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This is not what I wanted

The effect of avoidance coping strategy on non-work-related social media use at the workplace

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Abstract

Purpose – Many fresh graduates have unrealistic career expectations. When reality sets in after graduation, they may be disappointed. Due to factors such as the limited availability of feasible alternative career options, employees who have to stay in jobs they dislike may feel trapped. To alleviate the resulting stresses, they may engage in avoidance coping strategies, such as non-work-related social media use, to discharge their mental strains. The purpose of this paper is to discuss how the perception of being trapped can result in the adoption of avoidance coping strategies, and how these strategies can influence individual performance and social media use.

Design/methodology/approach – Based on the literature on avoidance coping strategy, goal orientation theory, and performance theory, the authors proposed a theoretical model on how the avoidance coping strategy of an individual can influence their performance and workplace behavior.

Findings – The authors propose that when a fresh graduate feels "trapped" in a job, the stresses experienced may cause them to hide behind their defense mechanisms. An avoidance coping strategy may then be adopted, and this will influence the individual's workplace behavior (in terms of non-work-related use of social media) and performance.

Practical implications – If an avoidance coping strategy is an antecedent to non-work-related use of social media, then controlling the use of social media in the workplace may only cause these employees to switch to other forms of self-distraction (for instance, spending more time chatting with colleagues). Under some circumstances, the use of such control mechanisms may even give cyberloafers stronger urges to use social media for non-work-related purposes. If this is the case, managers should reconsider their current approach in handling the related behavior.

Social implications – If the cause of non-work-related use of social media in the workplace is an avoidance coping strategy, then the engagement of such workplace behaviors should not be considered "intentionally harmful actions". One important criterion for workplace behavior to qualify as a type of counterproductive behavior is that such behavior must be conducted to be intentionally harmful. Given this, the resulting actions of an avoidance coping strategy should not be considered a form of counterproductive behavior, and the authors should reconsider the conceptualization of cyberloafing provided in the organizational literature.

Originality/value – The authors believe that this research represents one of the first attempts to bridge the gap between clinical and managerial literature. It attempts to explain non-work-related use of social media in the workplace from the perspective of trapped perception and avoidance coping strategy, and it argues that not all forms of non-work-related use of social media in the workplace are instances of cyberloafing.

Keywords Performance, Avoid-performance goal orientation, Avoidance coping strategy, Trapped perception

Paper type Conceptual paper

One of the key assumptions of many classical work motivation theories is that, where possible, human beings will do what they want to do. For example, the classical Maslow theory listed "self-actualization" as an individual's highest level of need, and McClelland's

model focused on the aspects of achievement, power, affiliation and autonomy (Steers *et al.*, 2004). This is also one of the assumptions of classical human resources management theories such as attraction-selection-attrition theory (Schneider, 1987).

Modern graduates are conditioned to the "success mindset". Many of them are over-educated through exposure to cases of successful ventures and role models. Many are also taught to believe in their potential. In reality, fresh graduates often find themselves having to accept offers for positions that they dislike (which, in this paper, refers to the fact that if given the chance, the individual would not have chosen the job; thus, the "dislike" arises from their own subjective perspective). Within this group, individuals usually have little interest in the jobs that they are offered. Many believe that they are underemployed, and that they are better suited in another position, organization, or location.

The scenario of fresh graduates having to accept offers for jobs they dislike is common. First, the limited availability of vacancies for desired positions in a market dictates that many people will not be able to get into their ideal careers. In this paper, "desired positions" refers to job vacancies that fresh graduates will typically look to as their ideal first job. Examples include: banker of a world-renowned bank located in the central business district of a metropolitan area; auditor at one of the "Big Four" audit firms; tenure-track academic at a highly ranked university; or researcher at a prestigious research and development institution. The competition for such positions is usually very intense. Second, fresh graduates often have to face pressures from a wide range of sources, such as the cultural pressure that dictates that individuals should be employed and stay employed; pressure from parents that causes graduates to lower their expectations, "be realistic", and get a job as soon as possible; and repayment pressure from banks that give student loans.

Failing to get into a career that an individual has been expecting for years before graduation can be hurtful to their self-esteem, self-efficacy, and locus of control (Judge *et al.*, 1998). The stresses experienced will also be exacerbated if their classmates are "more successful" than them in their job hunts; for example, when a person's ideal job is "taken away" by a classmate that the graduate considers inferior. Repeatedly rejected fresh graduates might start to think that they are not as "good" as they previously imagined themselves to be, and feel that they do not have much control over the outcomes of their job hunt. Some of these graduates might even experience "neuroticism surges": they might victimize themselves, become less trusting of the world, and believe that employers have not treated them fairly, or given them their rightful chances to enter into their desired careers (Clark and Watson, 1991). When these fresh graduates finally come to terms with the reality, they will be willing to lower their expectations and accept jobs that are available to them, even if these jobs were not previously on their list of desired careers.

After accepting an offer of a disliked job, many graduates will remain in their positions regardless of their interests for a few years before they finally have enough courage to quit. One of the most obvious reasons for this is that while a person may dislike their job, it might be the best option the person has at that moment. Considering the fact that a fresh graduate usually has a limited amount of market information, they might also have trouble locating more promising job vacancies. Moreover, fresh graduates face pressure not to quit their first job too soon, as this is never a good signal for future companies, since "stable" employees are usually preferred.

During this period of time, many of these individuals may feel that they are "trapped" in the disliked job. Drawing implications from cognitive consistency theory, when an individual feels that they are "trapped" in circumstances over which they have

little control in terms of the decision to stay or leave the situation, they are likely to evaluate their state unfavorably and become stressed (Spector, 1982).

Psychodynamics theory suggests that defense mechanisms will be activated when an individual feels "trapped" in unpleasant situations that they cannot "escape" from (Horowitz, 1998; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2005). The main effect of defense mechanisms is not to solve a problem, but to adjust the cognitive setup of the stressed individual so that they perceive less stress. In many circumstances, such adjustments will change not only the individual's mentality, but also their behavior. Nevertheless, one characteristic of defense mechanism activation is that the person experiencing the cognitive changes is usually unaware of the transformation, and behavioral changes are usually made unconsciously (Vansina and Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008).

We propose that when an individual feels "trapped" in a job that they have little interest in, they may adopt an avoidance coping strategy to handle workplace stresses (Ottenbreit and Dobson, 2004). The adoption of an avoidance coping strategy will cause the individual to engage in self-therapeutic behaviors such as self-distraction (Karekla and Panayiotou, 2011).

Avoidance coping strategy

In the field of clinical psychology, the literature on experiential avoidance focuses on the tendency of individuals to avoid stressful experiences or the perceived source of stress. By definition, experiential avoidance is the "tendency to negatively evaluate, escape and avoid aversive private experiences" (Gerhart *et al.*, 2014, p. 291). It consists of two parts: the unwillingness to remain in contact with the aversive private experiences, and the action taken to avoid the perceived source of the aversive experiences (Spinhoven *et al.*, 2014). We want to emphasize that the concept of "aversive experiences" is a relative perception. This is akin to a scenario in which parents ask their children "why is it so hard for you to […]?"; although the task may be easy and straightforward from the perspective of the parents, the children may perceive it to be a feat. Likewise, for individuals who feel trapped in a job, they may perceive completion of the "simplest tasks" as aversive experiences. For example, for those who perceive themselves to be underemployed, they may perceive the task of helping colleagues to make a cup of coffee or to photocopy documents as extremely aversive experiences, as their allocation of these "simple tasks" might be taken as an insult to their competencies.

When individuals are confronted with stresses from sources that they believe they cannot conquer, they may exhibit experiential avoidance. For example, Bardeen *et al.* (2013) conducted two studies to investigate the relationship between experiential avoidance, anxiety sensitivity, and perceived stress. In both studies, the authors found that experiential avoidance was highly correlated with perceived stress. On the other hand, Kashdan *et al.* (2006) found negative relationships between experiential avoidance with life satisfaction ($\beta = -0.10$, $p < 0.001$) and presence of meaning in life ($\beta = -0.14$, $p < 0.001$). That is, individuals who are not satisfied with their life will usually exhibit experiential avoidance. Hence, when faced with adversaries, some individuals will tend to avoid them. Although such avoidant behavior is unlikely to contribute to the resolution of these individuals' problems, it can at least bring moments of inner peace to them, and hence be an effective way to cope emotionally in the short term (Kashdan *et al.*, 2009).

A subfield of avoidant behavior research focuses on the therapeutic effect of avoidant behavior when it is used as a form of coping strategy. The concept of coping was introduced by Lazarus (1966) to refer to the way in which people approach and

react to stressful situations. Avoidance coping refers to coping behaviors that are associated with the avoidance of certain thoughts and/or behaviors to avoid a perceived stressor, or to alleviate the negative affect that is associated with the perceived stressor (Karekla and Panayiotou, 2011; MacNeil *et al.*, 2012). It is one of the three main types of coping behaviors (which are problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidance-focused coping) (Karekla and Panayiotou, 2011). Typical forms that avoidance coping can take include distraction and behavioral disengagement (Karekla and Panayiotou, 2011).

Interestingly, while experiential avoidance and avoidance coping are both about individual tendencies to avoid perceived stressors, it seems as though the therapeutic version of avoidance behavior is empirically distinguished from its generic counterpart. For example, Karekla and Panayiotou (2011) conducted a study on a sample of 197 Greek-Cypriot adults and found that experiential avoidance was weakly correlated with avoidance coping behaviors such as self-distraction ($|r| = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$) and behavioral disengagement ($|r| = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, when utilized in the appropriate way, avoidant behavior can act as a form of coping mechanism that defends the individuals' mental wellness against stressors, thereby circumventing behavioral disorders.

Social media use and avoidance coping strategy

Modern working life is characterized by the use of social media. Five characteristics of social media are: participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness (Mayfield, 2008). It can be accessed as long as there is a connection to the internet, and it can serve both work and entertainment purposes. Individuals can use social media to work on company projects (e.g. social media advertisements), liaise with colleagues or external third parties (via the chat or message function), read leisure articles (e.g. friend's blog), or even play online games. As of the end of 2014, the number of monthly active social media users from all parts of the world had exceeded two billion, the number of monthly active mobile device social media users had exceeded 1.6 billion, and people were spending an average of 2.4 hours per day on social media (We Are Social, 2015). The majority of corporations listed on the 2011 *Fortune 500* and Inc. 500 lists use social media in their business (Ratliff and Kunz, 2014). Essentially, social media has changed how organizations and individuals interact with each other (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011).

We propose that while the use of social media can lead to favorable organizational outcomes, such as more efficient communications between parties and better job performance, employees that adopt avoidance coping strategies might be "compelled" to use social media as a means to distract themselves from their unpleasant working context – that is, to use social media for non-work-related pursuits. When this happens, the use of social media will lead to unfavorable organizational outcomes.

Academic research on the use of social media such as Facebook has produced mixed results on whether it is beneficial to employee performance. For example, studies have reported social media as having both positive and negative associations with learning and knowledge sharing (Jong *et al.*, 2014; Karaoğlan Yılmaz *et al.*, 2015; Park *et al.*, 2014), negative associations with individual performance (Cain, 2008; Vanden Boogart, 2006), and positive associations with relationship building and maintenance (Cain, 2008; Ellison *et al.*, 2014; Iffat *et al.*, 2014). We believe that these positive individual outcomes are attainable only if the motivation of social media use is functional; for example, to discuss work or to share information. However, if an avoidance coping strategy is the cause of the

individual's social media use, such positive outcomes are unlikely to be attainable as the individual is likely to spend their time using social media for non-work-related issues.

We propose that the perception of being trapped in a disliked job can result in the adoption of avoidance coping strategy. We call this perception the "trapped perception". In turn, the avoidance coping strategy will affect the individual's social media use. An avoidant individual's social media use and avoidance coping strategy will jointly influence their performances (see Figure 1).

Non-work-related social media use – a form of deviance?

We aim to explain non-work-related use of social media in the workplace via an avoidance coping perspective. Many organizations and scholars have considered the non-work-related use of social media in the workplace as being willful deviant behavior by employees (e.g. Liberman *et al.*, 2011; Rahimnia and Karimi Mazidi, 2015). Some scholars have called this type of behavior "cyberloafing", and classified it as a form of production deviance, or counterproductive workplace behavior (Liberman *et al.*, 2011; Motowidlo *et al.*, 2013).

To control the non-work-related use of social media, some organizations have banned its use, and some organizations even require their employees to allow their social media accounts to be viewed regularly by superiors (Klemchuk and Desai, 2014).

Explaining the use of social media for non-work-related activities via an avoidance coping perspective, we propose that cyberloafing may be an unconscious form of coping strategy that individuals use for self-therapeutic purposes.

Definitions of counterproductive workplace behavior and deviant behavior usually include the qualifying element of "intentional action", and the definition of cyberloafing usually includes the qualifying element of "voluntary action". Unlike the stance taken by scholars of counterproductive workplace behavior, we do not categorize avoidance coping behaviors, such as distracting one's attention by surfing the internet, as cyberloafing because these actions are usually not intentionally meant to negative impact the organization (cf. Motowidlo *et al.*, 2013). Instead, we view it as a form of unconscious self-therapy. This perspective of cyberloafing has important academic and managerial implications.
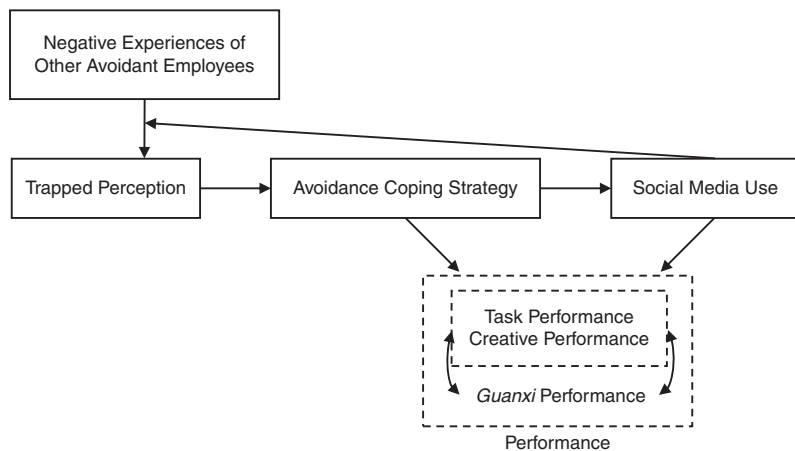

Figure 1.
The outcome for fresh graduates who feel "Trapped" in a disliked job

First, if the cause of non-work-related use of social media in the workplace is an avoidance coping strategy, then the engagement of such workplace behaviors should not be considered "intentionally harmful actions". One important criterion for workplace behavior to qualify as a type of counterproductive behavior is that such behavior must be conducted to be intentionally harmful (Motowidlo *et al.*, 2013). Given this, the resulting actions of an avoidance coping strategy should not be considered a form of counterproductive behavior, and we should reconsider the conceptualization of cyberloafing provided in the organizational literature.

Second, if an avoidance coping strategy is an antecedent to non-work-related use of social media, then controlling the use of social media in the workplace may only cause these employees to switch to other forms of self-distraction (for instance, spending more time chatting with colleagues). Under some circumstances, the use of such control mechanisms may even give avoidant employees stronger urges to use social media for non-work-related purposes. For example, fresh graduates are young adults who have grown up in the social media age. Social media is an important part of the lives of many fresh graduates. Given that they do not like the company that they are working for, the limitation of social media use at the workplace may be perceived as supports for the employee's dislike of the company. That is, the more the management wants to control an employee's "liberty to use social media at their own will", the more the employee may think that they are right to think that they are not working "at the right place". When this happens, avoidant employees may have stronger urges to use social media for non-work-related purposes to distract their attentions from the perceived "hostile working environment". If this is the case, managers should reconsider their current approach in handling the related behavior.

Third, we believe that this research represents one of the first attempts in this regard to bridge the gap between clinical and managerial literature. We believe that the triangulation of clinical psychology theories with organizational behavior theories is practical, and has the potential to produce meaningful managerial insights.

Towards this end, we have built our theory based on the avoidance coping strategy literature, goal orientation literature, and performance literature. Based on the avoidance coping strategy literature, we propose that when a fresh graduate feels "trapped" in a job, the stresses experienced may cause them to hide behind their defense mechanisms. An avoidance coping strategy may then be adopted, and this will influence the individual's workplace behavior (in terms of non-work-related use of social media) and performance. To obtain a more extensive view of performance, we adopt Cortina *et al.* (2013) trichotomous view of performance. We also use goal orientation theory as our theoretical framework to explain the mechanisms that link avoidance coping strategies to use of social media and performance.

Goal orientation theory
Goal orientation theory is based on the tenet that human actions are guided by an approach-avoid orientation: that is, individuals will deliberately approach favorable outcomes and avoid negative ones. Early goal orientation research focused on how the learning-goal orientations of students influenced their academic outcomes (e.g. Harackiewicz *et al.*, 1997, 2000). Three types of learning-goal orientation have been identified: mastery goal, performance goal, and work avoidance (Duda and Nicholls, 1992). Organizational scholars have adopted this concept to study how goal orientations can influence feedback-seeking behaviors.

Scholars of organizational goal orientation have suggested that goal orientations influence how individuals seek feedback (Ashford and Cummings, 1983). Whether one will actively ask feedback is thought to be influenced by whether their behavior is dominated by learning goal orientation or performance goal orientation (Dweck and Leggett, 1988). Employees that are learning-goal orientated tend to actively seek useful information for self-improvement. These individuals will seek both positive and negative information. Employees who are performance-goal oriented are inclined to seek only positive information to confirm their capabilities, or to avoid negative information that might affect their positive self-evaluation (Meng and Ni, 2002). An individual can adopt both types of goal orientation at the same time, but the net effect of the two types of orientation determines whether they will actively ask for feedback (Madzar, 2001; VandeWalle and Cummings, 1997).

To emphasize the two mechanisms that performance-goal-oriented individuals can adopt to maintain positive feelings about their capabilities, some scholars have conceptualized performance goal orientation along two dimensions: prove (approach positive feedback) and avoid (avoid negative feedback) (e.g. Elliot and Harackiewicz, 1996; VandeWalle, 1997). Given the focus of our paper on avoidance coping behavior, we focus our discussion on the avoid-performance orientation.

We adopt goal orientation theory as our theoretical framework for two reasons. First, it has higher face value in terms of its relevance to the focal topic of this paper as it focuses on the approach-avoid tendencies of employees. Second, it explains the mechanisms that are involved in the process of translating one's inner-experiences into performances. As will be illustrated later, goal orientation theory can "tell" us how the use of avoidance coping strategy (the motivation to disengage from one's work) can affect how well a person performs in the workplace.

Performance

Performance has long been a core theme of management literature. It has been defined as "the total expected value to the organization of the discrete behavioral episodes that an individual carries out over a standard period of time" (Motowidlo *et al.*, 2013, p. 82). It measures whether an employee's behaviors hinder or help an organization in achieving its goals (Motowidlo *et al.*, 2013). Cortina *et al.* (2013) proposed that performance can be viewed from three perspectives: task performance, contextual performance, and adaptive performance.

Task performance refers to how well individuals can complete role-presubscribed core activities (Campbell, 1990). Task performance is also known as "in-role performance" or "job performance" (Fisher, 2003); it is the measure of how well an employee is able to complete activities that can contribute toward organizational goals (Motowidlo *et al.*, 2013).

Contextual performance focuses on behaviors that can contribute to "organizational effectiveness through its effects on the psychological, social, and organizational context of work" (Motowidlo *et al.*, 2013, p. 88). Contextual performance was previously known as "minor helpful acts" or "extra-role performance", but is now formally known as organizational citizenship behavior (Fisher, 2003).

Chinese scholars have adapted the measurement of organizational citizenship behavior to the Asian context and termed it "*guanxi* performance" (Luo, 2012). *Guanxi* refers to the dyadic trust and sense of duty that two individuals have toward each other in a relationship, and *guanxi* performance refers to how well an individual can utilize their personal networks and network resources in order to create value for their organization.

Guanxi influences the trust one person has in another, whether one person will be willing to allow another to tap into their resources, and whether one person will be willing to share vital information with another. The discussion of this paper will be focused on *guanxi* performance instead of organizational citizenship behavior, because while the former concept places more emphasis on the nature of relationships between employees (e.g. trust and duty), the latter concept focuses more on the outcome of such relationships (e.g. giving an extra helping hand). We believe that it will be more meaningful for us to study the intricacies involved in the ever-evolving relationships between individuals, than to consider merely the outcomes of relationships.

Adaptive performance refers to how well employees can self-manage novel work experiences (London and Mone, 1999). One type of adaptive performance is creative performance. Creativity refers to the "production of new and useful ideas concerning products, services, processes and procedures" (Zhou and Shalley, 2003, p. 167), and creative performance refers to how well an individual can generate new ideas to contribute to an organization's competitiveness and effectiveness. As will be discussed later, avoidance coping strategies will influence the amount of vital information that an employee can receive from the internal parties of an organization, and the use of social media can influence the amount of novel information that the individual can receive from external sources. Information from these sources is likely to have an influence on the individual's creative performance. Thus, in this paper, we have chosen to focus specifically on creative performance as it is highly relevant to our focal topic of discussion.

How might a trapped perception influence individual performance?

We believe that for the majority of fresh graduates who feel "trapped" in disliked jobs, the form of avoidance coping strategy will not take the form of experiential avoidance, which will involve the employee not going to work at all. While individuals who take this route do exist, study of them is more relevant to the field of psychiatry, and is hence beyond the scope of this paper's discussion. We propose that individuals who adopt an avoidance coping strategy will engage in behaviors such as distraction and behavioral disengagement at work (Karekla and Panayiotou, 2011); for example, playing with their smartphones for long periods during office hours; playing online games with their office computers; showing disinterest in office activities; withholding their efforts toward team projects; procrastination; and so on (Goldstone *et al.*, 2011; Liu, 2011).

An employee who does not like their job is unlikely to show great interest, or want to excel, in it. This is likely to cause them to be badly rated during performance appraisals, and to perform poorly in tasks. In fact, depending on the degree to which an individual perceives themselves to be forced to stay in a job, any form of praise associated with doing well in the job may be taken as a form of insult. Subconsciously, these individuals know they are not going to get good feedback from their superiors during performance appraisals. As a result, these individuals are likely to adopt an avoid-performance goal orientation toward their work, and will try to avoid getting feedback on their task performance (Elliot and Harackiewicz, 1996; Meng and Ni, 2002).

The avoidance of performance feedback is likely to give rise to individual work errors and cause the individual to receive more negative feedback (Earley *et al.*, 1990). Thus, a vicious self-confirming cycle of one's incompatibility with a disliked career is likely to be formed over time. The more a person avoids work, the more mistakes they will make, the worse their task performance will become, and the more negative feedback they will try to avoid. Over time, the individual may conclude that regardless

of how hard they work, they will never get good results; they may then give up altogether (Wang and Shi, 2004). When this happens, the employee may become an "impossible-to-motivate" workplace "loafer". Unlike individuals who suffer from learned helplessness (i.e. who have tried but have not been successful in achieving their goals) (Martinko and Gardner, 1982), individuals who "give up" on their work due to an avoidance coping strategy have not even tried.

This proposition receives partial support from the existing goal orientation literature. For example, VandeWalle (1997) correlated the three dimensions of goal orientation (learning, avoid performance, and prove performance) and feedback seeking with the fear of negative evaluation scale. The fear of negative evaluation scale measures "the degree to which individuals worry about how they are perceived and evaluated by others" (VandeWalle, 1997, p. 1008). According to the results of the author's analyses, fear of negative evaluation is negatively correlated with feedback seeking ($r = -0.13$, $p < 0.05$), and positively correlated with avoid-performance goal orientation ($r = 0.37$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, individuals who adopt an avoid-performance goal orientation tend to be more apprehensive of negative evaluations.

From a social perspective, fresh graduates who perceive themselves to be trapped in a job are also not likely to have good *guanxi* performance or creative performance. It should be noted that supervisors are never the only source of performance feedback. In the modern business world, which places great emphasis on teamwork and collaborations, colleagues and teammates are good sources of performance feedback as well. Thus, if an employee wishes to avoid receiving negative feedback, not only do they have to avoid their supervisors, they also have to avoid getting in contact with their colleagues. Typical examples of such behaviors include refusal to go out for lunch with colleagues during breaks or refusing to socialize outside of office hours (Flores-Pereira *et al.*, 2008; Thomson and Hassenkamp, 2008). Moreover, when an individual dislikes their job, it is unlikely that they will want to work in it for long, such that they might want to leave as soon as an opportunity appears. Cognitively, they will perceive themselves as a "temporary" worker regardless of their employment status. Previous qualitative research has found that many temporary workers tend to avoid getting too close to long-term staff, and do not even eat lunches with these employees (Thomson and Hassenkamp, 2008). This type of self-distancing behavior is also not conducive for trust and team building (Flores-Pereira *et al.*, 2008).

Research indicates that individuals will have less trust in people who come from groups that they do not interact with frequently (Flores-Pereira *et al.*, 2008; Ng, 2013). This is known as the out-group vs in-group effect. The distancing of oneself from others is likely to do more harm than good to the trust that the others have in the person, and will also lead to the deterioration of trust. That is, avoidant behavior is likely to have a negative influence on a person's *guanxi* performance. When this happens, it can be expected that individuals who are perceived to be out-groupers are likely to gradually receive less of the information that they need to perform creatively and effectively within the organization (Ng, 2013). Thus, avoidant behavior is also likely to have an adverse impact on employees' creative performance. Summarizing our discussion, we propose the following:

P1. Trapped perception has a positive impact on an individual's tendency to adopt avoidance coping strategy.

P2a. Avoidance coping strategy has a negative influence on task performance.

P2b. Avoidance coping strategy has a negative influence on *guanxi* performance.

P2c. Avoidance coping strategy has a negative influence on creative performance.

Social media: a double-edged sword

Increasingly efficient forms of communications media have appeared over the years. One of the more prominent categories of new communication media is social media (e.g. Facebook, Whatsapp, Weibo, QQ, and Wechat). The main function of such tools is to facilitate communication between entities. Although social media might differ in form, they are essentially similar in substance – that is, they aim to connect people and to disseminate and share information (Mayfield, 2008).

Social media is playing an increasingly important role in organizational activities. Ratliff and Kunz (2014) studied the adoption of social media by corporations on the Fortune 500 and Inc. 500 lists as of 2011. They found that while the two groups of corporations had embraced the use of social media, they did not use social media in the same way. For example, Inc. 500 corporations were more likely to adopt the use of LinkedIn compared to Fortune 500 corporations. Vernuccio (2014) explored how corporations build their corporate brand by using social media. Using hierarchical cluster analysis, the author divided such corporations into four clusters (cautious beginners, confident communicators, selective strategists, rising stars), and found that the majority of them belonged to the cluster of cautious beginners. As social media is coming to play more important roles in organizational activities, some scholars have cautioned of the potential downsides of social media use in organizations. For example, recognizing the potency of social media in enabling individuals to network, communicate and get access to information, Lam (2016) discussed the potential legal concerns that may arise when employers and employees use social media.

As an efficient means of communication, social media has the potential to influence performance positively by improving the quality of communication between entities. Communication plays a vital role in modern organizations. It connects members, resolves disputes, facilitates task completion, and is a catalyst for creativity (Gao *et al.*, 2010). At the individual level, characteristics of good communication skills include being adept at expressing one's needs and conveying that message effectively. Social media can amplify the effect of communications by individuals with good communication skills. This is likely to contribute to their task performance whenever coordination and collaboration of efforts between entities are required.

Another important feature of social media is the availability of information. For example, QQ is linked to blogs (private information), Wechat is linked to Tencent News (public information), and it is possible to conduct surveys using Facebook (first-hand information). Individuals can obtain information regarding a person's professional profile via LinkedIn, and they can get to know what is happening to their social networks via Facebook and Twitter. An individual can even obtain quick information on a topic via Wikis, and if they need more detailed answers for specific questions, they can post these questions on the relevant online forums (Mayfield, 2008). Thus, social media can improve the quality of information flow between employees (Perry-Smith and Shalley, 2003; Zhang, 2009), and is an efficient means by which to access a huge pool of information. As information is one of the important antecedents of individual creativity, the effective use of social media is also likely to contribute to individuals' creative performance (Zhou and Shalley, 2003).

In addition, the social networking function of social media can improve the *guanxi* between employees. Dudley and Cortina (2008) proposed that communication-related skills such as facework, emotional support, conversation, and small-talk have positive impacts on organizational citizenship behavior. Indeed, when individuals communicate more, they are more likely to develop closer relationship each other, have more trust in each other, and hence become more likely to help each other (Cortina *et al.*, 2013). As an efficient tool for communication, social media therefore has the potential to improve the *guanxi* performance of employees.

Nevertheless, social media use can only have a positive influence on task performance, creative performance, and *guanxi* performance if it is used with the proper motivation. Social media is multiple-purpose and multi-functional. Many brands of social media also serve entertainment functions. For example, Facebook is linked to a huge number of online games. If an individual uses social media with the intention to seek entertainment, it is likely to distract their cognitive capacity from actual work. This is then likely to have more detrimental than positive effects on the individual's performance.

Moreover, one type of behavior can have different effects depending on the individual's motivation. For example, if a person uses social media to read blog posts by their connections to gain work-related information, the use of social media is likely to contribute to that individual's task performance. Say, for a property agent who finds out that a colleague is getting married, it can provide the basis for an educated guess that the colleague will need to buy a house soon; this information can then contribute to the property agent's task performance if it is found in time. However, if an employee uses social media to browse through blog posts that are simply entertaining, but are not professionally meaningful (e.g. updates on what is happening in the life of the person's favorite celebrity), it is likely to occupy the resources that the individual can utilize toward making meaningful organizational contributions.

In the preceding paragraphs, we proposed that when an individual perceives themselves to be trapped in a job they dislike, they will face mental strain. We also proposed that when individuals cannot change jobs easily, avoidance coping strategies such as self-distraction may be used to divert their attention from the unpleasant circumstances that they are in. In the workplace, forms that such self-distracting behaviors can take include: excessively checking for new messages, reading large amounts of online news and blog posts, playing online games, listening to music, and watching movie clips (Goldstone *et al.*, 2011; Liu, 2011). To a certain extent, being "trapped" in a disliked job may be perceived as an indication of the individual's limited control over their own fate. This perception of a lack of control may cause the individual to feel distressed (Feldner *et al.*, 2003), and engagement in self-distracting behaviors might compensate for their sense of limited control (MacNeil *et al.*, 2012). For example, a person who is forced to work in a job with low social prestige might attempt to gain the social prestige that they lack in reality by becoming the strongest player in an online game. While they do not have much control over their career choice, they can control the status of their avatar by putting more resources into the game. From a cognitive perspective, such dysfunctional uses of social media are likely to drain one's cognitive resources (Bardeen *et al.*, 2013), and result in lower task performance and creative performance. That is, avoidance coping behavior may cause an individual to use social media for non-work-related purposes more, which will in turn lead to worse task performance and creative performance. In addition, we propose that the relationship between social media use and task performance and creative performance is curvilinear.

When an individual spends more time using social media to cope, their perceived stresses should be alleviated during the process of this social media use. Research indicates that the level of stress experienced by employees will influence their task performance (Sonnentag *et al.*, 2013), and individuals who experience a decrease in negative affect and increase in positive affect have been found to be more creative (Bledow *et al.*, 2013). Thus, when an individual copes with stress using social media, the coping behavior might result in better task performance and creative performance. However, given that the use of social media on non-work-related tasks entails positive experiences that involve the individual experiencing sequentially lower levels of perceived stress during the process, social media use may have a positive reinforcing effect on the behavior of an avoidant individual. Once an individual feels better at work from using social media for non-work-related purposes, they may have an urge to spend more time on it to lengthen the duration of their positive experiences. That is, when an individual copes by using social media, such repetitive use may lead to maladaptation (Xanthopoulos *et al.*, 2013). Once an employee comes to spend too much time on social media on non-work-related tasks, this will naturally reduce the amount of time that they have for work. Thus, while a low level of social media use may lead to improved task performance and creative performance, a high level of social media use may lead to worse task performance and creative performance.

From a goal orientation perspective, the use of social media for the purpose of avoidance coping will also cause the deterioration of one's *guanxi* performance. First, when individuals become engrossed in non-work-related activities during office hours, they know that they will not be performing according to expectations. To avoid receiving negative performance evaluations, these employees may avoid contact with specific colleagues at work. Second, when an individual spends a significant portion of their time at work on non-work-related activities, they will receive reprimands from colleagues who have to bear the workloads for them. Over time, these chains of events may cause the avoidant employee to be "dislocated" from the office social cycle (Gerhart *et al.*, 2014). When this happens, the in-group vs out-group effect is likely to kick in, and the avoidant employee will be treated negatively.

The outcome of the deterioration of the relationship between an avoidant employee and their colleagues is not only simply the lowering of their *guanxi* performance. When an avoidant employee has poor relationships with their colleagues, the colleagues may withhold information and help necessary for the avoidant employee to carry out their job, and thereby cause the task performance and creative performance of the avoidant employee to be negatively affected (Devonish, 2013). When the avoidant employee attributes the cause of their bad performances to their colleagues, it will cause their *guanxi* with colleagues to deteriorate further, thereby starting a vicious cycle wherein bad *guanxi* performance leads to bad task performance and bad creative performance, which will again lead to worse *guanxi* performance.

In the event that there is more than one avoidant employee working in the organization, their common bad experiences of working in the company may cause them to form their own clique. For example, they may tend to sit with each other during lunch breaks (Thomson and Hassenkamp, 2008), and share their bad experiences with each other. The sharing of such experiences may reinforce the beliefs of avoidant employees that they are "trapped" in the wrong company. As social media is a convenient tool for employee communication, avoidant employees may also get together online to chat about their bad experiences. This will increase the time that avoidant employees are exposed to negative messages, and accentuate their negative sentiments toward the company.

Thus, the trapped perception of an avoidant employee who uses social media more will be more strongly influenced by the negative working experiences of the other avoidant employees. To summarize our discussion, we propose:

P3. Avoidance coping strategy has a positive impact on social media use.

P4a. Social media use has a curvilinear relationship with task performance, such that when an individual's level of social media use is low, the increased use of social media will lead to better task performance, but when the level of social media use is high, the increased use of social media will lead to worse task performance.

P4b. Social media use has a curvilinear relationship with creative performance, such that when an individual's level of social media use is low, the increased use of social media will lead to better creative performance, but when the level of social media use is high, the increased use of social media will lead to worse creative performance.

P5a. Social media use has a negative impact on *guanxi* performance, which will in turn negatively influence task performance and creative performance.

P5b. The negative influences that *guanxi* performance has on task performance and creative performance will result in worse future *guanxi* performance.

P6. Negative experiences of working in the company that are shared by other avoidant employees have a negative influence on trapped perception.

P7. Social media use will moderate the relationship between trapped perception and the negative experiences of other avoidant employees such that the trapped perception of those with high social media use will be more strongly influenced by the negative experiences of other avoidant employees.

Discussion

Research on the antecedents of job satisfaction has tended to focus on the cognitive evaluation of employees in relation to aspects of a job (Weiss, 2002); for example, the employee's satisfaction with their supervisor, coworkers, pay and benefits, opportunity for promotion, and the nature of the work. To address the lack of focus on the affective aspects of employees, Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) focused on the influence of affective events. The assumption is that good and bad things happen at work, and during work, and that the perception of the aspects of work and the affective outcomes of events that happen during work combine to influence people's satisfaction with their job. In this paper, we focused on a special group of employees: fresh graduates who feel trapped in their job. This group of employees believes that they should be doing something else at somewhere else. These employees' work-related evaluations have little influence on their job satisfaction because they are dissatisfied by default. Under such circumstances, will existing management theories work? Will existing managerial rules of thumb work? In this paper, we focused our discussion on the influence of the trapped perception on individual organizational behavior.

Theoretical and managerial implications

Researchers of cyberloafing have focused their research efforts on the negative impacts of this phenomenon and have tried to identify effective means of control over the behavior.

The assumption has been that employees choose to engage in cyberloafing voluntarily; furthermore, behind all of the control mechanisms proposed by scholars is the "carrot and stick" theory. Some researchers have even utilized the theory of crime to explain such behaviors and to rationalize the use of punishments to cyberloafers (e.g. Liberman *et al.*, 2011). However, the assumption of the carrot and stick theory is that employees desire the "carrot" and fear the "stick"; if an employee hates their job, it is unlikely that the theory will be fully applicable. The "carrot" may not have its intended motivational effect, and the "stick" may only induce additional negative perceptions of the organization, instead of fear of future punishments. Given that only 40 percent of human resources managers believe that the existing mechanisms are effective at controlling cyberloafing (Rahimnia and Karimi Mazidi, 2015), we should question whether our assumptions regarding the behavior is accurate. In recent research by Liberman *et al.* (2011) regarding predictions of cyberloafing, the authors only managed to explain 22 percent of the variance in cyberloafing. This means that the current literature on the antecedents of cyberloafing has a 78 percent error variance. Thus, this may be an indication that there are many more unidentified systematic error variances to be discovered, or perhaps that we are heading in the wrong direction.

We are not arguing that all forms of cyberloafing are due to avoidance coping strategies, or that all cyberloafers are free of blame. We are merely proposing that there may exist a less-culpable subgroup, and at the same time providing an alternative explanation for the phenomenon. The differentiation of this group of involuntary from voluntary cyberloafers is necessary for the successful control of the phenomenon. For example, the punishment element of many cyberloafing control mechanisms exploits employees' fear of formal punishments (Liberman *et al.*, 2011). However, if the antecedent of cyberloafing is an avoidance coping strategy, the use of formal punishments might cause the employee to dislike the organization even more, and hence engage in additional cyberloafing activities. As a minimum, if an avoidance coping strategy is the driver of non-work-related use of social media, the banning of social media will only cause the employee in question to turn to other forms of distraction, such as chatting with colleagues more often. That is, while banning the use of social media in the workplace may reduce instances of cyberloafing, the decrease in cyberloafing may be balanced out by the increase in non-cyber loafing.

Nevertheless, in comparison to the other forms of self-distraction, social media use is more elusive, and it is harder for managers to effectively enforce restriction policies to limit non-work-related use of social media without affecting the organization's operation. First, many types of social media can be "hidden" in the computer's system tray with one click on the "minimize" icon. Therefore, in contrast to chatting with colleagues, it is harder for managers to detect social media use, and if a company wants to ban social media completely it may have to change the configurations of its computer system to restrict employees' access to social media through computers in the workplace (Klemchuk and Desai, 2014). However, as social media is coming to play a more important role over time in the aspects of marketing and corporate communication (Ratliff and Kunz, 2014), the restriction of employees' access to social media essentially means that the company has to give up an increasingly important marketing and communication tool. Second, most types of social media can be accessed through smartphones, on which users can exit whatever application they are using at the press of a button. That is, when an employee is holding their smartphone, it is almost not possible to know whether they are watching video clips, reading news about their favorite celebrity, getting updates on the stocks that they have just bought, or reading e-mails and

messages from clients. When a manager walks toward an avoidant employee, they can switch to "work" easily through a few barely noticeable presses on their smartphone's touchscreen. In order to effectively ban the non-work-related use of social media on smartphones, managers must prohibit the use of smartphones. If the manager does this, in addition to being viewed as tyrannical by their subordinates, which will cause their employees to dislike them more, they could put the operation of the company at risk if contact with external parties is an important part of their daily operations.

Given the elusiveness of social media use compared to the other forms of avoidance coping strategy, managers have to come up with creative ways to identify avoidant employees. One effective way to identify avoidant individuals is to ask employees to answer questionnaires designed to identify avoidant individuals. However, as these measurement instruments are usually designed for clinical purposes, they may not be applicable to organizational objectives (Ottenbreit and Dobson, 2004). Another effective way to identify avoidant employees who feel that they are trapped in their organization is for the manager to pay close attention to individuals who dislike the job and seem to complain about almost "everything little thing" pertaining to the organization. For example, comments such as "the employees of this company are idiots compared to those working in Y company", and "nobody would want to come to this silly company; I'm here because this is the only offer I got" could be indicators that the employee believes that they are trapped in the wrong organization.

Once identified, we recommend managers to first think through whether they want to keep the employee. Avoidant employees are individuals who believe that they are "trapped" in the wrong organization. They are likely to leave the company as soon as they have the chance to do so. If the avoidant employee is dispensable, or is becoming a bigger problem to the organization over time, the manager may want to let them go; however, if the manager decides to keep the avoidant employee, they can reduce the employee's non-work-related social media use in a number of ways.

First, the manager can motivate the avoidant employee to reduce their trapped perception. The manager needs to convince the avoidant employee that they are not as bad a situation as they think they are. If this does not work, the manager can try to exploit the employee's trapped perception. One technique that is commonly used by military officers to motivate conscripts serving their military service is to repeatedly say things like: "you'd better work hard during your service term, don't get into trouble, get out of the army as soon as possible" and "I know you don't like my face, I hate yours too, you'd better do your job well, and get out of my camp as soon as possible!" Thus, instead of focusing on trying to make the avoidant employee like the organization, the manager could focus on telling them to work hard on building their credentials in order to get closer to obtaining their ideal job, thereby improving the employee's willingness to improve their performance.

Second, managers can tailor-make a social media restriction policy for avoidant employees. For example, as many social media users rely on Wi-Fi to get "free access" to social media using their smartphone, managers can limit the social media use of avoidant employees by restricting their access to the company's Wi-Fi. Furthermore, if an avoidant employee accesses social media during work mainly to play social online games, as many social games give "rewards" to gamers who complete their "daily tasks", the manager can conduct random checks to make sure that the avoidant employee has not completed the "daily tasks" of their games before the end of office hours. If an avoidant employee accesses social media to watch movie clips, the manager can ban the use of earphones in the workplace. Nevertheless, given that the restrictions

placed on social media use may cause the avoidant employee to switch to other forms of avoidance coping strategy, we recommend that managers use the motivational technique instead of implementing a social media restriction policy, whenever possible.

Many studies on avoidant behaviors have been conducted under pathological premises (c.f. Nolen-Hoeksema, 2005; Trull *et al.*, 2003). For example, Fernández de la Cruz *et al.* (2013) studied the relationships between experiential avoidance, emotional regulation, and hoarding behavior using a sample of 80 participants. Based on their findings, the authors proposed the possibility of combining interventions for experiential avoidance reduction with treatments for hoarding disorder for better clinical effects. Spinhoven *et al.* (2014) investigated the potential causal role of experiential avoidance within the course of a person's emotional disorder development by conducting a longitudinal study on 2,316 adults with emotional disorders. Based on their findings, the researchers proposed the potential transdiagnostic role that experiential avoidance can play in the manifestation and/or co-manifestation of multiple disorders, and called for more research to be conducted on the effectiveness of using transdiagnostic treatments on these patients. Although the findings of these studies have immense contributions toward the understanding of pathological avoidant behavior, they lack direct organizational implications. By bringing the literature of clinical psychology and that of organizational theories together, we expanded the range of applications of the clinical psychology literature, and opened new doors in organizational research.

Limitations of theory
In this paper, we focused our discussion on the trapped perception of fresh graduates. To keep our discussion focused, we did not expand our model to include the antecedents of trapped perception. For example, could the reason an individual becomes "trapped" in a job influence their perception of being trapped in the job? For example, if the individual accepts the role to please their parents, will the dynamics of the person's trapped perception and the ensuing influences of avoidance coping strategies on their social media usage pattern and performances differ compared to an instance in which an individual takes a job to support their family?

In addition, we did not consider the experiences of groups of people other than fresh graduates. Thus, the trapped perception of people with lower socioeconomic status, for instance, might differ from those of fresh college graduates. Future research can explore these questions in greater detail to shed more light on the phenomenon.

Conclusion
In this paper, we proposed that the trapped perception of fresh graduates employed in a company may cause them to engage in avoidance coping strategies. When these employees seek to discharge their stresses, they may look to non-work-related social media usage. While the current literature labels this type of behavior cyberloafing, and scholars classify it as a form of deviant behavior, we have challenged this overgeneralized stance, and suggested that employees who use social media as a tool for avoidance coping should be treated differently from those who do so to avoid work intentionally, as the traditional "carrot and stick" mechanism is not likely to work as well on the former group. We believe that when employees who feel trapped in an organization are motivated to work for the organization, and when they no longer feel trapped, instances of both cyberloafing and non-cyber loafing will be reduced. We hope

that our paper will spark the interest of management scholars to identify the optimum way to isolate this group of employees, and to find a way to motivate them to work for the organization.

Many universities educate business students using case studies on successful ventures and role models. A benefit of this approach is that it gives students more vivid impressions of the course content, and helps them to better understand how to apply the knowledge taught in class. However, one side effect of the approach is that it builds a "success mindset" in students. Many of them want to become successful after they graduate, and more of them are taught to believe in their potential. While ambitions are important, if there is large gap between reality and the ideal situation, unrealistic dreams may only be a source of unnecessary stress for these young adults. Students are often advised to be realistic in their job hunts only after they have received several rejections from companies. However, how many advisors tell students that the glamorous banking jobs they see in Hollywood movies will not be available to most of them? We hope our paper will motivate scholars to consider how to revise the current college education system to make students better prepared for the reality, so that fewer future graduates will feel trapped in jobs that actually match their professional profiles. This will not only improve the performances of those future graduates who might otherwise end up becoming avoidant employees, but can also contribute to their wellbeing by improving their job satisfaction and life satisfaction. At the very least, we hope that more teachers will be mindful of trying to give their students a more realistic "job preview" as early as possible, and not tell their students to be realistic only after they have received rejections from corporations.

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