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Abstract

With the advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, significant use of social network services (SNSs) for career-related purposes has begun to emerge. However, relatively few studies have explored the adverse effects of networking on SNSs, and the existing literature has overlooked its potential consequences. Drawing on upward social comparison theory, this study investigates how networking on SNS affects career satisfaction through an upward social comparison mechanism leading to ego depletion. To achieve this, we carried out two studies. In Study 1, the hypotheses were tested using a sample of 408 workers. The results indicated that networking on SNS is negatively related to career satisfaction through a sequential mediation of upward social comparison and ego depletion. In Study 2, we examined this mechanism using a longitudinal design with a three-wave survey of 157 workers, replicating and confirming the findings of Study 1. Both studies demonstrated the process through which networking on SNSs might produce adverse effects on career satisfaction. These findings offer guidance for career counselors, training and development professionals, and managers who want to limit the negative side of networking on SNSs. Different implications for theory and practice are discussed.

Keywords: upward social comparison, networking, career satisfaction, social networking sites, ego depletion, longitudinal

The Negative Consequences of Networking through Social Network Services: A Social Comparison Perspective

Social networking sites (SNSs) are Web 2.0 technology-based applications that facilitate the sharing of information, user-created content, and collaboration among people (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Nowadays, some of the most widely used SNSs are LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter (now known as "X"; Musetti et al., 2022). The rapid technological development of internet-connected mobile devices has allowed the integration of SNS technologies in different spheres of people's lives, including the world of work and organizations (Bazine et al., 2020). These technologies have become a very popular digital social-exchange tool that has revolutionized how people develop their careers (Johnson & Leo, 2020), creating both opportunities and challenges in the digital age.

Most career development studies have examined the positive aspects of SNS technologies, particularly the benefits of using SNS for career-related outcomes (e.g., career sponsorship, job search assistance; Davis et al., 2020) and the conditions (e.g., connectivity, flexibility to access content) that can unlock SNS benefits for career development (Utz & Breier, 2019). For instance, SNS use can potentially improve employees' career outcomes through increased social connectedness, enhanced knowledge sharing, and career-related competencies (e.g., networking ability, planning; Healy et al., 2023). Nevertheless, these same SNS technologies have the potential to negatively impact career development, which is why some career development and organizational scholars have described the importance of uncovering the negative sides of SNSs (Baccarella et al., 2018; Sands et al., 2020; Sun et al., 2021). For example, the information-sharing functions of SNSs might accentuate individuals' conscious or unconscious attempts to influence others' perceptions (i.e., impression management) of highly positive aspects of their personal or professional lives (Jang et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2020). As a

result, active SNS users are more likely than non-active users to perceive that others have better or more successful professional lives, which may be perceived as unfair (Jang et al., 2016).

Considering the knowledge- and information-sharing capacity of SNS, such as the ease of starting a conversation with unknown individuals or obtaining a large amount of information about the career advancements of colleagues, SNSs have become ideal settings for career development purposes (Pena et al., 2022). According to McFarland and Ployhart (2015), SNSs should be treated as an online and digital environment. Therefore, examining the underlying social comparison processes is necessary to understand how these SNS technologies impact personal beliefs, which can in turn impact many other career development outcomes (e.g., career satisfaction, perceived employability). More specifically, the upwardly social comparison-oriented nature of people (i.e., comparison with others perceived as "superior" or more skilled or successful in a specific work- or career-related domain) may exacerbate the negative effects of the underlying social comparison mechanisms in SNS environments (Latif et al., 2021).

Previous studies have highlighted that upward social comparison via SNSs can lead to undesirable outcomes, such as triggering jealousy and depression, reducing individual happiness, and causing negative gossip behaviors (Johnson & Knobloch-Westermick, 2014). SNSs have become a popular and useful environment for promoting people's careers in many ways, with networking being one of the career development strategies that has been affected by the rapid development of SNSs (Davis et al., 2020). Despite the positive side of networking via SNS, many researchers have reported the negative sides of networking via SNSs (Baccarella et al., 2018; Huang & Fan, 2022; Sands et al., 2020). Exploring the undesirable or negative sides of using SNSs has thus become an important issue since SNSs are now an essential tool for promoting career development (Johnson & Leo, 2020). However, this topic has received insufficient attention in the literature.

To address this issue, and based on social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954; Vogel et al., 2015), the present work seeks to uncover the negative effects of networking via SNS platforms on career satisfaction. Two survey studies (Study 1: cross-sectional; Study 2: longitudinal) were carried out to examine whether networking via SNS is related to career satisfaction through a social cognitive mechanism involving an indirect relationship with upward social comparison and ego depletion. This study aims to test a model that examines how networking via SNS can lead to negative personal (e.g., ego depletion) and career-related outcomes (e.g., career satisfaction) through upward social comparison.

The present work contributes to the growing literature on professional development in the digital age in at least three ways. First, while previous studies have mainly investigated the positive side of networking on SNS (Davis et al., 2020; Utz & Breuer, 2019), this study provides empirical evidence of the potential negative sides of networking on SNS by using the upward social comparison perspective. Second, building on social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), this study contributes to understanding how networking on SNSs can be detrimental through a depleting experience exacerbated by upward social comparison. Our research contributes to explaining the mixed results of networking on SNSs in the literature (Davis et al., 2020; Moqbel & Kock, 2018) by shedding light on the process underlying and leading to negative results for career development. Third, we extend our understanding of the negative consequences of networking on SNSs by showing that it can also lead to a devaluation of perceived career achievements through a decrease in career satisfaction via upward social comparison and ego depletion. Fourth, this research provides new insights into how ego depletion, activated through social comparison, could negatively impact people’s attitudes toward their own career advancements.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) posits that people develop their own personal and social worth by comparing themselves to others. Social comparisons can be divided into (1) parallel comparisons (with persons who are like us), (2) downward comparisons (with persons who are inferior to us), and (3) upward comparisons (with persons who are perceived as better than us; Wheeler, 2000). Social comparisons in different directions have different effects on different individuals (Festinger, 1954). For instance, when faced with upward comparison, people can experience negative emotions that affect their mental health, which can lead to depression (Appel et al., 2015). Some individuals may experience envy (Reh et al., 2018) and anxiety (Shaw et al., 2015), and then react defensively, such as by engaging in deviant job search behavior (Dineen et al., 2017). Although much of the literature on upward social comparison has focused on negative aspects, it is important to note that upward social comparison can also produce positive effects. Recent studies have underlined that upward social comparison might produce positive effects through a motivational process (Meier & Johnson, 2021; Meier & Schäfer, 2018). Inspiration induced by individuals that appear superior to us and assimilation processes are two main mechanisms through which positive outcomes are elicited, such as self-improvement and career advancement (Meier et al., 2020).

Activating the Social Comparison Mechanism in the Digital Age: The Relationship between Networking via SNS and Upward Social Comparison

Networking is defined as a set of behaviors aimed at building, maintaining, and using informal relationships for the benefit of facilitating career advancement (Wolff & Moser, 2009). Research has found that networking is positively related to many career outcomes, including job search success (Van Hoye et al., 2009; Wolff & Moser, 2010), number of promotions (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Spurk et al., 2019; Wolff & Moser, 2010), job performance (Blickle et al., 2012), salary level (Blickle et al., 2012), and rate of salary growth over time (Wolff & Moser,

2009). Networking has received considerable attention in the career literature (Gibson et al., 2014; Porter & Woo, 2015), but so far, research on networking on SNS remains limited, and even less is known about its potential adverse outcomes (Baumann & Utz, 2021; Utz & Breier, 2019). Networking on SNS can be defined as a series of goal-directed interpersonal interactions that build and maintain professional relationships and include the exchange of work- and career-benefiting resources through the use of SNSs. Networking on SNS differs from face-to-face networking in many respects, including the following: (a) the nature of SNS platforms allows for extended reach and accessibility, which represents scalability of networking opportunities (Boyd & Ellison, 2008); (b) online communication allows for delayed responses (Treem & Leonardi, 2012); (c) information and interactions are content-based (Davis et al., 2020); and (d) established relationships are associated with weak ties (Zhang & Leung, 2015).

Social media activities can be separated into two categories: active and passive. Active use refers to activities that facilitate direct exchanges with others (e.g., status updates, commenting on publications, direct interaction), while passive use can be defined as observing information without direct exchanges (e.g., browsing activity feeds, browsing publications, offline messages without live interaction). Networking on SNS is therefore considered an active use of SNSs, but it also involves elements of passive SNS use, such as browsing profiles and scrolling and reading posts from contacts. As demonstrated by Danias-Uraga (2022), in a digital context, no clear separation exists between active and passive use, and these two forms of SNS use are intertwined. In summary, networking on SNS consists of a set of behaviors that are considered to be a mix of active and passive use of SNS, with the aim of building and maintaining professional relationships, gathering information, or obtaining support to facilitate career advancement.

Preliminary studies on networking on SNS have demonstrated its potential career benefits (Davis et al., 2020; Pena et al., 2022) and have reported that networking on SNS is related to a number of positive career outcomes (Utz & Breuer, 2016). However, little is known about the potential negative effects of networking on SNS. The literature on face-to-face networking has already demonstrated its potential negative outcomes (e.g., drain process, exhaustion, impression management; Wingender & Wolff, 2023), and a large body of empirical evidence has demonstrated a number of negative outcomes (e.g., reduced self-esteem and well-being) that SNS use in general can produce (Saiphoo et al., 2020). According to multiple studies (Verdyn et al., 2020; Verdyn et al., 2021), SNS use can lead to several negative outcomes through upward social comparison. Individuals have an inherent tendency to evaluate their abilities and opinions by comparing themselves with others, a social cognitive mechanism known as social comparison (Wood, 1996). As well as allowing users to maintain friendships, form new relationships, and connect with others (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Manago et al., 2012), SNSs allow people to construct their own personal profiles and share extensive career information about themselves (e.g., achievements, promotions, professional activities; Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Because of this wealth of information, we can learn a lot about others, and there is an extensive network of people from whom we can learn (Huang, 2017). SNSs therefore provide an ideal platform for social comparison to occur. It appears that people are interested in learning about others on SNSs, as most networking activities consist of browsing others' profiles without initiating social interaction (Pempek et al., 2009). People use SNSs for the purpose of making social comparisons, especially when viewing others' posts and photos (Lee, 2014).

In light of this, we posit that networking on SNSs enhances upward social comparison in the SNS environment. Social comparison can be defined as the process in which individuals compare their abilities, opinions, and career advancement with others who are perceived as better

than themselves by browsing the information disclosed by others during online communication and interaction (Yang & Robinson, 2018). Social comparison on SNSs differs from social comparison in face-to-face interactions and can be seen as an extension of social comparison in traditional settings (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). Therefore, we formulated the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Networking on SNSs is positively related to upward social comparison.

Draining Personal Energy and Resources in the Digital Age: The Relationship between Upward Social Comparison and Ego-Depletion

Ego depletion can be defined as a temporary decrease in individuals' psychological resources or energy for participating in volitional activities due to volitional efforts in previous activities (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). According to the self-control resource model (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000), psychological resources are limited and vulnerable to becoming depleted over time (just as a muscle becomes tired after a period of exertion). When people engage in an act of self-control, their capacity to exercise further self-control becomes exhausted over time, leading to decreased performance in subsequent acts of self-control (Haggar et al., 2010). Consequently, the consumption of mental resources in previous volitional activities causes ego depletion (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). The process of upward social comparison consumes mental resources, which may be because it produces negative cognitions and emotions (e.g., feelings of failure, inferiority, and jealousy; Huang & Fan, 2022) that require energy to manage. If a person cannot control these negative cognitions, adverse behaviors, and harmful emotions, they may be affected by ego depletion, that is, a loss of energy and willpower (Johnson & Leo, 2020). Importantly, each person has a limited pool of resources to engage in self-regulation, and this pool is depleted whenever they use resources to self-regulate (Baumeister et al., 1998). Ego

depletion is the state of having diminished resources following the exertion of self-regulation and can be thought of as similar to mental fatigue (Baumeister et al., 2007).

In addition to self-control, ego depletion may also involve other volitional activities, such as impression management, self-expression, overcoming impulses, and managing emotions (Carlson et al., 2011). These activities often require employees to regulate their emotions and behaviors, which involves the consumption of psychological resources (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). On SNS platforms, people are continuously exposed to information about primarily positive news (e.g., promotions, new projects, new jobs, recognitions at work) about the careers of friends, colleagues, and people close to them, activating the social comparison process. This likely requires them to regulate their energy and emotions not only to analyze or justify the upward social comparison but also to envision or adopt the necessary career development strategies for themselves. In this way, the social comparison mechanism may cause a drain on personal energies and resources that affects not only their behavior (e.g., proactive career strategies) but also their attitudes (e.g., career satisfaction). Therefore, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 2: Upward social comparison is positively related to ego depletion.

Less Career-Related Enjoyment in the Digital Age: The Relationship between Ego Depletion and Career Satisfaction

The ego depletion model posits that people need to prioritize and spend energy not only to allocate the necessary resources to deal with problems but also to understand and regulate their behaviors and emotions in relation to the challenging situation (Hagger et al., 2010). For instance, Schwartz (2004) showed that being faced with extensive information or options can be exhausting and confusing, and therefore have a negative impact on a person’s vitality and ability to exercise self-control. According to Ryan and Deci (2008), vitality refers to the energy that

people have available in a specific context, and their satisfaction in this context depends on their vitality or the perceived available energy they have for dealing with it. Therefore, a drainage of energy or resources related to a situation or problem is negatively related to well-being or personal satisfaction, particularly in that specific personal or professional sphere.

With regard to career-related enjoyment, people with high levels of ego depletion show low levels of well-being or satisfaction with their careers (Ryan & Deci, 2008). For example, taking the use of SNS platforms as a reference, having fewer personal resources may negatively affect the extent to which we enjoy or are satisfied with the development of our career. Thus, the following hypothesis was formulated:

Hypothesis 3: Ego depletion is negatively related to career satisfaction.

Uncovering the Negative Side of Networking via SNS: The Relationship between Networking on SNS and Career Satisfaction through Upward Social Comparison and Ego Depletion

Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) posits that people continuously evaluate their worth by comparing themselves with others in their social environment. In the digital era, SNSs have the potential to create a psychosocial environment that provides new career opportunities (e.g., finding new jobs, developing new professional networks) but also creates new forms of social comparisons.

Networking on SNS is a draining process that may affect ego depletion through upward social comparison. It is highly self-directed and requires users to devote resources to organizing an unstructured and unclear process (Forret, 2018). In addition, individuals must manage how often they network, and networking requires an investment of resources, such as time, effort, and energy. Networking on SNS requires different resources from networking in face-to-face interactions, and individuals must invest these resources to manage negative emotions induced by

upward social comparison (e.g., feelings of failure, feeling inferior to others, jealousy; Huang & Fan, 2022). The more frequently an individual engages in networking on SNS, the more likely it is that they will experience ego depletion because they consume many resources to counteract the negative effects of upward social comparison. Therefore, we proposed the following:

Hypothesis 4: SNS networking on SNS is positively related to ego depletion through upward social comparison.

People compare themselves with others to determine whether their careers are successful (Heslin, 2003). Upward social comparisons on SNSs may cause individuals to become dissatisfied when "there is a discrepancy between the outcome they want and what they receive" and "they see that a comparison other has more than they do" (Sweeney et al., 1990, p. 423). On SNSs, individuals' self-presentation is usually more highly controlled and is likely to be more strategic (Liu et al., 2019), presenting only achievements in their careers to convey a "perfect image" to others (Schmuck et al., 2019). Therefore, in the social media environment, it is easier for upward social comparisons to be activated than downward or parallel social comparisons. The contrast revealed by upward comparisons may therefore reduce a user's sense of accomplishment and self- efficacy (Greenberg et al., 2007).

Many studies have shown that individuals who compare themselves to referents who perform better (Gerber et al., 2018) and earn more (Sweeney et al., 1990) tend to feel deprived and dissatisfied. This may be because the process of upward social comparison consumes their psychological resources and they have more difficulty regulating their behaviors and emotions. These individuals tend to have diminished perceptions of their own success because they have diminished resources available for self-regulation. Upward social comparisons on SNSs can reduce their sense of accomplishment; thus, the following hypothesis was formulated:

Hypothesis 5: Networking on SNS is negatively related to career satisfaction through upward social comparison and ego depletion.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Overview of Studies

Two studies were conducted to explore the hypothesized research model. The purpose of Study 1 (cross-sectional) was to assess the relationship between networking on SNS and career satisfaction through upward social comparison and ego depletion, while Study 2 (longitudinal) was carried out to examine and deepen the understanding of the underlying mechanisms of our theoretical model. We used structural equation modeling (SEM) to test our hypotheses. After finding significant results in line with our hypotheses for Study 1 (January 2023), Study 2 (April/May 2023) sought to replicate these results with a three-wave longitudinal study that addressed the methodological weaknesses of the first study. The studies complement each other and fulfill calls to extend the robustness of the findings through replication and an examination of the underlying psychological processes (Corley & Schinoff, 2017).

Study 1

Method

Sample and Procedure

A sample of 408 French workers from different settings was recruited using LinkedIn's social network. Participation in this study was voluntary and anonymous, no incentives were offered, and all participants gave their informed consent before completing the online survey. This research did not include procedures that could harm participants' psychological or social well-being, in line with the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association). In addition, it

followed the recommendations of the ethical principles of the National Data Protection Authority (CNIL in French): the data were hosted on a secure online platform (Limesurvey), and information was kept confidential and used only by the authors. Of the participants, 216 (52.94%) identified as women and 192 (47.06%) as men, with an average age of 31.8 years (*SD* = 9.81). Participants came from professional backgrounds in STEM (273; 66.9%), human sciences (87; 21.3%), and medical sciences (48; 11.8%); 260 had master's degrees (63.7%), 74 had doctorate degrees (18.1%), and the rest had bachelor's degrees (18.2%).

Measures

All measures were originally developed in English, except for networking on SNS's "motivation to learn," which was initially created and validated in French. Measures in English were translated into French using Brislin's (1980) back-translation procedure. Responses were all rated using a five-point agreement ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Totally).

Networking on SNS (NETS) was measured using Bazine and Fréour's (2024) four-item scale. A sample item for this scale is: "I am building, via social media or internet, a network of contacts or friendships to provide me with help or advice that will further my work chances" (Cronbach's alpha was .85).

Upward comparison on SNS (COM) was measured using Huang and Fan's (2022) six-item scale. A sample item for this scale is: "On social media, I often compare myself with people who have a better career than me" (Cronbach's alpha was .95).

Career satisfaction (CS) was measured using Greenhaus et al.'s (1990) five-item scale. A sample item for this scale is: "I am satisfied with the achievements that I have obtained during my career" (Cronbach's alpha was .91).

Ego depletion (EG) was measured using Lin and Johnson's (2015) five-item scale. A sample item for this scale is: "I feel my willpower is gone" (Cronbach's alpha was .90).

Control Variables

Demographic variables included age, sex, and education level, given that these variables may be associated with the different variables of this study (Huang & Fan, 2022).

Analytical Strategy

Descriptive statistics, internal consistency, bivariate analyzes, and variance analyses were performed using SPSS version 25 and Jamovi. Structural equation modeling analyses were conducted on Mplus 8.4 (Muthen & Muthen, 2017) using the maximum likelihood robust estimator (MLM).

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Variance Comparison

Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations among all the variables used in the current study. Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega were used to examine internal consistencies (Dunn et al., 2014).

Table 1 about here

Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using the MLM estimator was performed in Mplus 8.4 (Muthen & Muthen, 2017) to examine the theorized four-factor structure. Results from the CFA indicated that all items loaded significantly on their corresponding latent variables ($p <$ .001). The CFA model yielded a good fit to the data: χ^2/df = 3.15, RMSEA = .07, CFI = .94, TLI = .93 and SRMR = .04. Given the recommendations of Hu and Bentler (1998), the current fit indices were considered acceptable with regard to the RMSEA and SRMR values. The CFI and

TLI indices were also considered acceptable, with a value greater than or equal to .90 (Brown, 2015). The Satorra–Bentler method (Pavlov et al., 2020; Satorra & Bentler, 2001) was used to test the robustness of our model, with the results shown in Table 2. The theorized model outperformed simpler models obtained by merging two or more factors (Table 2).

Table 2 about here

Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesized structural model based on our hypotheses was examined using Mplus 8.4 (Muthen & Muthen, 2017). This model fit the data well: χ^2/df = 3.19, RMSEA = .07, CFI = .94, TLI = .93, and SRMR = .06.

Hypothesis 1 stated that networking on SNSs would be positively related to upward social comparison. A significant positive effect was found between networking on SNS and upward social comparison (β = .29, $p < .001$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported. Hypothesis 2 posited that upward social comparison would be positively related to ego depletion. A significant positive effect was found between upward social comparison and ego depletion (β = .26, $p < .001$), thus supporting Hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 3 stated that the pathway between networking on SNS and ego depletion would be mediated by upward social comparison. An indirect effect was found (β = .07, $p < .01$, 95% CI [.04, .11]), thus supporting Hypothesis 3. Hypothesis 4 posited that ego depletion would be negatively related to career satisfaction. A positive effect was found (β = .39, $p < .01$), thus supporting Hypothesis 4. Hypothesis 5 posited a mediating pathway between networking on SNS and career satisfaction through upward social comparison and ego depletion. An indirect effect was found (β = −.03, $p < .01$, 95% CI [−.04, −.02]), thus supporting Hypothesis 5. According to Igartua and Hayes' recommendations (2021), a bootstrapping

technique was performed to analyze the mediation effects using resampling (N = 10,000) and the percentile method to create 95% confidence intervals. In the percentile method, the sample estimates are ordered from lowest to highest, with the upper and lower 2.5% of the bootstrap distribution used to create the 95% confidence interval.

Study 2

Method

Study 2 sought to replicate the results of Study 1 using a three-wave sampling procedure, and we applied structural equation modeling. Our initial sample at T1 was composed of 157 individuals, of whom 91 responded at T2 and 96 responded at T3. Full information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation was performed, which allowed for use of the full sample (N = 157) for data analysis. We applied FIML because it was deemed the best option available for dealing with missing data. Other approaches, such as listwise or pairwise deletion, require stricter assumptions of missing completely at random (MCAR) and have been demonstrated to result in less trustworthy parameter estimates than listwise or pairwise deletion (Enders & Bandalos, 2001; Little & Rubin, 2019).

The time lag between each measurement point was two weeks. As stated by Griep et al. (2021), choosing the optimal time lag is always a difficult issue and should be guided by theory or empirical evidence. Within the career literature, to the best of our knowledge, theoretical works have not postulated an ideal time lag. However, the process of comparison and networking is considered a dynamic process with short-term effects (Aubry et al., 2024; Johnson & Leo, 2020; Wanberg et al., 2012). In light of this, we postulated that a time lag of one week for each interval would fit our hypotheses. As with Study 1, participation was voluntary and anonymous, no incentives were offered, and all participants gave their informed consent before completing the online survey. This research did not include procedures that could harm participants'

psychological or social well-being, in line with the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association). It also followed the recommendations of the ethical principles of the National Data Protection Authority (CNIL): the data were hosted on a secure online platform (Limesurvey), and it was confidential and used only by the authors. All participants gave their informed consent before completing the online survey, which explained their anonymity, their rights, and the aims of this study. In this sample, the majority were female (55.41%), and the average age was 33.4 years (*SD* = 11.13). Participants came from professional backgrounds in STEM (110; 70.06%), human sciences (29; 18.47%), and medical sciences (18; 11.46%); 91 (57.96%) had a master's degree, 35 (22.29%) had a doctorate degree, and the rest had a bachelor's degree (19.75%).

All measures were the same as in Study 1: n*etworking on SNS* (*NETS;* Cronbach's alpha was .85), *upward comparison on SNS* (*COM;* Cronbach's alpha was .94), *career satisfaction* (*CS;* Cronbach's alpha was .85), and e*go depletion* (*EG;* Cronbach's alpha was .91). In the present study, networking on SNS was only measured at Time 1, upward social comparison on SNS was only measured at Time 2, and ego depletion and career satisfaction were only measured at Time 3. We collected demographic data at each time point.

Results

For this study, we used the same data analytic strategy used in Study 1. Table 3 shows the means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations among all the variables used in the current study. Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega were used to examine internal consistencies.

Table 3 about here

Measurement Model

As in Study 1, we carried out a CFA using the MLM estimator with Mplus 8.4 (Muthen & Muthen, 2017) to examine the theorized four-factor structure. Results from the CFA indicated that all items loaded significantly on their corresponding latent variables ($p < .001$). The CFA model yielded an acceptable fit to the data: $\chi^2/df = 3.15$, RMSEA = .08, CFI = .91, TLI = .90 and SRMR = .07. Given the recommendations of Hu and Bentler (1998), the current fit indices were considered acceptable with regard to the RMSEA and SRMR values. The CFI and TLI indices were also considered acceptable, with values greater than or equal to .90 (Brown, 2015). The Satorra–Bentler method (Pavlov et al., 2020; Satorra & Bentler, 2001) was used to test the robustness of our model, with the results shown in Table 4. The theorized model outperformed simpler models obtained by merging two or more factors (Table 4).

Hypothesis Testing

As in Study 1, we examined the hypothesized structural model using Mplus 8.4 (Muthen & Muthen, 2017).

We tested the relationships between our variables and the mediation postulated in Study 2. First, we predicted that networking on SNS would be positively related to upward social comparison. A significant positive effect was found between networking on SNS and upward social comparison ($\beta = .25$, $p < .001$). Second, we posited that upward social comparison would be positively related to ego depletion. A significant positive relationship was found between upward social comparison and ego depletion ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$). Third, we postulated that ego depletion would be negatively related to career satisfaction. A significant negative relationship was found between ego depletion and career satisfaction ($\beta = -.25$, $p < .001$). Fourth, we predicted that there would be a mediating pathway between networking on SNS and ego depletion through upward social comparison. An indirect effect was found ($\beta = .07$, $p < .01$, 95% CI [.02, .22]). Finally, we predicted there would be a mediating pathway between networking on

SNS and career satisfaction through upward social comparison and ego depletion. An indirect effect was found (β = −.03, $p < .01$, 95% CI [−.10,−.03]), thus supporting Hypothesis 5. As with Study 1, we followed the recommendations of Igartua and Hayes (2021), and a bootstrapping technique was performed to analyze the mediation effects using resampling (N = 10,000) and the percentile method to create 95% confidence intervals.

Discussion

In the digital era, online social networking plays an important role in career development and has a number of benefits (e.g., learning, information sharing, networking over long distances; Battistelli & Bazine, 2022). However, the use of SNSs for career development purposes also has a potential dark side that needs to be explored (Baccarella et al., 2018). Drawing on social comparison theory (Wood, 1996) and networking literature (Porter & Woo, 2015), we examined the effects of networking on SNS on career satisfaction and ego depletion through upward social comparison.

Our findings demonstrate that individuals networking via SNSs are more likely to activate upward comparisons, which leads to ego depletion and affects their sense of accomplishment through a decrease in career satisfaction. To explore this mechanism in depth, we carried out a second study in which we examined the mediating role of ego depletion on career satisfaction. Using social comparison theory, this study sheds light on the processes through which SNS networking can have negative effects on personal and career-related outcomes and resources. A longitudinal design was employed to ensure the validity of the mediation process (Kline, 2015). As stated by Zapf et al. (1996), longitudinal designs are suitable for ensuring the validity of a mediation process because this model allows researchers to demonstrate that A causes B when (a) there is covariation between A and B, (b) A temporally precedes B, and (c) other plausible

explanations can be ruled out. The current research expands existing knowledge about the potential adverse side of networking on SNSs.

Theoretical Implications

First, the present study contributes to the extant SNS literature by demonstrating that the use of SNS for career development through networking strategies may also have negative outcomes through the lens of upward social comparison. Our research highlights some SNS-specific consequences of online networking, which differs from other contexts because it involves browsing profiles and scrolling and reading posts from other contacts. Some authors have emphasized that networking in face-to-face interactions is an energy-costly impression management process (Wingerder & Wolff, 2022). However, in online environments, networking is also related to the social comparison process due to the ability to see numerous profiles and extensive information about career advancements (Jang et al., 2015). In addition, on social media platforms, people can control what type of information they present, and they generally present only positive information. Our findings deepen the existing understanding of the dark side of career development strategies via online technologies and, more specifically, networking on SNSs.

Our study shows that networking on SNS can produce negative effects through upward social comparison, in line with previous studies stating that upward social comparison is deleterious for individuals. Surprisingly, the negative effects of networking on SNS have been overlooked in the literature (Zhang et al., 2024), and the studies that exist on SNS networking on SNS have primarily focused on benefits for individuals (Davis et al., 2020; Harrison & Budworth, 2015). This research fills an important gap in the literature by focusing on the negative consequences of networking on SNS in the field of career development. Although the consequences of SNSs have been studied extensively in other fields, such as education and public

health, there is a lack of research in the career development field. Our work can provide insights for career development scholars into how networking on SNSs affects individuals and through what processes. Future research is needed to verify and replicate these results and to extend our research on specific behaviors that may result from upward social comparison, such as impression management or cyberbullying.

Second, our findings deepen the existing understanding of the psychological processes related to networking via SNSs. Our data suggest that upward social comparison leads to ego depletion and reduces career satisfaction. However, upward social comparison may have positive effects through motivational processes (Meier & Johnson, 2022; Meier & Schäfer, 2018). For instance, inspiration induced by individuals who appear to be superior and assimilation processes are important mechanisms that may have positive outcomes of self-improvement and career advancement (Meier et al., 2021). Nonetheless, the current study demonstrates by which processes upward social comparison can be deleterious, adopting the theoretical perspective of the self-control resource model to examine the consequences of social comparison in social media usage. According to the self-control resource model, employees' psychological resources are limited; thus, consuming psychological resources to manage negative emotions from upward social comparison may lead to ego depletion (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). This reduces the psychological resources available, which can diminish a person's sense of accomplishment and satisfaction with their situation. This finding clarifies the underlying mechanisms of the effect of online upward social comparison on personal outcomes, providing new insights into the effects of individuals' social comparison on SNS.

Third, even though networking via SNS leads to positive career outcomes, our results underlined that networking via SNS may also produce some adverse outcomes and a sense of non-accomplishment. Our research allows us to better understand the mixed results highlighted

in the literature (Wingerder & Wolff, 2022). Previous research has underlined that networking on SNS can lead to career satisfaction (Pena et al., 2022), provide useful information, and facilitate communication and the development of networks (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Davis et al., 2020). However, our results demonstrate that networking on SNS can lead to reduced career satisfaction through the process of upward social comparison. We also found that ego depletion plays a mediating role between upward social comparison and career satisfaction. As underlined by Vogel et al. (2015), upward social comparison hurts an individual's self-image and leads to a loss of volition and subsequent depreciation of success. Our self-esteem and self-presentation are damaged by upward social comparison. The present work therefore contributes to reconciling mixed results and improving our understanding of the use of SNS for career development purposes.

Individual variables such as optimism and a preference for online social interactions (Liu & Baumeister, 2016) may also affect or moderate the relationship between upward social comparison and ego depletion. As explored in previous research, the negative effects of upward social comparison do not affect all employees equally (Huang & Fan, 2022; Wang et al., 2020). Our research provides new insights to better understand the underlying psychosocial mechanisms related to the online social comparison literature, which may inspire future researchers to examine employees' individual differences when investigating the dark side of social media use for career development purposes. Further research is needed to explore whether specific individual and contextual variables can limit or enhance the negative consequences of networking on SNS.

Practical Implications

The present study has some important practical implications. Our findings revealed the undesirable effects of networking on SNS. Career and counseling practitioners, managers, and

HR professionals need to be aware that although networking on SNSs can promote individuals' career advancement, it may also activate or amplify the disadvantages of upward social comparison for their health and sense of achievement. Furthermore, online social interaction lacks contextual cues such as body language and tone of voice, which can lead to incomplete or distorted information being received (Park & Baek, 2017), which can lead to a misinterpretation of information viewed on SNSs. Therefore, career and counseling practitioners need to guide individuals to use SNS rationally for career development purposes, to understand that a gap exists between reality and what is portrayed on SNSs, and to focus on the functionality of SNS to avoid paying excessive attention to irrelevant information.

Due to the nature of social media, impression management is common. Users are continuously exposed to information about positive news (e.g., promotions, new projects, new jobs, recognition at work) in relation to the careers of colleagues and friends (activating the social comparison process). Career counseling practitioners and managers must create strategies to alleviate individuals' ego depletion and focus on maintaining a reasonable level of networking on SNS to limit the negative effects and proactively address the negative effect of comparison with others perceived as superior. They should adopt suitable methods to help individuals maintain a reasonable level of networking on SNS and acknowledge that their competencies are different from those of others. Training initiatives on the use of SNS are needed to help managers, HR professionals, and employees develop ethical and conscious use of these types of resources for career purposes. Increasing real-life networking could also be a good alternative because real-life communication opportunities allow employees to gain comfort and pleasure from offline networking and can reduce their reliance on online interactions, thereby mitigating the negative effects of social media use on their health and sense of achievement.

Limitations

Although the current research offers some insights into networking via SNS, some limitations need to be acknowledged. First, while gathering data on a voluntary basis led to a relatively diverse range of participants, they all came from the same country, with a similar culture and background, and were all relatively well educated. In this regard, our data collection procedure may have inflated the heterogeneity of the sample and added to the random nature, which can lead to sample selection bias and self-selection bias (Heckman, 1990). For the second study, the sample was less diverse than for the first study, and the majority were well-educated people from STEM backgrounds.

Second, our measure did not specify what types of technologies and platforms the participants used. Future studies could focus on the different types of social network sites and how they promote different social exchange and comparison mechanisms. For instance, networking on LinkedIn or Twitter (now known as "X") captures different realities and might produce different results in terms of upward social comparison. Future studies could test whether the associations between upward social comparison and its consequences, as well as the underlying mechanisms, differ across social network sites. Third, we did not control for overall SNS use, which may be a hidden variable that influences upward social comparison more than networking on SNSs. Future studies should employ a measure of the overall use of SNS and disentangle the effects of networking on SNS and overall SNS use on upward social comparison.

Fourth, further research is needed to assess the dynamic aspects of networking and upward social comparison through dynamic longitudinal studies. Fourth, although organizational context and practices have been found to improve the career development of employees (Kraimer et al., 2011), the current study focused only on personal aspects. Thus, future studies need to assess the organizational context and its influence on career development through multilevel studies. Fifth, the present study provides new insights into the upward social comparison process

that mediates the effects of networking on SNS. Thus, future studies are necessary to fully understand the processes of networking on SNS and upward social comparison, particularly through the study of reciprocal effects, such as whether low career satisfaction leads to more upward social comparison and ego depletion. Future researchers might consider the dynamic of ongoing social comparison as well as the boundary conditions shaping such a dynamic.

Conclusion

Networking on social media is becoming increasingly common for career development purposes. A large amount of social comparison information on social media enables individuals to make upward social comparisons (Zhang et al., 2024), which can cause negative emotions and psychological states (Verduyn et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020), harming their perceptions of their career success. Our results show that upward social comparison on social media platforms can impair career satisfaction through increased ego depletion. The present study responds to recent calls for research on the dark sides of social media use for career development purposes and aims to inspire rational social media usage and training to reduce the potential negative impact of upward social comparison on social media platforms.

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Table 1.

Means, Standard Deviations, Coefficient Alphas and Correlations Between Variables.

Variables	Mean	*SD*	ω	1	2	3	4
1. Networking on SNS	2.40	1.04	.86	(.85)			
2. Upward comparison on SNS	1.85	1.07	.95	.25**	(.95)		
3. Ego-depletion	2.21	1.00	.90	.16	.33**	(.90)	
4. Career satisfaction	3.24	.93	.91	.05	.04	-.32**	(.91)

Note: N = 408. ** $p < .01$. Cronbach's alpha in brackets along the diagonal.

Table 2.

Model Measurement Fit Indices for Assessed the Differences between the Variables.

Model	χ^2	*df*	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	SRMR	AIC	BIC	$\Delta\chi^2$
M1	461.253	146	.07	.94	.93	.04	19165.278	19417.678	
M2	1002.626	149	.12	.83	.80	.10	19789.029	20029.410	$\chi^2(3)=154.44$**
M3	1705.295	151	.16	.69	.65	.14	20601.847	20834.215	$\chi^2(5)=1298.78$**
M4	2824.628	152	.20	.46	.40	.20	21884.045	22112.408	$\chi^2(6)=2844.60$**

Note: N = 408. ** $p < .01$. RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; SRMR: standardized root mean square residual; AIC = Akaike information criterion; BIC = Bayesian information criterion; NETS = Networking on SNS; EG = Ego-depletion; CS= Career satisfaction. M1: 4-model factor; M2: 3-model factor (combining factor NETS and Upward comparison); M3: 2-model factor (combining Factor EG and CS); M4: 1-model factor.

Table 3.

Means, Standard Deviations, Coefficient Alphas and Correlations Between Variables.

Variables	Mean	*SD*	ω	1	2	3	4
1. Networking on SNS (T1)	2.12	.80	.86	(.85)			
2. Upward comparison on SNS (T2)	1.50	.78	.95	.26**	(.94)		
3. Ego-depletion (T3)	2.21	1.00	.90	.07	.24**	(.90)	
4. Career satisfaction (T3)	3.24	.93	.91	.15	-.13	-.32**	(.91)

Note: N = 157. ** $p < .01$. Cronbach's alpha in brackets along the diagonal.

Table 4.

Model Measurement Fit Indices for Assessed the Differences between the Variables.

Model	χ^2	*df*	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	SRMR	AIC	BIC	$\Delta\chi^2$
M1	265.367	129	.08	.91	.90	.07	3717.423	3892.182	
M2	391.542	132	.12	.81	.79	.11	3837.598	4003.620	$\chi^2(3)=2221.20$**
M3	716.284	134	.18	.59	.52	.16	4158.340	4318.536	$\chi^2(5)= 1354.08$ **
M4	994.112	135	.22	.39	.30	.24	4434.169	4591.452	$\chi^2(6)= 926.63$ **

Note: N = 157. ** $p < .01$. RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; SRMR: standardized root mean square residual; AIC = Akaike information criterion; BIC = Bayesian information criterion; NETS = Networking on SNS; EG = Ego-depletion; CS= Career satisfaction. M1: 4-model factor; M2: 3-model factor (combining factor NETS and Upward comparison); M3: 2-model factor (combining Factor EG and CS); M4: 1-model factor.

Figure 1.

Hypothesized Model.