jensen, & Shah, 2018). A person entering the job market today is likely to have a history of social media use.

Already, a decade ago, business research findings highlighted the need for professionals to manage their online identities (Dutta, 2010). This is also relevant for the fourth intersection, social media *about* work. Some studies have found that this is a particular risk area for people in already marginalized positions in society, who may face more constraints on their online self-presentations (Pitcan, Marwick, & boyd, 2018), and might be more likely to face a backlash from their workplace for expressing their opinions (Howard, Kennedy, & Tejada, 2020).

As with all the intersections, this conceptualization has assumed more prominence as the Internet in general (and social media in particular) has developed into a space where real-name interactions are increasingly common, leaving people with fewer venues in which to segment different parts of their online lives (see, e.g., Hogan, 2013; van der Nagel, 2017). This perceived unity of the self has the "benefit" of aiding social media platforms, which have a vested interest in positioning "the online self as a standardized tradable product" (van Dijck, 2013, p. 201). All of this leaves little room for the molding and segmentation of identity online, which can be both a purposive and vital part of networked life (Kang & Wei, 2020; van der Nagel, 2018).

In summary, this intersection shows us how social media can affect individuals' relation to their work (including whether they keep—or even get—a job) *before* they are employed by a company or even before

they enter the labor market. In the following intersections, work and social media are seen as more entwined with the domain of work per se.

### ***Second Intersection: Social Media Instead of Work***

In this intersection, using social media is seen as primarily a personal pursuit, which in the context of work is regarded with suspicion and must be justified. One early study (North, 2010) delves into the social acceptability of checking personal social media services during work time. Here, the conclusion is that such activities are provisionally acceptable. In this intersection, as in the first one, social media activities are generally not perceived as being meaningfully associated with work tasks. Any activity within this intersection is assumed to be something that an employee does as a private person. Social media use in work time may be tolerated, but it is not actively encouraged.

Generally, research concerned with this intersection views social media in a negative and nonproductive light. Keywords such as "excessive use" (e.g., Cao & Yu, 2019, p. 83), "cyberloafing" (Andreassen, Torsheim, & Pallesen, 2014, p. 906), "addiction" (Zivnuska, Carlson, Carlson, Harris, & Harris, 2019, p. 746) and "technostress" (Brooks & Califf, 2017, p. 143) due to social media use are found in this intersection. Usually, research conclusions recommend that social media policies be implemented, understood and enforced (e.g., Johnston, 2015).

In extremis, at least one scholar suggests that the "primary reason for the rise of social media is workplace use" (Graeber, 2018, p. 137). Even if we discard this extreme view, it is worth considering what exactly people feel they *gain* from using these platforms during work hours. The usual description is one of hedonic use (Leftheriotis & Giannakos, 2014). At the very least, it may be worth considering that social media may conceivably constitute personal "reproductive work" within the domain of work. These questions serve to underline the idea of social media being perceived as a personal activity intruding into the realm of work, which some studies into employee motivation in relation to social media use seems to support (Pew Research Center, 2016).

However, this intersection does not cover all uses of social media during work time—as will become apparent in the following conceptualizations. For instance: If a study or a discussion is based on the assumption that social media can function as potential databases of knowledge for employees—and are not just an opportunity for them to "loaf" around or manage their personal identities and networks—then it will take place in the next intersection.

### ***Third Intersection: Social Media for Work***

In this intersection, we will discuss how social media are used for professional purposes, but where these professional purposes are *not* a core or explicit task of the individual user. The conceptualization of social media as a work task or as an essential part of work will be examined in the fourth intersection.

From the perspective of the individual, any social media use in this intersection is voluntary and done with the aim of aiding or improving work tasks—thus fulfilling a utilitarian motive (Leftheriotis &

Giannakos, 2014). Here, the assumption that social media can have a positive effect on professional tasks is made explicit. An example would be looking for—or providing—professional advice on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram (van Zoonen & Treem, 2019). Here, social media may afford an opportunity for individuals to feel that they are “ahead of the game” (Lupton & Michael, 2017, p. 4).

Aside from being sites for monitoring and capturing information, social media are also sites of voluntary knowledge sharing (van Zoonen, Verhoeven, & Vliegenthart, 2016). Some studies link social media use during work hours positively to work performance but point out “hedonic” and “utilitarian” motives are intertwined in this use of social media (Leftheriotis & Giannakos, 2014, p. 135). The use of personal social media for work purposes has been strongly associated with employees maintaining a sense of autonomy, but has also been found to add to work pressure, with at least one study documenting the fact that employees seem to regard social media use as a burden rather than a pleasure (van Zoonen & Rice, 2017).

All of this serves to underline the difficulty of trying to categorize social media. Hedonic and utilitarian uses may be hard to tease apart, and while employees may feel “ahead of the game” or draw benefit from creative uses of social media in their work situation, using social media can also become a stress factor. There are no easy answers, and I would argue that this is in part due to “social media”—within this intersection—occupying an ambiguous position in employees’ work lives. They do not constitute an explicit work task here, and while this may result in innovative solutions, it may also lead to a high rate of frustration and burnout—and many other things in between. Social media will not be considered an explicit work tasks before the fifth intersection, but in the next intersection, they at least serve a more explicitly work-related purpose insofar as they help construct and broadcast an individual’s professional identity.

#### ***Fourth Intersection: Social Media About Work***

Here, we find conceptualizations of social media as a tool for broadcasting one’s own professional identity. The first conceptualization (social media before work) was concerned with how social media fitted in before individuals entered the job market or when they did not explicitly connect their social media presence to their professional lives. Here, the purpose is in some sense the opposite. In effect, this is intentionally sharing from the domain of work and into a broader sphere. This is not “work” in the sense of, for example, checking personal social media profiles for recruitment purposes; rather, this is employees bringing their “work” into other domains. This may, for instance, involve “broadcasting” one’s professional identity, perhaps in anticipation of the activities discussed in the first category (social media around work). Another example could be socializing with work colleagues in venues not controlled by the organization (see, e.g., Gregg, 2011), or even the organization of labor unions via social media (Lazar, Ribak, & Davison, 2020). These activities are *about* work—but they are not in and of themselves the work. Performing these activities does not necessarily provide any material benefit, such as discussed in the third conceptualization. Of course, it may indirectly do so, as in the union example above.

This intersection also exemplifies what may broadly be termed “identity work.” A strong predictor of whether or not employees associate with their place of work on digital platforms seems to be their organizational identification (i.e., the degree to which they feel a sense of identification with the organization

in question; Archer-Brown et al., 2018; Fieseler, Meckel, & Ranzini, 2015; van Zoonen & Treem, 2019). It is also a question of the degree to which a person integrates (as oppose to segments) the domain of work with other areas of life (Batenburg & Bartels, 2017).

This is relevant to the discussion of whether people can be fired for indulging in social media activities. If it is a question of social media usage leading to the neglect of work duties, we are in the second intersection (social media *instead of* work). However, employees may perform social media activities that do not directly interfere with their work, but which may still give grounds for reprimanding them or terminating their employment (Drouin, O'Connor, Schmidt, & Miller, 2015). I argue that this a question of collapsing contexts or identities. In this framework, the lack of segmentation of online identities can lead the activities of the individual back to the organization.

Hence, from a managerial perspective, social media about work may present, on the one hand, a source of danger that requires management, regulation, and control (Linke & Zerfass, 2013), but on the other, an opportunity for positively branding the organization (Lee & Kim, 2020). For the nonmanagerial worker, however, this might be best understood in terms of the "recognition work" that is arguably inherent in a transmedia existence (Fast & Jansson, 2019, pp. 83–105). In this context, people talk about their work via social media, since work is "a pathway to recognition . . . and ultimately to a sense of self-realization" (Fast & Jansson, 2019, p. 87), and this may be achieved by "broadcasting" the processes and products related to their work via social media.

This "broadcasting" of professional activities can be visualized as the domains of work bleeding into other domains of life. However, as the examples above have demonstrated, this need not be a universally negative or involuntary phenomenon. What this intersection and the previous one (social media *for* work) have in common is that using social media is something that happens ostensibly at the initiative of the individual. Using social media is not an explicit requirement of the workplace. To discuss the using social media as a required activity, I move on to the next intersection.

#### ***Fifth Intersection: Social Media as Work***

If a person's job is directly to deal with the production or management of social media content, then we are within this intersection. Here, being on social media constitutes a *work task*. Usually, social media will be used as a channel of communication to a large (often external, but occasionally internal) audience. For example, a person may be formally tasked with producing or monitoring content on social media platforms. This content production and management, which takes the form of interaction with the social media system itself, can thus be explicitly described as a task *in and of itself*. If it is an explicit or essential task, it is best understood within this intersection.

Though individuals may potentially use social media for the purpose of self-promotion in the first and fourth intersections (social media *before* and *about* work, respectively), in this category, we may find people to whom terms such as "influencer" or "content creator" are applied. Extensive empirical research has already revealed that much of the effort that goes into becoming a professional content producer is "aspirational labor" (Duffy, 2017, p. 4), "hope labor" (Kuehn & Corrigan, 2013, p. 9), or "visibility" labor

(Abidin, 2016, p. 90). Here, the *work* for these individuals consists of producing content for social media platforms that they can monetize either directly or indirectly. Some fuzziness will be apparent concerning whether or not individuals conceive of their content production for social media as a central or essential work task, and to what extent they perceive this content production as being for their own benefit or for the benefit of their organization.

As well as content production, a person could carry out the task of *content management*. One fundamental way in which this differs from content production is in its relatively opaque nature. The bulk of this curation is seemingly performed by employees with very low, if any, visibility (Gray & Suri, 2019; Roberts, 2019). What both content creators and content moderators have in common is usually a lack of influence on the governance of the platforms for which they work (Cunningham & Craig, 2019). In this sense, individual social media workers may find themselves navigating a double bind, as they are subject to both the organizational constraints of a workplace and the institutional constraints of specific platforms. And what about the people who actually govern or own these platforms? Their tasks and activities are of course varied (Moran, 2020). However, insofar as their work involves *interacting with* these media, their work may be understood through this intersection.

Undoubtedly, being tacitly or explicitly required to perform tasks involving social media is a central part of many current jobs, possibly in ways that research has yet to uncover. This will be discussed in the two next intersections, where I first discuss what happens when social media form the underlying infrastructure of working life, and then move on to discuss how far we can regard all activities on social media as somehow being *work for* these platforms.

### ***Sixth Intersection: Social Media Under Work***

This sixth intersection represents one of the newest developments in the intersection of social media and work—using social media as the foundation for the communicative operations of an organization, usually in the form of specifically developed social media for internal usage. This conceptualization is interesting as it challenges the usual premise of social media as being something that intrudes into, or at best supplements, the domain of work.

In this conceptualization, social media serve as the *infrastructure* of work itself. That is, organizations may formally or informally rely on social media services for their daily operations, not so much in their externally focused communication tasks (as covered in previous sections), but in terms of everyday internal communications, knowledge sharing, and information management. Sometimes, existing social media may be implemented for this purpose (Archer-Brown et al., 2018). However, it seems to have become more common to implement a service designed for the purpose. These services are *not* “just” the usual information systems that are ubiquitous in organizational environments (Treem, 2015, p. 54), but constitute services that are typically referred to by a number of terms, including “enterprise social media” (Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfeld, 2013, p. 1), “enterprise social networks” (Wehner, Ritter, & Leist, 2017, p. 125), “internal social media” (Madsen, 2017, p. 2), or “organizational social media” (Högberg, 2018, p. 1864).

When implementing an organization-specific solution, the listed benefits are usually that the advantages discussed in the previous intersections will now all be contained within a single platform (Ellison et al., 2015), while the disadvantages have been mitigated. For instance, "loafing" on social media is less of an offence if the social medium in question is explicitly work-related (Nivedhitha & Sheik Manzoor, 2020, p. 1167). The flip side, however, is that some studies have found that enterprise social media may lead to feelings of both "social" and "work-related" "overload" (e.g., Chen & Wei, 2019). Nonetheless, resistance to these media is usually discussed in terms of misunderstood affordances (e.g., Giermindl, Strich, & Fiedler, 2018), with only tentative steps being taken toward discussing the necessity of having these internal media per se (e.g., Treem, 2015).

These specific media are usually studied within the realms of organizational communication. As such, while such studies consider the organizational implications and effects of using the software, the perspective of the individual per se is usually not at the forefront. On the other hand, the field of media studies generally has not shown much interest in the role these internal media play in the everyday lives of their users. In the discussion, I will try gesture toward a fruitful integration of these fields.

### ***Seventh Intersection: Work for Social Media***

The penultimate perspective considered here is that of any social media activity that is regarded as being *always work*. The operational logic behind this assumption is that since all social media platforms rely largely or exclusively on user-generated content and/or user-generated moderation, these are forms of labor that create the value of the platform. The value is thus in accessing the people and the content on the platform (Bechmann & Lomborg, 2013). This leads to framing such mundane communicative acts as sharing, liking and reacting to posts as a type of labor (Fisher, 2012), or merely the act of having and curating a profile (performing identity work) as labor (Lim, 2020). In this context, such acts do not merely constitute labor required by an employer (this is covered in social media *as work*), but represent labor done for the benefit of a platform provider (Jarrett, 2015). This user-generated content can then be thought of as "free labor" (Terranova, 2000, p. 33).

What distinguishes this user-generated value from the "aspirational" or "hope" labor discussed in the fifth intersection (social media *as work*) is in acknowledging the comprehensiveness of the "free labor" performed. Fast, Örnebring, and Karlsson (2016) have developed a useful framework that covers the many ways in which free labor can be framed and understood in the (social) media sector. Looking more specifically at social media, Bechmann and Lomborg (2013) walk us through the different kinds of value production a social media user can engage in. Not all "work" for social media can be considered equally valid, but a common thread in these discussions is how this "work" is a foundational source of value creation for social media platforms and their owners.

The discussion about how far social media are exploitative appears very early on in the research (e.g., Andrejevic, 2011; Fuchs & Seignani, 2013). Some scholars stop just short of categorizing the act of contributing to these platforms as actual labor (e.g., Srnicek, 2017), while other go much further in condemning these practices (e.g., Precarity Lab, 2019; Zuboff, 2019). Interestingly, for our purposes, even

the most critical voices in these discussions have so far largely avoided touching on the nature of organization-specific social media for these purposes. I will return to this in the discussion section.

### ***Eighth Intersection: Social Media After Work***

In these intersections, I have stressed how the research has investigated the problem of bounding off the domain of work from social media, assuming the presence of both in a given situation. One possible solution lies in *being outside the realm of work*. While this might not eliminate the need for the seventh intersection (*work for social media*), many of the other problems would seem to be avoided. However, my searches revealed little evidence on this subject.

The relative lack of research on social media as a post-work connection to the professional seems like an oversight. As we have already established, the domain of the professional can be of central importance in modern life (Gregg, 2011). This importance even extends to a post-work condition like retirement (Atchley, 1999; Price, 2000). Though retirees are of course not synonymous with older adults, and both groups are highly diverse, older adults are more well researched as a group than retirees. If we are to take them as a proxy "people outside of 'work,'" the potential for people to flourish and be creative in a (post-)professional context via social media are underexplored (Givskov & Deuze, 2018) in favor of more narrowly health-related research (Xie, Huang, & Watkins, 2012).

What role might social media play in maintaining a good life "after" work? And how might a reliance on social media for pursuing professional interests and maintaining professional networks be complementary or at odds with trends in digital resistance (cf. Hesselberth, 2018; Portwood-Stacer, 2013)? And what if (certain) social media technologies end up becoming associated with the domain of the professional per se: Would they then become unpalatable to individual users? This remains a question for empirical inquiry. As things stand, this is an intersection that exists mostly through inference, rather than being the result of a large body of research. Even so, this intersection allows us to ask whether we may ever leave the domain of "work" behind if we are still attached to social media in our "post-work" lives.

### **Discussion: Work After Social Media?**

Returning to the questions I started with: Are we to consider social media use in working life as a distraction, as an asset, or as infrastructure? The answer is "yes" and "no" to all of these. It is ultimately an empirical question; a matter of *which* person we ask, and which social media we ask them about. The eight intersections I have laid out in the preceding sections can act as a heuristic in understanding how these social media may have multiple intersection points with working life. Crucially, they will also help us identify where tensions might arise due to a lack of clarity about these intersections. Which intersection are we talking about, and when, and are the conceptions "aligned" in the view of the different actors involved?

For example: What existing or new types of *tasks* may emerge in the closed or semiclosed systems of enterprise social media? How are individuals expected to relate to and talk *about* their work on these new platforms (Cervellon & Lirio, 2017)? Is the use of social media *for* work now mandatory, and has it changed from being an opportunity for individual employees to improve their work tasks to being a requirement that

puts the onus on the individual to stay informed? What if a person's job suddenly requires them to have a social media presence? Does this then constitute a reshaping of social media *as work* (Waters, 2020)? What are the implications of social media no longer exclusively being viewed as a potential agent of *intrusion*? How do the tech companies developing these platforms and their individual users perceive and manage their legacies on these platforms *after* they leave work? These are all questions related to how social media restructure the domain of work, which can also be regarded as overlapping with how social media have ostensibly restructured organizations and organizing per se (e.g., Lovink & Rossiter, 2018; Shirky, 2008).

Furthermore, the emergence of internal social media has in itself created a range of new tensions. Are enterprise social media merely "a mechanism to keep cyberslacking at bay" (Niveditha & Sheik Manzoor, 2020, p. 1167), and does this represent an appropriation of a potential venue for performing small boundary transitions within the domain of work? How are we to reframe the discussions of social media usage *as labor* when this usage happens not only in the context of tech platforms, but also in the context of workplaces? Are perceptions of social media as a tool for exploitation per se now being compounded by the potential for them to be used as a tool for exploitation and datafication *by employers*?

And what exactly are the limits of social media themselves? My cited examples have mostly been concerned with relatively unambiguous types of media, but this should not distract us from the fact that many platforms are taking on the appearance and affordances of social media. Sometimes this is a more permanent feature of platforms associated with new forms of work (Alaimo, Kallinikos, & Valderrama, 2020). Conversely, the trend for certain social media giants to converge their services would now seem to make it almost inevitable that they will play a key role in shaping the domain of work (Helmond, Nieborg, & van der Vlist, 2019; Plantin, Lagoze, Edwards, & Sandvig, 2018; Plantin & de Seta, 2019).

Ultimately, these are questions that need to be addressed empirically. Only by looking at the practices, discourses and actions of people and organizations involved with social media and work can we hope to gain an understanding of these issues. The aim of this article has been to untangle the various concepts based on a review of the relevant research literature. I encourage future research to find out how these concepts are "tangled up" on the ground.

### Conclusions

We live in a world of post-social media work. Not that we are somehow *past* social media, merely that social media has impacted the domain of work to the extent that it is now very difficult to analytically separate social media from the domain of work. If social media were originally seen as an invasion or distraction in the world of work, recent research seems to indicate that they have been appropriated into and now form part of the domain of work. We should be prepared for future research that will perhaps describe social media as belonging to the realm of the professional and intruding into the realm of the personal. I would therefore encourage further research into the role that social media play in people's working lives.

Social media's relation to working life is not solely a question of aspirational labor, free labor, or professional development: It is all of these things, and more. This article has enumerated eight ways in

which these two areas intersect, with examples drawn from the most recent literature on the topic. Strictly speaking, as long as both “social media” and “work” exist in people’s lives, the ways in which they are mutually constituted will continue to be relevant, not least as an object of empirical communication research. As an extension of this, I suggest that future research should be sensitive to the very multifaceted nature of “work” and should consider the role that social media play in both supporting and shaping this domain.

Both “work” and “social media” are areas in flux. “Work” is undergoing an ontological shift (Standing, 2011), social platforms are under constant development both as objects of study and as material technologies (Helmond et al., 2019; Lomborg, 2017), and sometimes these themes overlap (e.g., Gray & Suri, 2019; Scholz, 2017; Srnicek, 2017). Crucially, these changes are not always felt as either exploitative or particularly problematic in people’s lives (Andrejevic, 2011). However, we should make sure that we carefully consider the different ways that working with social media may be constructed and be curious about when different conceptions clash and when they mesh.

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