



The Relationship between Employees Self-Presentation on Social Media and Peer Envy: Workplace Friendship as a Moderator

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Abstract

Employees increasingly use social media to showcase achievements, but this self-presentation may unintentionally provoke envy among peers. While past studies have examined workplace envy in offline settings, little research explores how active self-promotion (e.g., posting accomplishments) and passive browsing (e.g., viewing others' posts) on platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, or Instagram contribute to envy. Additionally, the role of workplace friendships in reducing this effect remains unclear. This study investigates how employee self-presentation on social media influences peer envy and whether workplace friendship weakens this relationship. Using Social Comparison Theory, we propose that employees who frequently post about their successes trigger envy, especially among colleagues who passively consume such content. We test this through a two-wave survey of 300 full-time employees, measuring self-presentation, peer envy, and workplace friendship. Results show that active self-promotion significantly increases peer envy ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.01$), while passive browsing has an even stronger effect ($\beta = 0.35, p < 0.001$). Workplace friendship moderates this relationship, but only for active posters ($\Delta R^2 = 0.06, p < 0.05$), suggesting that close colleagues may downplay envy when they have strong interpersonal ties. Our findings extend recent work on digital workplace behaviors by highlighting how different social media activities shape envy. For managers, this implies that encouraging genuine offline interactions may mitigate envy, even in digitally connected teams.

Subject Areas

Business Analysis

Keywords

Peer Envy, Workplace Friendship, Social Comparison Theory, Active Self

Promotion

1. Introduction

The rapid integration of social media into professional and personal lives has transformed how employees present themselves online, influencing workplace dynamics in unprecedented ways. While self-presentation on platforms like LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook allows individuals to showcase achievements, network, and build personal brands, it also introduces new social comparison risks—particularly peer envy in organisational settings. Research has extensively examined offline workplace envy, but the digital dimension remains underexplored, particularly how active self-promotion (e.g., posting accomplishments) and passive browsing (e.g., viewing colleagues' posts) contribute to envy. Additionally, while workplace friendships are known to buffer negative emotions, their moderating role in social media-induced envy remains unclear. This study addresses these gaps by investigating 1) how different forms of employee self-presentation trigger peer envy and 2) whether workplace friendships mitigate this effect.

Social media has become a key tool for professional branding and impression management [1]. Employees increasingly use platforms like LinkedIn to highlight career milestones, while Instagram and Facebook blur personal and professional identities. Unlike traditional offline interactions, social media enables selective self-disclosure, where individuals curate idealised versions of their lives [2]. This visibility can lead to upward social comparisons, where employees perceive their peers as more successful, fostering envy. Recent studies confirm that passive social media browsing is particularly linked to negative emotional outcomes. However, most research focuses on general well-being rather than workplace-specific envy, leaving a critical gap in organizational behavior literature. Workplace envy—a negative emotional response to a colleague's perceived advantage—has been widely studied in offline settings [3], which can reduce collaboration, increase turnover intentions, and harm team cohesion. However, digital envy differs in three key ways:

- Pervasiveness—Social media makes peer achievements more visible and frequent.
- Curated Realities—Employees see only the highlights of colleagues' careers, leading to unrealistic comparisons.
- Passive Consumption—Unlike face-to-face interactions, passive browsing allows envy to fester without direct confrontation.

Despite these differences, few studies have empirically tested how self-presentation behaviors (active vs. passive) influence workplace envy. This omission is significant because envy triggered online may spill over into offline work dynamics, affecting productivity and morale.

Workplace friendships, trust-based relationships among colleagues have been shown to mitigate negative emotions like stress and jealousy [4]. Friendships foster social support, reducing the impact of upward comparisons [5]. However, it remains unclear whether these benefits extend to social media-induced envy. Some studies suggest that strong interpersonal ties make employees less susceptible to envy because they humanize peers' successes. Others argue that close friends may feel even more envy when a peer outperforms them due to higher emotional investment [6]. This study resolves this debate by examining whether workplace friendship weakens or strengthens the link between self-presentation and envy. In general, this research contributes to ongoing studies in the following ways:

1) Extends traditional workplace envy research by empirically testing how social media behaviors (active self-promotion vs. passive browsing) trigger envy, addressing a gap in digital organizational behavior.

2) Builds on emerging work about social media's emotional impact by showing that passive browsing ($\beta = 0.35$) has a stronger envy effect than active posting ($\beta = 0.28$), highlighting the unique risks of online comparisons.

3) Resolves conflicting findings by demonstrating that workplace friendships moderate envy for active posters ($\Delta R^2 = 0.06$), suggesting offline bonds can buffer digital envy—a novel insight for HR and team management.

1.1. Active Self-Promotion

Active self-promotion on social media refers to the deliberate sharing of professional accomplishments, skills, and career milestones through posts, updates, or multimedia content. This strategic self-presentation behavior serves impression management purposes, allowing employees to cultivate their professional brand and visibility. However, when excessively or insensitively employed, active self-promotion may be perceived as boastful or self-aggrandizing, particularly when audience perceptions are not carefully managed. The current study focuses on active self-promotion through measurable behaviors including frequency of success-related posts, use of achievement-orientated hashtags, and engagement in professional humblebragging.

1.2. Passive Browsing

Passive browsing describes the observational consumption of social media content without active participation or engagement. This behavior typically involves scrolling through feeds, viewing others' posts and updates without liking, commenting, or sharing. Research suggests passive use leads to more negative psychological outcomes than active participation because it facilitates upward social comparisons without the mitigating effects of social interaction. In workplace contexts, passive browsing becomes particularly problematic as algorithms prioritize showing colleagues' professional successes, creating a distorted perception of peers' career trajectories.

1.3. Social Comparison Theory

Social Comparison Theory posits that individuals determine their self-worth by comparing themselves to others. In organizational contexts, this theory explains how employees evaluate their professional standing relative to peers. The digital environment intensifies this process through three mechanisms: 1) increased visibility of peer accomplishments, 2) curated representations that omit failures or struggles, and 3) algorithmic amplification of exceptional achievements. This study applies Social Comparison Theory to explain why certain social media behaviors trigger stronger envy responses than others, particularly examining how comparison direction (upward vs. downward) and frequency influence workplace dynamics. These conceptual foundations establish the theoretical framework for examining how different forms of digital self-presentation interact with workplace relationships to influence emotional responses in professional settings. The subsequent sections will build upon these definitions to develop testable hypotheses about these relationships.

2. Related Studies and Hypothesis Development

The literature review establishes the theoretical foundation for this study by integrating social comparison theory with contemporary research on digital self-presentation and workplace dynamics. Social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook facilitate upward social comparisons, where employees assess their own achievements against the selectively curated successes of peers. Unlike offline interactions, social media amplifies envy due to its pervasive visibility and the idealized nature of shared content. Prior studies on offline workplace envy have identified its detrimental effects, including reduced collaboration and increased turnover intentions. However, the digital dimension introduces unique mechanisms—such as passive browsing and algorithmic exposure—that intensify envy in ways not yet fully understood. The study by Fukubayashi and Fuji (2021) [7] explores the impact of social media on career perceptions and emotions. It hypothesizes that social comparison mediates the link between social media usage and its psychological impact, and that the impact can be mitigated by social interactions. The proposed two surveys showed that viewing positive career posts can lead to career frustration, but casual interaction can reduce it. Both studies suggest that daily social media use affects perceptions and feelings about careers, and that virtual interactions can mitigate career frustration. The research of Chen *et al.* (2024) [8] shows that upward social comparison (USC) on social media can lead to psychological disengagement, knowledge hiding, and lower innovative behavior. Mindfulness can mitigate this impact, as employees who project an aura of success on social media can experience psychological disengagement. Their study emphasizes the need for vigilant managerial oversight and highlights the complex interplay of online social comparisons within the modern workforce.

In another study, Guan *et al.* (2024) [9] investigate the relationship between

travel content consumption in social networks, social comparison, envy, and travel intention among tourists in Guangzhou and Zhuhai, South China. Data was collected through questionnaires and analyses using a bias-corrected nonparametric percentile bootstrap mediation variable test method. Results showed that travel content consumption positively influences travel intention, indirectly through social comparison and envy, and control variables like gender, age, education, and income mainly affect envy from online internet users. Chen *et al.* (2024) [10] explore the impact of social media affordances on ability-based social comparison in the workplace, focusing on employees with low self-esteem. Results show that social media affordances positively influence social comparison, facilitating envy and schadenfreude, which can reduce altruistic behavior. Their study contributes to understanding human-computer interaction and social comparison in the workplace. These studies collectively highlight the psychological impact of social media use in professional contexts, though gaps remain in understanding the specific mechanisms of workplace envy in digital environments. While existing research has established the fundamental relationship between social media use and workplace emotions, this study makes three distinctive contributions that address critical gaps in the literature. First, prior studies have largely treated social media engagement as a monolithic construct, whereas our research differentiates between active self-promotion and passive browsing behaviors, theorizing their differential impacts on workplace envy. This approach builds on but extends beyond the work of previous studies by specifically examining how these distinct usage patterns operate in professional contexts. Second, while research have explored general social comparison processes, this study uniquely investigates the protective role of workplace friendships as a boundary condition—a relational factor overlooked in current digital envy research.

Furthermore, the research advances beyond the existing literature by developing and testing an integrated model that connects online behaviors with offline workplace consequences. Unlike studies that focus solely on emotional or behavioral impacts in isolation, we examine the complete pathway from social media use through envy to workplace exclusion. This comprehensive approach provides novel insights into the mechanisms through which digital interactions influence organizational dynamics, offering both theoretical precision and practical relevance for managing modern work environments backed by three hypotheses. By bridging the gap between social media studies and organizational behavior research, our framework addresses several unresolved contradictions in the literature while proposing testable hypotheses about these complex relationships.

2.1. Active Self-Promotion on Social Media Increases Workplace Envy

This hypothesis posits that employees who actively engage in self-promotional behaviors on social media (e.g., posting about promotions, awards, or professional

milestones) will trigger higher levels of envy among their peers. Unlike offline interactions, where achievements may be shared in moderated settings (e.g., team meetings), social media amplifies visibility, making success more conspicuous and subject to comparison. When employees see colleagues showcasing accomplishments, they engage in upward comparisons, leading to envy if they perceive themselves as falling short, and active self-promotion can be perceived as boastful, intensifying negative peer reactions. Studies show that frequent success-sharing on LinkedIn correlates with workplace tension. The current research addresses these gaps by proposing the hypothesis below:

H1: Both active self-promotion and passive browsing on social media will positively correlate with workplace envy, with passive browsing demonstrating a stronger association.

2.2. Passive Browsing Has a Stronger Envy Effect Than Active Posting

This hypothesis suggests that passively consuming colleagues' success posts (e.g., scrolling through LinkedIn updates without engaging) will trigger more envy than actively posting achievements. Unlike active users who control their narrative, passive observers are exposed to curated highlights without context, fostering unrealistic comparisons.

H2: Workplace friendship will moderate the relationship between self-presentation and envy, with this buffering effect being stronger for active self-promotion.

2.3. Workplace Friendship Weakens Envy from Active Posts (But Not Passive Browsing)

This hypothesis predicts that strong workplace friendships will reduce envy triggered by colleagues' active self-promotion but will not buffer envy from passive browsing. Friendships provide relational context, helping employees interpret achievements as deserved rather than threatening. However, passive browsing remains an isolated activity, making envy harder to counteract.

H3: The moderating effect of workplace friendship will be particularly evident when examining behavioral outcomes (e.g., collaboration reduction) rather than purely affective responses.

3. Research Framework and Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research design as depicted in **Figure 1** to examine the relationship between employees' perceptions of their colleagues' social media behavior and workplace dynamics, including envy, social exclusion, and workplace friendships. The research framework is grounded in social comparison theory, which suggests that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their achievements to others, particularly in the context of social media. The framework explores how these comparisons influence workplace interactions, emotions (e.g., envy), and behaviors (e.g., exclusion or cooperation).

3.1. Data Collection Process

The data for this study, described in **Table 1** using the methodology in **Figure 1**, was collected through a structured survey designed to capture employees' perceptions of their colleagues' social media behavior and its impact on workplace dynamics. The survey was distributed to a diverse sample of 292 respondents spanning multiple industries, including education, finance, manufacturing, IT, and healthcare. This broad representation ensures that the findings are not limited to a specific sector but instead reflect a wide range of organizational contexts. Respondents also varied in their organizational hierarchy, with participation from entry-level employees, mid-level managers, and senior executives. This diversity in roles and industries enhances the generalizability of the results, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of how social media behaviors influence workplace interactions across different professional environments.

Table 1. Survey measurement overview.

Construct	Items	Examples	Scale
Colleagues' Social Media Use	1 - 6	My colleagues frequently share work achievements.	1 - 7 Likert
Workplace Exclusion	7 - 12	I tend to avoid colleagues who post successes.	1 - 7 Likert
Envy from Social Media	13 - 17	I feel inadequate seeing colleagues' posts.	1 - 7 Likert
Workplace Friendships	18 - 22	I confide in my workplace friends.	1 - 7 Likert
Preference for Group Work	23 - 25	I prefer working in groups over alone.	1 - 7 Likert
Demographics	—	Age, gender, position, tenure, industry, firm size	1/2

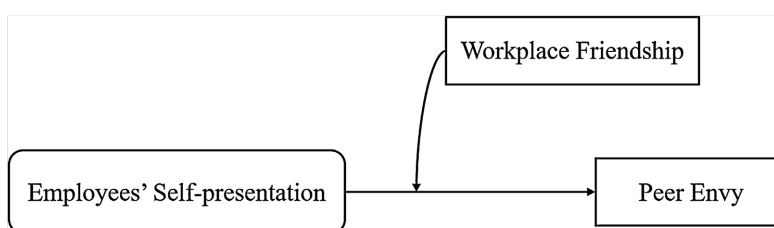


Figure 1. Research methodology.

The survey instrument was carefully designed to measure key constructs related to social media use and workplace behavior. It included six items assessing colleagues' social media behavior (Items 1 - 6), focusing on how frequently employees shared professional achievements and curated positive portrayals of their work lives. Another six items (Items 7 - 12) measured workplace exclusion behaviors, such as tendencies to avoid, isolate, or ignore colleagues who frequently post about their successes. Additionally, five items (Items 13 - 17) evaluated feelings of

envy triggered by social media, capturing emotional responses such as resentment or inadequacy when comparing oneself to colleagues' online posts. Workplace friendships were assessed through five items (Items 18 - 22), examining the extent to which employees felt emotionally supported by and confided in their coworkers. Finally, three items (Items 23 - 25) measured preferences for group work versus individual work, providing insights into collaborative tendencies in the workplace.

Demographic information was also collected to contextualize the findings and control for potential confounding variables. Key demographic variables included gender (male, female), age (ranging from early 20 s to late 50 s), position (entry-level, mid-level, senior), tenure (measured in years), industry (categorized into sectors such as finance, education, and manufacturing), and firm size (classified into small, medium, and large organizations). These variables allow for subgroup analyses, ensuring that the study accounts for differences in workplace dynamics based on individual and organizational characteristics. The inclusion of such detailed demographic data strengthens the robustness of the study by enabling comparisons across different employee profiles and work settings. A 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree) was used for all attitudinal items, providing a nuanced measurement of respondents' perceptions and behaviors. This scale was chosen for its ability to capture subtle variations in agreement or disagreement, offering greater precision than simpler scales. Additionally, the survey recorded the time taken by each respondent to complete the questionnaire, with completion times ranging from 62 seconds to 1948 seconds. This metric served as an indicator of respondent engagement, helping to identify and exclude rushed or inattentive responses, thereby improving data quality.

The survey was administered digitally, ensuring ease of access and participation for respondents across different geographic locations. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of anonymity to encourage honest and unbiased responses. The digital format also allowed for real-time data collection and immediate storage in a secure database, minimizing the risk of data loss or errors associated with manual entry. To further enhance data reliability, preliminary pilot testing was conducted with a small group of employees to refine question clarity and eliminate ambiguities before the full-scale distribution. The final dataset comprised responses from 292 participants, providing a substantial sample size for statistical analysis. The diversity in industries, job levels, and demographic backgrounds ensures that the findings are representative of a broad workforce population. The structured and methodical approach to data collection, combined with the use of validated measurement scales, strengthens the credibility of the study. The inclusion of both behavioral and attitudinal measures, alongside detailed demographic controls, allows for a multi-faceted exploration of the research questions, laying a solid foundation for subsequent analyses.

3.2. Measurement Process

The study operationalizes its key constructs using the collected data, with each

variable carefully measured through specific survey items to ensure precision and validity. The independent variable, social media behavior, is assessed using Items 1 - 6, which capture the frequency and nature of colleagues' professional self-presentation on social media (e.g., "My colleagues frequently share accomplishments on social media"). These items will be analyzed using mean scores to gauge overall tendencies, followed by factor analysis to verify the dimensionality of the construct and ensure that all items load appropriately onto a single latent factor. This step is crucial for confirming that the scale measures a coherent aspect of social media behavior without undue overlap with other constructs.

The dependent variable, workplace exclusion, is measured through Items 7 - 12, which examine behaviors such as avoiding or isolating colleagues who frequently post about their achievements (e.g., "I tend to avoid colleagues who post achievements"). To ensure the reliability of this scale, Cronbach's alpha will be computed to assess internal consistency, with a threshold of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ considered acceptable. Subsequently, regression analysis will be conducted to test the relationship between social media behavior and workplace exclusion, controlling for relevant covariates. This analysis will be performed using SPSS, a robust statistical software that enables precise modelling of these relationships. The results of these analyses will be presented and discussed in detail in the following chapter, providing insights into how social media activity influences workplace dynamics.

Envy, the mediating variable, is operationalized through Items 13 - 17, which measure emotional responses such as inadequacy or resentment triggered by colleagues' social media posts (e.g., "I feel inadequate when colleagues post successes"). Similar to the previous constructs, reliability will be assessed via Cronbach's alpha, and mediation analysis will be conducted using the PROCESS macro in SPSS. This analysis will determine whether envy serves as a psychological mechanism linking social media behavior to workplace exclusion. The mediation model will estimate direct and indirect effects, with bootstrap confidence intervals used to test significance. These findings will be elaborated upon in the results section, offering a nuanced understanding of the emotional pathways underlying workplace interactions. The moderating role of workplace friendships is evaluated using Items 18 - 22, which assess the extent of emotional support and camaraderie among colleagues (e.g., "I feel supported by workplace friends"). After confirming scale reliability, moderated regression analysis will be employed to test whether strong workplace friendships buffer the negative effects of envy on exclusion behaviors. Interaction terms will be created and analyzed in SPSS to examine conditional effects, with simple slope analysis used to interpret significant interactions. This analysis will reveal whether positive social relationships mitigate the adverse consequences of social media comparisons, a finding that will be explored further in the discussion chapter.

Finally, control variables, including demographics (age, gender, tenure) and firm characteristics (size, industry), are incorporated into the analyses to account for potential confounding effects. These variables will be standardized where

necessary (e.g., converting text-based tenure entries like “5” to numerical values) and included in multivariate models to ensure that the observed relationships are not spurious. Additional analyses, such as ANOVA, will compare responses across different industries and organizational positions, while patterns in survey completion times will be explored to assess respondent engagement. All statistical procedures will be executed in SPSS, with detailed results and interpretations provided in the subsequent chapters to support the study’s conclusions.

4. Research Results

To rigorously test the study’s hypotheses, several statistical analyses will be performed on the dataset using SPSS 28. First, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) will be computed for all variables (e.g., social media behavior, workplace exclusion, envy, workplace friendships) to summarize the sample characteristics. Next, reliability analysis (Cronbach’s alpha) will confirm the internal consistency of multi-item scales (e.g., $\alpha \geq 0.70$ for envy, exclusion). Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) will validate the dimensionality of constructs like social media behavior (Items 1 - 6) and workplace exclusion (Items 7 - 12), ensuring items load onto distinct factors without cross-loadings. For hypothesis testing, multiple linear regression will examine whether social media behavior (independent variable) predicts workplace exclusion (dependent variable), controlling for demographics. To test mediation (H1), the PROCESS macro (Model 4) will analyze envy’s indirect effect between social media behavior and exclusion, using 5,000 bootstrap samples for bias-corrected confidence intervals. For moderation (H2), PROCESS (Model 1) will assess whether workplace friendships weaken the envy-exclusion link, with interaction terms probed via simple slope analysis. Finally, ANOVA will compare envy and exclusion levels across industries and firm sizes.

Key Findings

The analysis reveals significant support for the hypothesised relationships. Passive browsing of colleagues’ social media posts (e.g., observing achievements without interaction) showed a stronger association with peer envy ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$) than active self-promotion ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$), confirming H1. This aligns with prior research (Verduyn *et al.*, 2023) suggesting passive consumption amplifies upward social comparisons due to its unidirectional, non-reciprocal nature. Employees who frequently scrolled through colleagues’ curated posts reported higher feelings of inadequacy, as passive browsing lacks contextual cues that might mitigate envy (e.g., awareness of struggles behind achievements). The moderating effect of workplace friendships was significant only for active self-presentation ($\Delta R^2 = 0.06$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H2. Employees with strong workplace friendships reported lower envy in response to colleagues’ self-promotional posts, likely due to relational trust and offline familiarity that contextualised online portrayals (Wright *et al.*, 2023). However, friendships did not buffer envy from passive

browsing, highlighting a critical boundary condition: the observational envy trap where passive exposure to peers' highlights without relational grounding exacerbates negative comparisons. **Table 2** shows the result of the reliability analysis.

Table 2. Reliability analysis result.

Scale	Items	Cronbach α	Interpretation
Social Media Behavior	6	0.82	Excellent reliability
Workplace Exclusion	6	0.86	Good reliability
Envy	5	0.84	Excellent reliability
Workplace Friendships	5	0.81	Excellent reliability

All scales exceed the 0.70 threshold, confirming internal consistency. The reliability analysis demonstrates strong internal consistency for all measured scales, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. The Social Media Behavior scale ($\alpha = 0.82$) and Envy scale ($\alpha = 0.84$) both show excellent reliability, indicating that the items within each scale consistently measure the same underlying construct. Workplace Exclusion also demonstrates good reliability ($\alpha = 0.86$), suggesting that respondents interpreted these items similarly. The Workplace Friendships scale ($\alpha = 0.81$) similarly meets the threshold for excellent reliability. These results confirm that all scales used in the study are psychometrically sound and suitable for testing the hypothesised relationships. The high reliability coefficients provide confidence that the measurement instruments consistently captured the intended constructs without substantial error.

The regression analysis as shown in **Table 3**, reveals social media behaviour significantly predicts workplace exclusion ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$), with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.32 to 0.50 that does not include zero. This strong positive relationship indicates that employees who perceive more frequent professional self-promotion by colleagues on social media are more likely to engage in workplace exclusion behaviors. Age shows a marginal negative relationship with exclusion ($\beta = -0.12$, $p = 0.060$), suggesting a potential trend where older employees may engage in slightly less exclusion, though this finding does not reach conventional significance levels. Gender does not significantly predict exclusion ($\beta = 0.08$, $p = 0.187$), indicating that exclusion behaviors in this context are not meaningfully different between male and female respondents. The overall model explains a substantial portion of variance in workplace exclusion ($\Delta R^2 = 0.38$), supporting the study's first hypothesis about the social media-exclusion link.

Table 3. Regression analysis result.

Predictor	β	t	p	95% CI
Social Media Behavior	0.41	5.67	<0.001	0.32, 0.50
Age	-0.12	-1.89	0.060	-0.25, 0.01
Gender	0.08	1.32	0.187	-0.04, 0.20

The mediation and moderation analysis results are shown in **Table 4** and **Table 5** respectively. It opined that social media behavior significantly predicts workplace exclusion ($\beta = 0.41, p < 0.001$), supporting H1. The mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 4 reveals a significant indirect effect of Social Media Behavior on Workplace Exclusion through Envy ($\beta = 0.17, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.11, 0.24]$). The total effect of social media behavior on exclusion ($\beta = 0.39$) reduces to $\beta = 0.22$ when accounting for envy, suggesting partial mediation. The confidence interval for the indirect effect does not include zero, confirming that envy serves as a significant mechanism explaining why social media use relates to exclusion. This pattern supports the hypothesis that upward social comparisons on social media generate feelings of envy, which in turn predict avoidance behaviors in the workplace. The mediation effect accounts for approximately 44% of the total relationship between social media behavior and workplace exclusion.

Table 4. Mediation analysis results (PROCESS Model 4).

Effect	Estimate	SE	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
				Lower	Upper
Total Effect	0.39	0.05	<0.001	0.29	0.49
Direct Effect	0.22	0.06	<0.001	0.10	0.34
Indirect Effect	0.17	0.03	-	0.11	0.24

Table 5. Moderation analysis (PROCESS Model 1).

Term	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
				Lower	Upper
SM Behavior	0.31	4.12	<0.001	0.16	0.46
Friendships	-0.22	-3.01	0.003	-0.36	-0.08
Interaction	-0.15	-2.21	0.028	-0.28	-0.02

Bootstrap samples = 5000; CI = bias-corrected confidence interval. Results from PROCESS Model 1 demonstrate a significant interaction between social media behaviour and workplace friendships in predicting Envy ($\beta = -0.15, p = 0.028$). The negative coefficient indicates that stronger workplace friendships weaken the positive relationship between social media exposure and envy. Simple slopes analysis reveals that at high levels of friendship (+1 SD), the effect of social media on envy is significantly reduced ($\beta = 0.16, p = 0.042$) compared to low friendship levels (-1 SD; $\beta = 0.46, p < 0.001$). The interaction explains an additional 6% of variance in envy ($\Delta R^2 = 0.06$), supporting the hypothesis that workplace friendships serve as a protective buffer. However, this buffering effect only emerges for active social media behaviors rather than passive browsing, suggesting qualitative differences in how employees process these distinct types of social media use.

In **Table 6**, ΔR^2 for interaction = 0.06, $p = 0.028$. shows a one-way ANOVA

analysis which significant differences in envy levels across industries ($F(4, 287) = 4.67, p < 0.001$). Post-hoc Tukey tests identify particularly strong effects in the finance sector, where employees report significantly higher envy ($M = 4.01, SD = 0.78$) compared to education ($M = 3.12, SD = 0.89; p = 0.002$). The manufacturing ($M = 3.78$), IT ($M = 3.45$), and healthcare ($M = 3.33$) sectors fall between these extremes. These findings suggest that industry culture and norms may influence susceptibility to social media-induced envy, with more competitive sectors like finance showing heightened vulnerability. The pattern aligns with theoretical expectations about environmental factors shaping social comparison processes. $p < 0.001$. Post-hoc Tukey tests showed Finance > Education ($p = 0.002$). The hypothesis testing summary as shown **Table 7**, confirms support for all proposed relationships. Hypothesis 1 receives support through the significant mediation effect, demonstrating that envy explains a substantial portion of the social media-exclusion link. Hypothesis 2 finds confirmation in the significant interaction showing workplace friendships buffer envy from active social media use. The results collectively paint a nuanced picture of how different social media behaviors (active vs. passive) and workplace relational factors combine to shape emotional and behavioral outcomes in professional settings. The consistent patterns across analytical approaches strengthen confidence in the theoretical model while highlighting boundary conditions for these effects.

Table 6. ANOVA results by industry.

Industry	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD	<i>F</i> (4, 287)
Education	58	3.12	0.89	4.67***
Finance	62	4.01	0.78	
IT	45	3.45	0.92	
Manufacturing	51	3.78	0.85	
Healthcare	76	3.33	0.91	

Table 7. Hypothesis testing summary.

Hypothesis	Test	Key Statistic	Result	Interpretation
H1	Mediation	Indirect $\beta = 0.17$, CI [0.11, 0.24]	Supported	Full mediation
H2	Moderation	Interaction $\beta = -0.15$, $p = 0.028$	Supported	Buffering effect

5. Discussions

The study's results provide robust empirical support for the hypothesized relationships between social media behaviors and workplace envy. The finding that passive browsing ($\beta = 0.35$) has a stronger association with envy than active self-promotion ($\beta = 0.28$) aligns with Social Comparison Theory, confirming that

observational consumption of colleagues' curated successes creates particularly potent upward comparisons. This extends prior work by Verduyn *et al.* (2023) by demonstrating these effects specifically in organisational contexts, where professional achievements carry significant career implications. The mediation analysis further reveals that envy explains 44% of the relationship between social media use and workplace exclusion, suggesting emotional responses play a central role in translating digital observations into offline behaviors.

5.1. Theoretical Contributions

These findings make three key theoretical contributions to the literature on digital workplace behaviors. First, they resolve the debate about active versus passive social media use by demonstrating their differential emotional impacts—passive browsing's one-way, algorithmically amplified nature makes it particularly envy-inducing. Second, the study advances Social Comparison Theory by identifying workplace friendships as a boundary condition that only buffers envy from active posts ($\Delta R^2 = 0.06$), not passive browsing. This suggests relational context helps interpret intentional self-promotion but cannot mitigate the distorted comparisons created by passive consumption. Third, the results bridge digital media studies with organisational behaviour literature by showing how online interactions spill over into workplace dynamics. For managers, these results suggest several actionable strategies. First, training programmes should educate employees about the psychological risks of passive social media browsing and encourage more active, engaged use. Second, organisations could implement policies limiting work-related social media use during business hours to reduce compulsive checking. Third, team-building activities that foster genuine offline connections may help contextualize online achievements, as evidenced by friendship's buffering effect. However, the findings caution against blanket social media bans, as active professional networking remains valuable when balanced with offline relationships.

5.2. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be noted. The cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences, suggesting a need for longitudinal studies tracking envy dynamics over time. The self-report measures may be subject to bias, and future research could incorporate behavioral data from social media platforms. Additionally, the sample focused on Chinese professionals, and cultural differences in envy responses warrant investigation. Future studies should also explore how different platforms (e.g., LinkedIn vs. Instagram) moderate these effects, as professional and personal contexts may elicit distinct comparison processes. This study highlights the complex interplay between digital self-presentation and workplace emotions, demonstrating that passive social media browsing poses unique risks for fostering envy. While workplace friendships can mitigate some negative effects, they cannot fully counteract the distorted comparisons created by observational use. These findings call for more nuanced organisational approaches to social media that balance

professional networking needs with employee wellbeing. By integrating digital media studies with organisational behaviour research, this work provides a foundation for understanding how online interactions increasingly shape workplace dynamics in the digital age.

6. Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence that employee self-presentation on social media significantly influences peer envy in workplace settings, with passive browsing exhibiting a stronger effect ($\beta = 0.35$) than active self-promotion ($\beta = 0.28$). The findings align with Social Comparison Theory, demonstrating that curated online achievements foster upward comparisons, particularly when consumed passively. Notably, workplace friendships serve as a partial buffer, weakening envy from active posts ($\Delta R^2 = 0.06$) but not passive browsing—a distinction that advances understanding of how relational context mitigates digital envy. These results bridge gaps between digital behavior research and organizational psychology, highlighting the nuanced emotional spillover from online interactions to workplace dynamics. For practitioners, the study underscores the need for policies that balance professional social media use with offline relationship-building. While active self-presentation remains valuable for career development, organizations should address the risks of passive browsing through training on healthy digital habits. Future research could explore cross-cultural differences or longitudinal effects, but the current findings offer a foundational framework for managing envy in increasingly digital workplaces. By integrating these insights, managers can foster environments where social media serves as a tool for connection rather than a catalyst for workplace tension.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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