

REFRAMING SOCIAL MEDIA USE: UNLOCKING EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY THROUGH MENTAL WELL-BEING

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ABSTRACT

This study reframes the role of social media in the workplace by examining how its use can enhance employee productivity through the mediating effect of mental well-being. The research was conducted in Indonesia involving 263 respondents who were full-time or part-time employees within productive working age and active social media users. A quantitative approach with an online survey and purposive sampling was employed. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS 4 software. The results reveal that social media use positively and significantly affects both employee productivity ($\beta = 0.254$; $p < 0.001$) and mental well-being ($\beta = 0.695$; $p < 0.001$). Mental well-being also has a positive and significant effect on productivity ($\beta = 0.669$; $p < 0.001$) and serves as a mediator in the relationship between social media use and productivity ($\beta = 0.465$; $p < 0.001$). The model explains 74.9% of the variance in employee productivity ($R^2 = 0.749$) with good predictive relevance ($Q^2 = 0.402$). These findings challenge the negative stigma of social media in professional settings, highlighting its potential to foster psychological well-being and sustainable work performance.

Key words: social media; mental well-being; employee productivity; mediation; digital workplace

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has profoundly reshaped modern work culture, particularly through the integration of social media as a key platform for communication, collaboration, and knowledge sharing (Nadkarni & Prüggl, 2021). In Indonesia, where more than half of the population actively uses social media platforms, digital engagement has become an inseparable part of professional life (Siahaan et al., 2022). Social media is now utilized not only for networking and information exchange but also for learning, innovation, and career development (Khousa & Atif, 2018). This transformation is particularly evident among millennial employees, who represent the largest proportion of the productive-age workforce and have grown up in a technology-driven environment (Kim, 2018). As this generation enters leadership and managerial roles, their digital behavior increasingly shapes organizational productivity and workplace dynamics (Kim, 2018).

Despite these advantages, the use of social media in professional settings presents a paradox. While it can enhance collaboration, motivation, and knowledge sharing (Nadkarni & Prüggl, 2021), unregulated or excessive use may lead to distraction, mental fatigue, and reduced concentration (Świątek et al., 2023). This duality highlights the complexity of social media's role in shaping work outcomes and underscores the need to identify the psychological mechanisms that determine whether its use promotes or hinders employee productivity.

One such mechanism is mental well-being, which has been recognized as a crucial factor influencing how individuals respond to digital demands (Twenge, 2019). Employees with higher levels of mental well-being are more likely to maintain focus, engagement, and job satisfaction, which can enhance productivity even in digitally intensive environments (Pudasaini Thapa et al., 2023). However, most previous studies have primarily focused on the direct relationship between social media use and employee productivity (Nisar et al., 2019; Riyanto et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021; Wushe & Shenje, 2019), without examining the psychological processes that explain this linkage. Empirical investigations that position mental well-being as a mediating variable—particularly in the context of millennial employees in Indonesia—remain limited. This research gap provides a strong rationale for exploring how mental well-being functions as a psychological bridge through which social media use contributes to improved employee productivity.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effect of social media use on employee productivity by examining the mediating role of mental well-being. By focusing on millennial employees in Indonesia, this research provides a novel empirical contribution to the field of human resource management by reframing social media use as a potential enabler of psychological well-being and sustainable productivity in the digital era.

The relationship between social media use and employee productivity reflects a dual-edged dynamic that depends largely on the nature and purpose of its use. When utilized for professional purposes, social media can enhance collaboration, information exchange, and real-time coordination, leading to higher efficiency and work engagement (Khousa & Atif, 2018; Nadkarni & Prüggl, 2021). Through organizational platforms and instant communication tools, employees can access timely updates, share ideas, and strengthen teamwork, which ultimately improves performance outcomes (Leonardi & Vaast, 2017). Conversely, unstructured or excessive use may lead to distraction and time mismanagement, thereby reducing work focus (Świątek et al., 2023). Despite these potential drawbacks, empirical evidence consistently supports that purposeful and work-related social media engagement contributes positively to employee productivity (Khousa & Atif, 2018; Nadkarni & Prüggl, 2021). Hence, it is hypothesized that social media use has a positive effect on employee productivity (H1).

The psychological impact of social media use is multifaceted, encompassing both risks and opportunities for mental well-being. Excessive and unregulated engagement is often associated with depression, anxiety, and diminished life satisfaction due to social comparison and cognitive overload (Brailovskaia et al., 2023; Marttila et al., 2021). However, when used mindfully and purposefully, social media can foster social connectedness, provide emotional support, and facilitate positive coping mechanisms that strengthen individuals' mental well-being (Khousa & Atif, 2018; Nadkarni & Prügl, 2021). For working adults particularly millennials—who rely on digital platforms for communication and collaboration, social media can act as a valuable tool for maintaining psychological balance and reducing workplace stress (Aalbers et al., 2019). Therefore, it is hypothesized that social media use has a positive effect on mental well-being (H2).

Mental well-being represents a vital psychological resource that directly influences how employees perform, engage, and contribute to organizational outcomes (Nielsen et al., 2017). Employees with a positive mental state tend to experience higher motivation (Babalola et al., 2021), focus (Kour et al., 2019), and creativity (Khalilzadeh et al., 2023), which enhance their ability to solve problems, collaborate effectively, and sustain high levels of productivity. Conversely, poor mental health can lead to emotional exhaustion, reduced concentration, absenteeism, and increased turnover factors that significantly diminish performance and organizational efficiency (Agnafors et al., 2021). When organizations foster mental well-being through supportive environments and balanced workloads, employees are more likely to remain engaged, resilient, and productive (Babalola et al., 2021). Therefore, it is hypothesized that mental well-being has a positive effect on employee productivity (H3).

Emerging evidence indicates that mental well-being functions as a critical psychological mechanism through which social media use influences employee productivity (Zhu et al., 2024). Studies have shown that purposeful and work-related social media engagement enhances psychological well-being and thriving at work, which in turn fosters better performance and innovative behavior (Bodhi et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2024). When employees experience higher mental well-being, they are more motivated, resilient, and capable of managing digital demands effectively, translating online engagement into productive outcomes (Ruggeri et al., 2020). Conversely, excessive or unregulated social media use may undermine this pathway by causing stress and information overload, which negatively affect well-being and productivity (Świątek et al., 2023). Therefore, it is hypothesized that mental well-being mediates the relationship between social media use and employee productivity (H4).

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey approach to examine the relationships among social media use, mental well-being, and employee productivity. The population consisted of employees in Indonesia who were currently working either full-time or part-time and were active users of social media. A total of 263 respondents participated in the study, selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) being employed, (2) within productive working age, and (3) using or owning at least one social media account. Demographic characteristics, including gender, age, and employment status, were collected to provide a descriptive overview of the participants. Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire that measured three main constructs: Social Media Use (SMU), Mental Well-Being (MWB), and Employee Productivity (EP). The SMU construct was adapted from Ali-Hassan et al., (2015) and comprised items capturing the intensity and purpose of social media usage in professional contexts. The MWB construct was adapted from Garcia et al., (2023) to reflect contemporary psychometric validations of well-being measures. The EP construct was adapted from Putri et al., (2017) to assess perceived performance, focus, and task effectiveness. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The measurement model demonstrated acceptable reliability and convergent validity based on internal consistency and AVE criteria. Data analysis was performed using PLS-SEM (SmartPLS 4) to test direct and mediating effects; model assessment included R² and Q² for explanatory and predictive power, and hypothesis testing used bootstrapping.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The structural model was evaluated using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS 4. The model demonstrated strong explanatory and predictive power, with R² = 0.749 for Employee Productivity and Q² = 0.402, confirming its substantial explanatory and predictive capability. All hypothesized relationships were found to be statistically significant (p < 0.001).

Table 1. Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	β	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Social Media Use → Employee Productivity	0.254	5.024	0.000	Supported
H2	Social Media Use → Mental Well-Being	0.695	23.592	0.000	Supported
H3	Mental Well-Being → Employee Productivity	0.669	11.969	0.000	Supported
H4	Social Media Use → Employee Productivity (Mediated by Mental Well-Being)	0.465	10.955	0.000	Supported

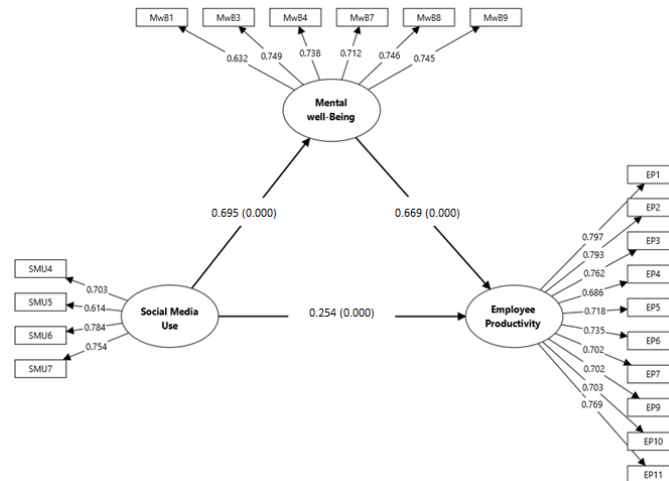


Figure 1. Structural Model

The results confirm that all hypothesized relationships are statistically significant and positive, demonstrating that social media use, mental well-being, and employee productivity are closely interconnected. Specifically, social media use positively and significantly affects employee productivity (H1), aligning with previous studies (Khouza & Atif, 2018; Nadkarni & Prügl, 2021) who found that professional and work-related social media engagement facilitates collaboration, information sharing, and real-time coordination among employees, thereby enhancing performance. Similarly, Leonardi & Vaast, (2017) highlighted that organizational social media platforms improve teamwork and communication efficiency, which directly translate into higher productivity levels. These findings reinforce the view that purposeful digital engagement can serve as an enabler of work effectiveness when properly managed, despite the potential risk of distraction identified by Świątek et al., (2023).

The analysis also indicates that social media use has a significant positive effect on mental well-being (H2). This result supports the notion that mindful and purposeful use of digital platforms can strengthen psychological balance, emotional connectedness, and coping mechanisms, as documented in the studies of Aalbers et al., (2019) ; Khouza & Atif, (2018); Nadkarni & Prügl, (2021). These findings suggest that social media can function as a positive psychological tool, especially for millennial employees who integrate digital communication into their daily work routines to reduce stress and enhance their sense of social belonging.

Furthermore, mental well-being shows a strong and positive effect on employee productivity (H3), consistent with the findings of Nielsen et al., (2017), Babalola et al., (2021) Kour et al., (2019), and Khalilzadeh et al., (2023). These scholars emphasize that employees with higher mental well-being tend to exhibit greater motivation, concentration, and creativity, which lead to enhanced problem-solving, collaboration, and overall performance. Conversely, as shown by Agnafors et al., (2021), poor mental health may result in emotional exhaustion and reduced work quality, underscoring the critical role of mental well-being in sustaining organizational efficiency.

Finally, the mediation analysis confirms that mental well-being partially mediates the relationship between social media use and employee productivity (H4). This finding corroborates the work of Zhu et al., (2024), Bodhi et al., (2023), and Ruggeri et al., (2020), which found that psychological well-being serves as a key mechanism through which social media engagement enhances work performance and innovation. However, excessive or unregulated social media use, as noted by Świątek et al., (2023) can disrupt this positive pathway by inducing stress and information overload. Collectively, these results validate that the productive benefits of social media are most effectively realized when its use supports both psychological well-being and professional collaboration.

CONCLUSION

This study provides robust empirical evidence that social media use exerts a positive influence on both mental well-being and employee productivity, with mental well-being serving as a crucial mediating variable in this relationship. The findings highlight that purposeful and work-oriented social media engagement enhances psychological wellness, which in turn contributes to improved individual performance. The proposed model explains a substantial proportion of the variance in employee productivity ($R^2 = 0.749$), underscoring the importance of employees' mental well-being as a psychological pathway linking social media use to sustainable work outcomes. These results challenge the traditional perception of social media as merely a source of distraction by emphasizing its constructive potential in supporting collaboration, communication, and emotional balance in the workplace.

The study enriches the literature on human resource management and organizational behavior by demonstrating the positive role of digital engagement in enhancing both mental health and work performance. Practically, the findings suggest that organizations should promote mindful social media use and invest in initiatives that foster employees' mental well-being to achieve higher productivity. Future research is encouraged to employ

longitudinal or experimental designs to examine the causal dynamics of digital behavior, mental health, and productivity across diverse industries and cultural contexts..

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