

The Impact of Social Media Fatigue on Employee Silence Behavior: The Mediating Role of Knowledge Hiding and Information Avoidance Mechanisms

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Abstract: This paper explores the relationship between social media fatigue and employee silence behavior, with knowledge hiding and information avoidance as mediating variables. A total of 412 valid questionnaires were collected through a survey. The results indicate that social media fatigue has a positive and significant impact on knowledge hiding and information avoidance. Knowledge hiding and information avoidance partially mediate the relationship between social media fatigue and silence behavior. With the emergence of excessive use of social media in the workplace, it can lead to negative employee behaviors. Therefore, while emphasizing the convenience of social media, enterprises should pay more attention to controlling the scope and intensity of usage to avoid the negative effects of knowledge hiding, information avoidance, and silence behavior.

Keywords: Social media fatigue, Silence behavior, Information avoidance, Knowledge hiding

1. Introduction

Enterprises widely use social media, expecting to obtain broader information and knowledge sharing to generate more efficient and economical solutions. However, the excessive use of social media has led to negative effects such as fatigue, mental exhaustion, aversion, and anxiety among employees, a phenomenon referred to as social media fatigue by researchers both domestically and abroad^[1]. Social media fatigue not only has negative effects on individual employees but also hinders organizational development and innovation. The internal use of social media in enterprises creates a paradoxical situation for employees. On one hand, employees gain an unimaginable amount of information, "create time" to complete work tasks, and significantly increase work efficiency. On the other hand, they fall into a state of emotional exhaustion. Researchers start from the relationship between social media fatigue and the negative behaviors it induces, hoping to find a way to solve this dilemma. This paper explores the relationship between Social media fatigue and employee silence behavior, investigates the mediating role of information avoidance and knowledge hiding, and aims to provide new research perspectives for enterprise practice and theory expansion.

2. Literature Review and Research Hypotheses

Social media fatigue is a subjective and multidimensional user experience characterized by fatigue, annoyance, disappointment, loss of interest, or a weakened need for social media use and interaction^[2], manifested by behaviors such as gradually reducing or even abandoning the use of social media^[3]. Researchers have found that factors such as information overload, social overload, privacy concerns, and fear of missing out are antecedent variables of social media fatigue^[4]. With the rapid development of information technology, research on social media fatigue is closely integrated with fields such as knowledge management, organizational innovation, and organizational behavior. Studies indicate that social media fatigue can lead to specific behaviors such as knowledge hiding^[5] and information avoidance^[6] among employees in enterprises. How do employee knowledge hiding and information avoidance impact organizations? This requires research grounded in specific contexts of management practice to obtain effective answers. For example, many employees, even when aware of certain problems and potential solutions in the operation of the enterprise, still withhold their thoughts, a behavior referred to as silence behavior^[7].

Social media is considered as a mechanism for knowledge transfer and a convenient channel for information dissemination, assisting enterprises in knowledge management and organizational innovation, ultimately leading to improved organizational performance^[8]. However, employees experiencing social media fatigue in their use of enterprise social media may lead to knowledge hiding and information avoidance, ultimately manifesting as silence behavior, which can have negative implications for organizational dynamics. Therefore, this paper defines social media fatigue as the independent variable, silence behavior as the dependent variable, and knowledge hiding and information avoidance as the mediating variables. A model is constructed (Figure 1) to explore the interactions among these factors, aiming to draw relevant conclusions and provide improvement suggestions for mitigating negative emotions and behaviors among employees in enterprise social media applications.

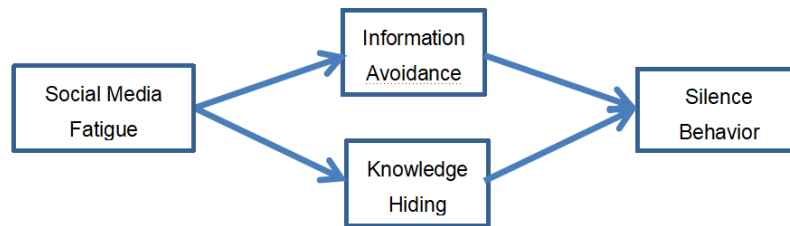


Figure 1: Research Model

Social media fatigue triggers negative emotions and behaviors among employees. In this context, employees become more concerned about the risks associated with knowledge sharing on enterprise social media, fearing the potential loss of their unique competitive advantage. To maintain psychological ownership of knowledge, employees choose knowledge hiding, which refers to intentional withholding, concealing, and refusing to provide knowledge requests from others within the enterprise^[9]. Employees experiencing social media fatigue will gradually reduce or even abandon the use of enterprise social media platforms, thereby decreasing productivity and creative behavior. Knowledge hiding is considered a counterproductive behavior in knowledge management, posing significant barriers to organizational development and innovation^[10]. Therefore, this paper posits the first hypothesis:

H1: Social media fatigue has a significant positive effect on knowledge hiding within the enterprise.

Information avoidance refers to the behavior of ignoring, refusing, avoiding, or delaying the acquisition of available information. It is contrasted with information seeking and acquisition; individuals may search for information due to uncertainty, while they may avoid information due to uncertainty to reduce cognitive dissonance and behavioral conflicts^[11]. Information avoidance is a consciously chosen behavior by individuals, who tend to select information that aligns with their own knowledge and viewpoints, while avoiding exposure to conflicting or contradictory information^[12]. The information avoidance behavior of social media users is influenced by their cognition, emotions, interests, attitudes, and other factors^[13]. Social media fatigue, as a negative experiential emotion for users, leads to behaviors such as withdrawal or reduced use of social media platforms, which in turn result in individuals' information avoidance behavior on social media platforms. Therefore, this paper posits the second hypothesis:

H2: Social media fatigue has a significant positive effect on information avoidance within the enterprise.

Silence behavior is a negative behavior at the individual level, referring to when employees, after rational consideration, choose to retain their own views and evaluations of organizational aspects in behavior, cognition, or emotion when they have the ability to improve current organizational performance^[14]. When employees face external pressures, they may choose defensive strategies to protect remaining resources, and maintaining silence is a natural and safe way for them to protect and preserve these remaining resources^[15]. Silence behavior is a conscious choice made by employees, and on enterprise social media platforms, it involves reducing the proactiveness of knowledge sharing by avoiding information that conflicts with their own views. For example, employees engage in knowledge hiding behaviors such as lurking, avoiding, tolerating, and staying silent on social media platforms^[16]. Therefore, silence behavior exhibits characteristics of both information avoidance and knowledge hiding behaviors. However, studying the impact of employees' information avoidance and knowledge hiding on their silence behavior can help further elucidate the triggering mechanisms of

silence behavior. Therefore, this paper proposes the third and fourth hypotheses:

H3: Information avoidance on enterprise social media platforms has a significant positive effect on silence behavior within the enterprise.

H4: Knowledge hiding on enterprise social media platforms has a significant positive effect on silence behavior within the enterprise.

Against the backdrop of increasing dependence on information technology, the emergence of fatigue on enterprise social media platforms will diminish employees' organizational autonomy and emotional commitment, ultimately leading to silence behavior as a form of self-protection^[17]. Social media fatigue directly or indirectly influences employees' silence behavior, with the indirect effect manifesting transitional emotions or behaviors, such as selectively filtering information on enterprise social media platforms, known as information avoidance. Meanwhile, the motivation behind employee silence stems from the psychological need to maintain individual organizational status and safeguard personal resources in an uncontrollable external environment, namely, knowledge hiding^[18]. These intermediary behaviors form a series linking social media fatigue and silence behavior. Therefore, this paper posits the fifth and sixth hypotheses:

H5: Information avoidance mediates the relationship between social media fatigue and silence behavior within the enterprise.

H6: Knowledge hiding mediates the relationship between social media fatigue and silence behavior within the enterprise.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Sample Selection

This paper conducts a survey on employees from relevant organizations in the Guangdong region. Based on authoritative literature on individual factors of employees, gender, age, education level, years of work experience, and nature of the enterprise are selected as five questions to obtain basic information about the survey subjects. The questionnaire was distributed online, reaching a wide and large sample range, ensuring a certain level of representativeness among the surveyed population. After two months of distribution, 412 valid questionnaires were collected, and the sample information is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Data Description

Category	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	207	50.2
	Female	205	49.8
Education level	High school and below	62	15.0
	College degree	78	18.9
	Bachelor's degree	235	57.0
	Master's degree	37	9.0
Age group	18-25 years old	27	6.6
	26-35 years old	190	46.1
	36-45 years old	98	23.8
	46-55 years old	62	15.0
	56 years old and above	35	8.5
Years of work experience	Less than 5 years	48	11.7
	5-8 years	140	34.0
	9-15 years	91	22.1
	16-25 years	77	18.7
	More than 25 years	56	13.6
Nature of enterprise	Public institution	48	11.7
	State-owned enterprise	140	34.0
	Foreign-funded joint venture	77	18.7
	Private enterprise	91	22.1
	Other	56	13.6

3.2. Questionnaire Item Reliability

3.2.1. Measurement of Social Media Fatigue

The mature scale for social media fatigue developed by Zhang et al. (2016) was employed, consisting of five items, to measure employees' sense of social media fatigue based on aspects such as interest, fatigue, boredom, stress, and concern regarding the use of enterprise social media^[19]. The scale utilizes a Likert 5-point format, ranging from 1 to 5 to indicate the degree of agreement from "completely disagree" to "completely agree". Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 20.0 software. The results indicated a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.798 for the scale of social media fatigue.

3.2.2. Measurement of Knowledge Hiding

The scale developed by Connelly et al. (2012) was utilized, from which three items were selected. The scale adopts a Likert 5-point format, ranging from 1 to 5 to indicate the degree of disagreement to agreement, with higher scores indicating a stronger tendency for knowledge hiding^[20]. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 20.0 software, revealing a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.811 for knowledge hiding.

3.2.3. Measurement of Information Avoidance

The scale developed by Li (2018) was employed, consisting of three items. The scale utilizes a Likert 5-point format, ranging from 1 to 5 to indicate the degree of non-alignment to alignment, with higher scores reflecting a stronger tendency for information avoidance^[21]. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 20.0 software, revealing a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.825 for information avoidance tendency.

3.2.4. Measurement of Silence Behavior

The scale developed by Tangirala et al. (2008) was utilized, from which five items were selected. The scale adopts a Likert 5-point format, ranging from 1 to 5 to indicate the degree of disagreement to agreement, with higher scores indicating a higher tendency for silence^[22]. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 20.0 software, revealing a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.826 for the tendency for silence.

Reliability analysis of the 16-item scale encompassing Social media fatigue, knowledge hiding, information avoidance, and silence behavior yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.869. A coefficient greater than 0.7 indicates good reliability of the questionnaire, providing a strong foundation for subsequent hypothesis validation analysis.

4. Research Results

4.1. Correlation Analysis

The specific results of the correlation analysis for Social media fatigue, knowledge hiding, information avoidance, and silence behavior are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Results of Correlation Analysis

	Social media fatigue	Knowledge hiding	Information avoidance	Silence behavior
Social media fatigue	1			
Knowledge hiding	.463**	1		
Information avoidance	.333**	.283**	1	
Silence behavior	.376**	.336**	.419**	1

** . Significantly correlated at the .01 level (two-tailed).

The results in Table 2 indicate that the correlation coefficients between social media fatigue and knowledge hiding, and between social media fatigue and information avoidance, are 0.463 and 0.333, respectively, both significant at the 0.01 level. This suggests a positive correlation between Social media fatigue and both knowledge hiding and information avoidance, validating hypotheses 1 and 2. The correlation coefficient between knowledge hiding and silence behavior is 0.336, and between information avoidance and silence behavior is 0.419, both significant at the 0.01 level. This indicates a positive correlation between knowledge hiding and silence behavior, as well as between information avoidance and silence behavior, validating hypotheses 3 and 4.

4.2. Mediation Analysis

Through the regression analysis of social media burnout, knowledge hiding, and information avoidance, the results presented in Table 3-1 and Table 3-2 were obtained. The significance between social media burnout and knowledge hiding is less than 0.01, and the significance between social media burnout and information avoidance is also less than 0.01. Both have passed the significance level test.

Table 3-1: Regression Analysis of Social Media Fatigue and Knowledge Hiding

Model	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Standard error			
(Intercept)	1.859	.201		9.262	.000
Social media fatigue	.526	.050	.463	10.578	.000

a. Dependent variable: Knowledge hiding

Table 3-2: Regression Analysis of Social Media Fatigue and Information Avoidance

Model	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Standard error			
(Intercept)	2.425	.215		11.286	.000
Social media fatigue	.380	.053	.333	7.152	.000

a. Dependent variable: Information avoidance

Regression analysis was conducted with social media fatigue as the independent variable, knowledge hiding and information avoidance as the mediating variables, and silence behavior as the dependent variable. The results are presented in Tables 4-1 and 4-2.

Table 4-1: Mediation Analysis for Knowledge Hiding

Model	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Standard error				
1	(Intercept)	2.332	.198		11.758	.000
	Social media fatigue	.403	.049	.376	8.214	.000
2	(Intercept)	1.970	.214		9.204	.000
	Social media fatigue	.301	.054	.281	5.537	.000
	Knowledge hiding	.194	.048	.206	4.059	.000

a. Dependent variable: Silence behavior

Table 4-2: Mediation Analysis for Information Avoidance

Model	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Standard error				
1	(Intercept)	2.332	.198		11.758	.000
	Social media fatigue	.403	.049	.376	8.214	.000
2	(Intercept)	1.578	.214		7.374	.000
	Social media fatigue	.285	.049	.266	5.807	.000
	Information avoidance	.311	.043	.331	7.229	.000

a. Dependent variable: Silence behavior

The results in Tables 4-1 and 4-2 indicate a significant relationship between social media fatigue and silence behavior, with a coefficient of 0.403. In Model 2 of Table 4-1, the coefficient of social media fatigue decreases to 0.301, and the relationship between knowledge hiding and silence behavior is significant, suggesting that knowledge hiding plays a partial mediating role. In Model 2 of Table 4-2, the coefficient of social media fatigue decreases to 0.285, and the relationship between information avoidance and silence behavior is significant, indicating that information avoidance plays a partial mediating role. Thus, hypotheses 5 and 6 of this study are validated.

5. Discussion of Results and Future Research Directions

This study investigates the relationship between employees' use of enterprise social media platforms, with knowledge hiding and information avoidance as mediating variables, and silence behavior. The following conclusions are drawn: Firstly, the stronger the employees' Social media fatigue, the more it reinforces their tendencies towards knowledge hiding and information avoidance. Secondly, employees' Social media fatigue leads to knowledge hiding, thereby increasing their inclination towards silence behavior. Thirdly, employees' social media fatigue leads to information avoidance, which further exacerbates their tendency towards silence behavior. Finally, the excessive use of enterprise social media platforms in the workplace can lead to various negative behaviors among employees.

Social media fatigue triggers various negative behaviors among employees, which not only fails to leverage social media for competitive advantage and internal collaboration but also decreases work efficiency. Therefore, companies should control the intensity of social media platform usage in the workplace to prevent employees from overloading on social media platforms and experiencing fatigue, mental depletion, and other negative emotions. This study used a questionnaire survey to obtain cross-sectional data, which cannot predict contextual changes over time. Furthermore, further research is needed to determine the threshold at which social media usage is considered excessive and significantly triggers negative behaviors among employees. Lastly, there are differences in social media needs among different companies and job positions, which should be effectively distinguished.

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