Competition or Silence? The Double-Edged Sword Effect of ESM Affordance on Employee Creativity

Rundian Shen * and Jigan Wang

Business School, Hohai University, Nanjing 210098, China; wang_jigan@hhu.edu.cn
* Correspondence: shenrundian@163.com

Abstract: Enterprise social media (ESM) refers to a platform built on Web 2.0 technology dedicated to online collaboration and information sharing among employees within an organization. With the advent of the information age, ESM as a kind of information tool improves the internal communication and management mode of the enterprise, which is crucial for its sustainable development. The current research on ESM affordance has a single perspective and lacks a double-edged sword perspective. Studying ESM affordance from a double-edged sword perspective enables managers to recognize the complex impact of ESM use. Based on communication visibility theory and regulatory focus theory, we used prestige-striving behavior (PSB) and quiescent silence (QS) as mediating variables. In addition, we used need for uniqueness (NFU) as the moderating variable. The impact of ESM affordance on employee creativity (EC) was explored from a double-edged sword perspective. There were 428 questionnaires collected in China from October to November of 2023. The results indicate that ESM affordance promotes EC, PSB and QS. ESM affordance positively influences employee creativity by promoting PSB. ESM affordance negatively affects employee creativity by promoting QS. The moderating effect of NFU is significant.

Keywords: ESM affordance; prestige-striving behavior; quiescent silence; need for uniqueness

1. Introduction

With the advent of the Industry 4.0 era, promoting industrial change through information technology has become a significant trend [1]. Hence, Enterprise Social Media (ESM) came into existence. ESM is a platform that allows employees to communicate and exchange massages with partners; post, edit and sort text and files; and view the communication and files anytime in the organization. As a tool to carry information technology, ESM greatly impacts how employees work [2]. For instance, according to the 2022 Ali financial report, the number of Ding Talk enterprise organizations reached 21 million, and the number of users using Ding Talk has exceeded 500 million. In order to promote industrial change, employees’ creativity has always been valued by organizations. Therefore, in the process of informatization, how to further improve members’ innovation ability through such tools as ESM is of great theoretical and practical significance for organizations. Current research has found that using ESM has a paradoxical effect on employees [3]. On the one hand, ESM can help employees interact with each other regarding information and knowledge sharing [4,5] and other behaviors. On the other hand, using ESM can lead to negative effects such as weakening employees’ initiative [6] and emotional exhaustion [7]. Therefore, analyzing the two sides of ESM can help fill the gaps in the existing research and enable managers to be more objective about this technology.

Over time, the focus of research on ESM has been changing. In the initial research phase, scholars focused on the communication function of ESM [8] and explored members’ motivations for using ESM [9]. Next, scholars noted that ESM could facilitate knowledge flow and help knowledge management within organizations [10–12] and
added the variable of members’ attitudes towards technology to the study [8]. Later, scholars further opened up the concept of ESM and started the discussion on the availability of ESM [13]. Then, they further opened up the concept of ESM and started the discussion on ESM affordance [14]. After that, scholars further opened up the concept of ESM, discussed ESM affordance [4,13–15], and attempted to use case study methodology [8]. In recent years, the research on ESM has become more diversified, and scholars have begun to pay attention to adverse effects [16]. The research on enterprise social media has begun to be carried out from the perspective of a double-edged sword [17], and research on ESM from the perspective of a double-edged sword is gradually increasing.

ESM affordance mainly refers to the visibility, persistence, editability, and association characteristics that ESM possesses [4,13–15]. Current research on ESM affordance focuses on the positive impact on members. From a social network perspective, Chen et al. investigated the ability of ESM affordance to positively influence employee in-role performance and innovation performance through social networks [17]. As ESM affordance enhances social connections in the workplace, it can reduce employees’ online loitering behaviors [18]. From the perspective of knowledge sharing and knowledge management, ESM affordance can increase the accumulation of meta-knowledge of members within a firm [4]. Sun et al. found that ESM affordance can accelerate organizational knowledge transfer [19]. Further, some scholars have also opened up the mechanism of ESM affordance for knowledge sharing, suggesting that ESM affordance facilitates the flow of social capital and contributes to interactions between members, facilitating knowledge exchange [20]. In addition, some studies have explored the positive impact of ESM affordance for members from the perspective of employee conflict [21] and employee improvisation [22].

The current research has the following areas for improvement. First, few studies explore the impact of ESM affordance on employee creativity from a double-edged sword perspective. The current discussion on the positive impact of ESM affordance on employee creativity is more inclined to its positive impact, while exploring its double-edged sword effect can more objectively reflect how ESM’s technological features impact members’ psychology and behaviors. Second, the existing research has yet to explore the boundary effects of ESM affordance on employee creativity. At the level of individual employee characteristics, the moderating variables in current research were mainly based on employees’ technical abilities, and there needs to be more discussion on employees’ characteristics. However, employees’ own characteristics, such as psychological and personality, are also important factors influencing their behavior. Therefore, there is a need for empirical research on employees’ characteristics as moderating variables. Third, the current research perspectives on ESM affordance mainly focus on social capital theory, resource base theory and social network theory, and there is a lack of research on the theory at the technical level as well as the psychological aspects of the members.

In order to make up for the shortcomings of the above studies, this study tried to explore both the positive and negative impacts of ESM affordance on employees’ behaviors and employee creativity. This study provides a reference for managers to recognize ESM more comprehensively. In addition, this study also introduces moderating variables to weaken the negative impact of ESM affordance on employee creativity and strengthen the positive impact of ESM affordance on employee creativity, thus helping managers make better use of ESM in their organizations.

We collected survey data from 428 employees to explore how ESM affordance affects employee creativity. This study used prestige-striving behavior (PSB) and quiescent silence (QS) as mediating variables. Moreover, it used need for uniqueness (NFU) as a moderating variable. The contributions of this study include the following: First, based on the regulatory focus theory and communication visibility theory, this study introduced two variables, namely, PSB and QS, which broadens new ways of understanding ESM affordance from the perspective of a double-edged sword. Second, this study discussed the boundary role of employees’ NFU, which complemented current ESM-relevant research
that needs to pay more attention to moderating effects [23]. Third, in terms of practice, this study also provided new ideas for companies to use ESM to enhance employee creativity and thus promote sustainable development.

2. Literature Review

2.1. ESM Affordance

According to Leonardi et al.’s definition [2], ESM enables employees to communicate publicly or with specific peers, to create internal networks for employee use, to publish, edit, and categorize their own or others’ documents, and to view the information, messages, and documents exchanged and published by others in the organization at any time. With the continuous development of research on ESM, some scholars have proposed ESM affordance based on the affordance theory, i.e., visibility, persistence, editability, and association [4,13–15]. Visibility refers to the ability of ESM to enable users to access information that is usually invisible or difficult to see, such as meta-knowledge in the organization, the work behavior of other members, and the flow of organizational activities. Persistence refers to the fact that the content people post in ESM is available for continuous communication and can help the organization achieve the three aspects of knowledge retention, information accumulation, and a sound form of communication. Editability means that users can edit the information before posting it. After posting it, they can revise or reorganize the information through communication with others to ensure the quality of the information. Association means that ESM can help people establish connections between individuals and between individuals and information [2].

ESM affordance is commonly used in studies of organizational socialization, knowledge sharing and power evolution processes [24–26]. The relationship between human–technology interactions was emphasized from the perspective of technology features, and the collection of technology features, usability, and user behavior into a single perspective can help scholars understand the adoption of ESM technologies and the process of adoption [27].

2.2. ESM Affordance and Employee Creativity

Factors affecting employee creativity were categorized into two levels. First, at the individual employee level, it includes the employee’s self-motivation, professional skills, and creativity-related skills. Secondly, the environment in which an employee lives also affects individual creativity [28]. Woodman proposed that the environment interacts with the individual and that the environment can either promote or inhibit individual creativity [29]. From the perspective of affordance theory, ESM affordance can improve employee communication and information acquisition and enhance employee creativity [30]. First, ESM affordance can help employees understand the organization’s workflow more clearly [31] and provide rich work-related resources so that employees can understand the innovation path of the enterprise more clearly, and provide conditions for employees to carry out independent innovation [32]. Secondly, from an internal perspective, ESM affordance can clarify the communication process between members and enable employees to understand the meta-knowledge in the organization. Based on communication visibility theory, when employees are aware of the meta-knowledge in the organization, they can recode the existing knowledge and restructure it, leading to innovative behavior [4]. Thirdly, from outside the organization, ESM affordance can be a way for employees to better understand customer needs and integrate them with internal knowledge networks and product innovation processes to form a new innovation logic [33]. Fourth, ESM affordance provides a channel for employees to obtain timely feedback, and employees are able to obtain the feedback they need and solve problems more quickly through ESM [34].

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H1. ESM affordance promotes employee creativity.
2.3. ESM Affordance and Prestige-Striving Behavior

Prestige-striving behavior (PSB) is a type of status-competitive behavior in which individuals with PSB focus on recognition and positive evaluations from members and want to gain respect and prestige within the organization, as opposed to the other type of dominant status-competitive behavior [35–37]. As a result, individuals implementing PSB are more inclined to engage in different pro-social behaviors to gain recognition from members of the organization, such as actively helping others and being generous with knowledge sharing [38]. They contribute to the collective by upholding the principle of putting the interests of the group first [39]. The characteristics of ESM affordance mean that it can provide adequate technological conditions for knowledge sharing and open and transparent communication within organizations [2]. According to communication visibility theory, the level of transparency within a team improves team members’ perceptions of each other [4]. ESM affordance ensures a level of transparency in intra-team communication, driving proximity and relationship maintenance among employees. According to regulatory focus theory, individuals have two types of self-regulation, namely, promotion regulatory focus and prevention regulatory focus [40]. Promotion regulatory focus makes individuals more focused on self-growth and their desire of achievement. As a result, a promotion regulatory focus makes individuals more willing to adopt proactive behaviors. Individuals with a high promotion focus choose to act quickly when faced with an opportunity and are willing to take risks to pursue a desired state [41]. Individuals with a high promotion regulatory focus choose to act quickly when faced with an opportunity and are willing to engage in risk-taking behaviors in the pursuit of a desired state [42].

It follows that ESM affordance can stimulate promotion regulatory focus, which in turn can stimulate PSB because the purpose of PSB is to gain the honor that status reveals [43]. ESM is a platform that can display and diffuse the pro-organizational behaviors of individuals motivated by PSB, increasing the likelihood that they will gain respect. Therefore, in order to succeed in status competition, individuals will frequently engage in knowledge sharing and mutual support behaviors based on ESM affordance in order to display themselves and gain the respect of team members.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H2a. ESM affordance positively influences employees’ PSB.

2.4. ESM Affordance and Quiescent Silence

Quiescent silence (QS) is the behavior of an employee who has the ability to improve some organizational aspect or can enhance organizational performance but is motivated by a desire to protect himself or herself and hides his or her views for fear of creating an interpersonal gap or endangering himself or herself if he or she speaks up [44]. Especially in the Chinese context of high-power distance and interpersonal orientation, QS is more common in organizations [45]. Based on ESM affordance, the workflow in the organization is clearly displayed on the social media platform. Steps such as who raised and modified the issue can be traced [2]. According to regulatory focus theory, prevention regulatory focus makes individuals more sensitive to adverse outcomes and more inclined to security and stability. Therefore, to reduce uncertainty and pitfalls, individuals with a high prevention regulatory focus will be more inclined to behave conservatively and want to make more thoughtful decisions [46]. While ESM affordance can facilitate the flow and integration of knowledge by making communication between two parties open to a third party [2], the traceability feature of ESM affordance can also stimulate a prevention regulatory focus in individuals, which can lead to QS in some organizational members due to self-protective motives to avoid being held accountable.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H2b. ESM affordance positively affects QS.
2.5. The Mediating Role of Prestige-Striving Behavior and Quiescent Silence

Employees’ ability to innovate depends on social and personal factors. At the level of personal factors, a wealth of expertise is the basis for innovation [29]. At the level of social factors, a specific environment and social context can stimulate a person’s ideas, and an atmosphere of positive communication can lead to a collision of ideas that can lead to innovative ideas [47]. According to the communication visibility theory, once an exchange that occurs in an organization that is not visible to others becomes visible to a third party, the meta-knowledge of the third party (who knows what and who knows who) is enhanced. Enhanced meta-knowledge reduces the duplication of tasks within the organization, and the output of different employee perspectives promotes the collision of ideas, enhancing the possibility of generating innovative thinking. It can motivate employees to compose existing ideas into new ones more effectively, promoting member innovation [4].

Individuals who prefer PSB use ESM for altruistic behaviors in order to gain appropriate reputation and status, which can create an excellent knowledge-sharing atmosphere for members of the organization, promote employees’ learning, learn about their knowledge shortcomings and make up for them, and accelerate the accumulation of personal expertise. In light of this, this study argues, based on communication visibility theory, that the availability of corporate social media can promote prestige-based status-competitive behaviors among members of an organization and enhance employee creativity.

On the other hand, QS, although it can moderate interpersonal relationships in organizations, has a significant negative impact on employees’ ability to innovate [48]. According to the communication visibility theory, members of an organization are able to see the discussions within the organization and then integrate these opinions to complete restructuring and innovation, enabling employees to solve problems faster and more thoroughly [4]. On the contrary, when employees choose QS in the face of communication visualization, members will not be able to learn from the opinions of other members in the organization, hindering employees’ communication learning and weakening their innovation ability.

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed.

**H3a.** PSB mediates the relationship between ESM affordance and employee creativity, i.e., ESM affordance positively influences employee creativity by promoting PSB.

**H3b.** QS mediates the relationship between ESM affordance and employee creativity, i.e., ESM affordance negatively affects employee creativity by promoting QS.

2.6. The Moderating Role of the Need for Uniqueness

According to regulatory focus theory, an individual’s choice of regulatory focus is influenced by the situation as well as by personality traits [40]. In organizational situations, individual strategy choices are influenced by values, norms, past performance, and interpersonal interactions [49]. Research has shown that, depending on the situation, an individual’s strategy preference can change [50]. The NFU as a personality trait can drive individual behavior. Individuals high in NFU crave attention and want to be involved in scarce activities [51,52]. In addition, based on the theory of uniqueness, winning through competition enhances an individual’s NFU [53]. Moreover, individuals’ need for uniqueness is related to developing and enhancing their self-image and social image [54]. Therefore, individuals with a high NFU are more likely to engage in PSB to gain praise and self-esteem and demonstrate their uniqueness by enhancing their status and respecting others [55]. Therefore, we deduce that high NFU reenforces ESM’s positive effect on PSB.

The feature of ESM affordance also provides an space for individuals with high NFU to showcase themselves. Individuals with high NFU will try activities with a high difficulty factor to highlight their differences [56]. In order to gain visibility and win the competition, the individual with high NFU will be more willing to make something original [57]. Based on the individual trait of high NFU, individuals will prefer to be able to satisfy
NFU through PSB. Since the purpose of PSB is that individuals want to gain expert power through altruistic behaviors in the organization, such as knowledge sharing, in order to achieve higher status in the organization, individuals need to engage in more pro-organizational behaviors, such as increasing communication with members and sharing knowledge with others [58]. Therefore, individuals must engage in more pro-organizational behaviors, such as increasing communication with members and helping others. As a result, the members of the organization communicate more closely, and knowledge flows more rapidly, which is a prerequisite for increasing employee creativity.

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed.

**H4a.** NFU positively moderates the relationship between ESM affordance and PSB, i.e., the higher the NFU, the stronger the positive effect of ESM affordance on PSB.

**H4b.** NFU positively moderates the mediating effect of ESM affordance on employee creativity through PSB, i.e., the stronger the NFU, the stronger the mediating effect of ESM affordance on PSB.

In organizations, ESM affordance makes the behavior of employees open and transparent; so, some employees are afraid of making mistakes and choose to do nothing to be silent out of self-protective motives [59]. For individuals with high NFU, there is less pressure to follow the herd and a willingness to risk breaking traditional norms [60]. In addition, because the nature of the NFU is a motivation for disobedience [61], individuals with a high NFU do not stop acting out of fear of failure [62]. The pursuit of differentiation is a persistent and continuous process for individuals with high NFU [63], and individuals with high NFU are unlikely to choose to remain silent for fear of failure or blame. We, therefore, hypothesized that individuals with high NFU traits are less likely to stimulate prevention regulatory focus and lead to QS because of ESM affordance.

When QS is weakened in an organization, the communication between employees increases. The sense of control over the organization increases as employees speak out, providing the basis for confidence in accomplishing goals [64]. As employees’ sense of psychological security increases, they are more willing to develop innovative ideas [65]. In addition, employees with a high NFU will choose to believe in themselves when their superiors reject their ideas and demonstrate high creativity by innovating privately [62].

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed.

**H5a.** NFU negatively moderates the relationship between ESM affordance and QS, i.e., the higher the NFU, the weaker the positive influence of ESM affordance on QS.

**H5b.** NFU negatively moderates the mediating effect of ESM affordance on QS, i.e., the stronger the NFU, the weaker the mediating effect of ESM affordance on QS.

### 2.7 Research Model

Based on the above assumptions, the model for this study is shown in Figure 1.
3. Methods

3.1. Sample and Procedure

The questionnaires for this study were mainly distributed to eight companies in Nanjing and Zhengzhou. In order to ensure the validity of the data, the enterprises selected for this study are mainly knowledge-based. The use of ESM is more prevalent in knowledge-based enterprises as communication is crucial for knowledge-based enterprises. Prior to the distribution of the questionnaires, the participants were informed that their information would be kept completely confidential and that the results would be used only for academic research. The questionnaire was collected online, and the participants answered the questionnaire on a webpage. A total of 480 questionnaires were distributed, and 428 questionnaires were returned. The validity rate of the questionnaire is 89%. Of these, 45.56% were men and 54.44% were women.

3.2. Measure

The scales used in this study include both Chinese and foreign scholars’ scales. The questionnaires used are well established and have been empirically tested many times. Since the subjects of this study are employees of Chinese companies, in order to ensure the validity of the questionnaire, in this study, the questionnaire was first translated by two doctoral students. Then, the translated content of the questionnaire was corrected by professors specialized in human resources to ensure the questionnaire’s accuracy. The Likert seven-point method of measurement was used in this study. The respondents were asked to select the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the options in the questionnaire (1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree”).

3.2.1. ESM Affordance

For the measurement of ESM affordance, we used a scale with 9 question items designed by Rice [66]. The questions in this scale contain three dimensions of ESM affordance, visibility, editability and sustainability. For example, “When using corporate social media, I am able to observe connections between members or learn about them”. “When using corporate social media, I will edit documents after they are posted by others”. “When using enterprise social media, after I post my messages or comments, I make them visible at all times”. The Cronbach’s alpha of ESM affordance is 0.966.

3.2.2. Prestige Status-Striving Behavior

For the measurement of prestige status-striving behavior, this study referred to the scale of Cheng et al. [67] and finally formed a scale containing 5 items. Example items included “I am able to be recognized by others for my unique talents and abilities in the workplace”. The Cronbach’s alpha of prestige status-striving behavior is 0.859.
3.2.3. Quiescent Silence

For the measurement of quiescent silence, this study referred to the scales of Chinese scholars Zheng et al. [45] and foreign scholars Knoll and Dick [68], respectively, and finally formed a scale containing 5 items. Example items included “For expressing opinions, I do not think it is necessary to offend leaders and colleagues”. The Cronbach’s alpha of quiescent silence is 0.90.

3.2.4. Need for Uniqueness

For the measurement of need for uniqueness, this study referred to the scales of foreign scholars Lynn and Synder [69], and finally we formed a scale containing 6 items. Example items included “I often do things to set myself apart from those around me”. The Cronbach’s alpha of need for uniqueness is 0.922.

3.2.5. Employee Creativity

For measuring employee creativity (EC), this study referred to the scales of foreign scholars Farmer et al. [70], and finally formed a scale containing 7 items. Example items included “At work, I will develop a complete programme to implement my innovative ideas”. The Cronbach’s alpha of employee creativity is 0.937.

3.2.6. Control Variables

As exemplified in previous studies, the age and gender of the individuals are predicted to influence employee creativity [71]. Thus, employees’ age and gender were used as control variables in this study.

3.3. Common Method Bias Testing

Since the data for this study are derived only from self-reported data from employees of the firms, there may be common method biases [72]. Therefore, this study conducted exploratory factor analysis using SPSS 24.0 based on Harman’s single-factor method. The test results showed that five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were obtained. One single factor accounted for 30.025% of the variance, below 50%, thereby indicating no major common method biases issues.

3.4. Data Analysis

This paper uses SPSS 24.0 as well as AMOS 21.0 for data analysis. First, we performed correlation analysis using SPSS 24.0. Next, AMOS 21.0 was used to analyze the CFA. Then, we performed stratified regression analysis using SPSS 24.0 to test the hypotheses. After that, we used bootstrap tests for mediator variable testing. Finally, we used Process 4.0 for moderator variable testing.

4. Results

4.1. Correlation Analysis

Table 1 shows the correlation coefficients between the variables. ESM affordance is significantly positively correlated with EC ($r = 0.252, p < 0.01$). ESM affordance was significantly positively correlated with prestige status-striving behavior (PSB) ($r = 0.413, p < 0.01$). ESM affordance was significantly positively correlated with quiescent silence (QS) ($r = 0.292, p < 0.01$). PSB was significantly positively related to employee creativity (EC) ($r = 0.322, p < 0.01$). QS was significantly negatively related to EC ($r = -0.239, p < 0.01$).
Table 1. Correlation analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>ESM</th>
<th>PSB</th>
<th>QS</th>
<th>EC</th>
<th>NU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>-0.063</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESM</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.413 **</td>
<td>0.292 **</td>
<td>-0.069</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSB</td>
<td>-0.35</td>
<td>-0.045</td>
<td>0.252 **</td>
<td>0.322 **</td>
<td>-0.239 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QS</td>
<td>0.044</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>0.292 **</td>
<td>-0.069</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>-0.044</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.252 **</td>
<td>0.322 **</td>
<td>-0.239 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NU</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.252 **</td>
<td>0.226 **</td>
<td>-0.133 **</td>
<td>0.204 **</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 428, ** p < 0.01.

4.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

In this study, the five latent variables, ESM affordance, PSB, QS, NFU, EC, in the measurement model were subjected to a CFA. As shown in the results of Table 2, the fit indices of the five-factor measurement model were better than the recommended values ($\chi^2$/df < 5, RMSEA, SRMR < 0.08, CFI, TLI > 0.90), indicating that the data were well fitted to the model. Moreover, the fit index of the five-factor model was significantly better than the other models with the best fit, which indicated that the five variables in this study had good discriminant validity.

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$\chi^2$/df</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>TLI</th>
<th>SRMR</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ESM, PSB, QS, NU, EC</td>
<td>1106.949</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>2.433</td>
<td>0.943</td>
<td>0.938</td>
<td>0.069</td>
<td>0.058</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESM, PSB+QS, NU, EC</td>
<td>2538.438</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>5.542</td>
<td>0.820</td>
<td>0.805</td>
<td>0.144</td>
<td>0.103</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESM, PSB+QS, NU+EC</td>
<td>4238.362</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>9.194</td>
<td>0.673</td>
<td>0.648</td>
<td>0.227</td>
<td>0.139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESM+PSB+QS, NU+EC</td>
<td>4828.548</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>10.429</td>
<td>0.622</td>
<td>0.595</td>
<td>0.224</td>
<td>0.149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESM+PSB+QS+NU+EC</td>
<td>7200.787</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>15.519</td>
<td>0.416</td>
<td>0.376</td>
<td>0.233</td>
<td>0.184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ESM = ESM Affordance, PSB = Prestige Status-Striving Behavior, QS = Quiescent Silence, NFU = Need for Uniqueness, EC = Employee Creativity.

4.3. Hypothesis Testing

This study used hierarchical regression to test the mediation effect first. The results are shown in Table 3. It is obvious that ESM affordance had a significant positive effect on EC ($r = 0.218$, $p < 0.001$). So, H1 is established. ESM affordance had a significant positive effect on PSB ($r = 0.348$, $p < 0.001$) and QS ($r = 0.303$, $p < 0.001$). PSB was significantly positively correlated with EC ($r = 0.200$, $p < 0.001$). QS was significantly negatively correlated with EC ($r = -0.253$, $p < 0.001$). The results suggested that ESM positively affects EC by enhancing PSB, on the one hand, and negatively affects EC by enhancing QS, on the other. PSB and QS play a partial mediating role. Therefore, the hypotheses H2a, H2b, H3a, H3b are established.
Table 3. Hierarchical regression analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>EC</th>
<th>PSB</th>
<th>QS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td>Model 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>β</strong></td>
<td><strong>SE</strong></td>
<td><strong>β</strong></td>
<td><strong>SE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gender</td>
<td>−0.079</td>
<td>0.074</td>
<td>−0.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESM affordance</td>
<td>0.218</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>0.277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSB</td>
<td>0.200</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QS</td>
<td>−0.253</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NFU</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESM×NFU</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.206</td>
<td>0.174</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01.

To further test for mediating effects, this study conducted bootstrap tests using Process. The results are shown in Table 4. The effect value of PSB on the relationship between ESM and EC was 0.682. The 95% confidence interval was [0.0294, 0.1133], excluding 0. The effect value of QS on the relationship between ESM and EC was −0.750. The 95% confidence interval was [−0.1212, −0.0365], excluding 0. The bootstrap tests further support hypothesis H3a, and H3b is established.

Table 4. Mediation effect results based on bootstrap.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Effect Value</th>
<th>Bias Corrected 95% CI</th>
<th>Lower Limit</th>
<th>Limit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ESM affordance-PSB-EC</td>
<td>0.682</td>
<td>0.0294</td>
<td>0.1133</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESM affordance-QS-EC</td>
<td>−0.750</td>
<td>−0.1212</td>
<td>−0.0365</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, this study examined the moderating effect of UN on the relationship between ESM for PSB and QS. To prevent multicollinearity, we centralized the independent and moderator variables before testing. After that, this study used hierarchical regression analysis for the moderating effect test. The results are shown in Table 3. The interaction terms of ESM and UN are significantly and positively associated with PSB (r = 0.079, p < 0.01). Thus, hypothesis 4a holds. The interaction term of ESM and UN is significantly negatively related to QS (r = −0.100, p < 0.01). Hypothesis 5a is valid. Next, this study did a moderated effects test still using Process and the results are shown in the table 5 below, again proving that Hypotheses 4a and 5a hold.

In order to visualize the moderating effect, a simple slope analysis was performed in this study. As shown in Figure 2, the higher the UN, the stronger the positive effect of ESM on PSB. As shown in Figure 3, the higher UN, the weaker the positive effect of ESM on QS.
This study uses model 7 in Process to test for a moderated mediation effect with a sample size of 5000 and a confidence interval of 95%. The results are shown in Table 5 below. First, the moderating effect of UN on PSB is significant. When UN is low, the indirect effect of ESM on EC through PSB is 0.074. The confidence interval is [0.036, 0.120] and includes 0. When UN is higher, the indirect effect of ESM on EC via PSB is 0.120. The 95% confidence interval is [0.059, 0.190] and includes 0. The difference in the indirect effect of PSB at high and low UN is 0.46. The 95% confidence interval is [0.006, 0.100] and does not contain 0. This suggests that the difference is significant and that a moderated mediation effect holds. So, H4b holds.

Second, the moderating effect of UN on QS is significant. When UN is low, the indirect effect of ESM on EC through QS is −0.115. The confidence interval is [−0.173, −0.064]...
and includes 0. When UN is higher, the indirect effect of ESM on EC via QS is −0.55. The 95% confidence interval is [−1.16, −0.009] and includes 0. The difference in the indirect effect of QC at high and low UN is 0.061. The 95% confidence interval is [0.014, 0.111] and does not contain 0. This suggests that the difference is significant and that a moderated mediation effect holds. So, H5b holds.

Table 5. Direct effects at different levels of moderator.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Mediator</th>
<th>Moderator</th>
<th>Indirect Effects</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Bias Corrected 95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ESM affordance</td>
<td>PSB</td>
<td>High UN</td>
<td>0.120</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>[0.059, 0.190]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low UN</td>
<td>0.074</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>[0.036, 0.120]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>[0.006, 0.100]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QS</td>
<td></td>
<td>High UN</td>
<td>−0.55</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>[−1.16, −0.009]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low UN</td>
<td>−0.115</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>[−0.173, −0.064]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>[0.014, 0.111]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Discussion

5.1. General Discussion

This study discusses the effects of ESM affordance on employee creativity, including the mediating effects of PSB and QS and the moderating effects of NFU. The conclusions are as follows. First, ESM affordance has a positive effect on employee creativity. Second, the mediating effects of PSB and QS are significant. Third, the moderating effect of NFU is significant.

5.2. Theoretical Implications

First, based on visual communication theory and regulatory focus theory, this paper provides new insights into how ESM affordance affects employee creativity and deepens the understanding of the relationship between ESM affordance and employee creativity. Studies have been conducted to investigate the mechanism of ESM affordance on employee outcomes in terms of social capital [15], and social networks [4], among others. However, it is not known whether employees’ regulatory focus can explain the effect of ESM affordance on employee creativity. In addition, previous research has focused more on the positive impact of ESM affordance on creativity, such as knowledge transfer and employee conflicts [24–26], and less on its negative impact on creativity. This paper examines ESM affordance from the perspective of a double-edged sword, breaking through the limitations of previous studies that have focused on the positive impact of ESM affordance on employee creativity.

Second, based on the regulatory focus theory, this paper explains the mechanism of ESM affordance on employee creativity from two perspectives, namely, PSB and QS. There needs to be more research from a double-edged sword perspective of the impact of ESM affordance on employee creativity. This study applies regulatory focus theory to areas related to ESM research and discusses the impact of technology on members’ psychology and behavior. It is found that ESM affordance induces different moderating foci in employees, resulting in contrasting behaviors and different impacts on employee creativity. This provides a mediating mechanism for understanding the relationship between ESM affordance and employee creativity from a regulatory focus perspective. This study strengthens the understanding of the psychological dimension of ESM-related research. To a certain extent, it also helps to resolve the conflict of whether ESM affordance will have positive or negative psychological effects on employees.

Finally, this paper constructs a moderated mediation model to test the boundary conditions under which NFU influences employee creativity in ESM affordance through PSB and QS. This finding provides a new perspective on understanding the weighted impact
of ESM affordance on employee creativity. Previous studies have focused on employee technical competence as a moderating variable but have neglected the moderating role of personality traits. This paper introduces the variable of NFU and finds that NFU not only moderates the relationship between ESM affordance and PSB and QS, but also moderates the mediating effect of PSB and QS between ESM affordance and employee creativity. In addition, current research on NFU is mainly focused on the field of marketing, and this paper applies NFU to the field of organizational behavior, which provides new ideas for later research.

5.3. Practical Implications

Firstly, managers should take a dialectical view of the technological feature of ESM affordance in terms of both the positive and negative impact it can have on employee behavior. Managers need to recognize that ESM affordance can have different psychological impacts on employees, affecting their behaviors and creativity. Therefore, managers should take advantage of the characteristics of ESM affordance to encourage PSB among employees, enhance positive interactions among employees, and promote information interaction and knowledge sharing, which, in turn, promotes an enhancement in employee creativity. On the other hand, managers should consider the reasons for the negative impact of QS brought about by ESM and adjust their management style. For employees who are worried that ESM affordance will magnify their mistakes, leaders should take a softer approach and encourage employees more; and once employees have good ideas, they can affirm them in time in the social software to enhance employees’ confidence and weaken the QS.

Secondly, managers should focus on the reinforcing role of NFU in the different behaviors adopted by employees to face the different impacts of ESM affordance. First, managers need to understand their employees better, understand the extent of their NFU, and tailor their management approach to the individual characteristics of their employees. Also, since NFU can promote PSB and weaken QS, managers should think about how to increase their employees’ NFU. For example, managers can encourage employees’ behaviors that are innovative and conducive to the development of the enterprise so as to strengthen healthy competition within the enterprise and promote its sustainable development.

In addition to this, because ESM is being used a lot in the organizations, it also poses a challenge for managers to manage their employees. From this study, it can be seen that managers need to invest some resources to develop the psychological capital of their members, which, in turn, enhances the positive mindset of their employees. When employees have a positive mindset, it is easier to generate healthy competition. For the managers themselves, their competence in using information technology is also critical. When managers are able to use and understand ESM better, they will be able to guide their employees in the organization and steer the use of ESM in a positive and innovative direction.

5.4. Limitations and Future Research

There are several areas for improvement in this paper. Firstly, this study collected cross-sectional data, but the study of ESM affordance on employee creativity may be a dynamic process. Therefore, it can be considered to use research and development or longitudinal data to further explore the relationship between the two. Second, the questionnaire in this paper was collected from the employees themselves. In a following study, we can consider collecting questionnaires at multiple levels and adding dimensions such as evaluations performed by others. Thirdly, the research in this study is limited to the employee level, and future research can consider researching this theme from the team or organizational level to deepen people’s understanding of ESM affordance. For example, from a team perspective, the heterogeneity of a team’s knowledge makes it one of the critical elements of its creativity [73]. However, it has been demonstrated that the use of social media will have a peer-to-peer effect [74]. Therefore, whether there are moderating
variables that minimize the peer effect in teams due to the use of social media can also be one of the directions of future research.

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**References**


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