

## Review

# Impression management strategies on enterprise social media platforms: An affordance perspective

Yuan Sun<sup>a,b,c,\*</sup>, Shuyue Fang<sup>a</sup>, Zuopeng (Justin) Zhang<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Business Administration, Zhejiang Gongshang University, No. 18, Xuezheng St., Xiasha University Town, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, People's Republic of China

<sup>b</sup> Key Research Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at Universities - Modern Business Research Center of Zhejiang Gongshang University, No. 18, Xuezheng St., Xiasha University Town, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, People's Republic of China

<sup>c</sup> Zheshang Research Institute, Zhejiang Gongshang University, 149 JiaoGong Road, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, People's Republic of China

<sup>d</sup> Coggin College of Business, University of North Florida, Jacksonville, FL 32224, USA



## ARTICLE INFO

## Keywords:

Enterprise social media platforms

Affordance

Impression management

Boundary management

## ABSTRACT

Enterprise Social Media Platforms (ESMPs) are arenas for self-presentation where employees construct, co-create, and maintain an online image among their colleagues. This study systemically evaluated the current literature to understand the potential of ESMPs in influencing employees' impression management strategies from the affordance perspective. Drawing from a focused review of the literature on ESMPs' affordances and impression management, this paper reclassified employees' impression management strategies in the context of ESMPs. It proposes a conceptual framework that captures the complex relationship between ESMPs' affordances and employees' various impression management strategies. The framework highlights that ESMPs' affordances affect employees' impression management strategies, both positively and negatively, and proposes the contingent effects of individual motives and boundary management on the relationship between affordances and employees' impression management strategies. Our literature review and proposed framework provide a useful basis for future studies on impression management on ESMPs. Our framework also helps employees manage impressions strategically and managers and ESMPs' developers to fulfil ESMPs' potential by understanding how affordance affects impression management strategies.

## 1. Introduction

The advancement of web-based technology enabled social media (such as blogs, wikis, social networking sites, social tagging and microblogging) to proliferate rapidly, leading to new management practices in organisations (Cao & Yu, 2019). An increasing number of organisations in various industries are deploying social media to improve critical organisational processes (Kwayu, Abubakre, & Lal, 2021). According to McKinsey's survey, 65 % of corporations reported using Web 2.0 technologies in their organisations (Bughin & Chui, 2010).

Enterprise social media platforms (ESMPs) are digital platforms based on Web 2.0 technologies that can help employees connect, collaborate and communicate (Azaizah, Reyhav, Raban, Simon, & McHaney, 2018; Zhu, Sun, Jeyaraj, & Hao, 2021). The benefits of ESMPs also include improving employees' agility (Cai, Huang, Liu, & Wang,

2018), team improvisation ability (Sun, Wu, Chen, Lin, & Shang, 2020), and team creative performance (Cao & Ali, 2018). ESMPs' achievements are mostly due to their characteristics, which differ from other information and communication technologies. For instance, employees can observe the conversations and social connections among colleagues to promote knowledge transfer (Islam, Jasimuddin, & Hasan, 2017). Yammer, Chatter, Jive and Sharepoint are some of the popular ESMPs organisations use to encourage employees' information and knowledge sharing and add value to their existing processes (Schrage, 2013).

As a digital arena in which employees interact virtually, ESMPs allow employees to manage their self-presentation; that is, to construct, co-create and maintain an online image to manage their colleagues' perceptions (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). Employees can strategically show or hide certain aspects of themselves (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009) to develop positive online impressions (Hall, Pennington, & Lueders, 2014) and facilitate interpersonal interactions (Schlenker,

\* Corresponding author at: School of Business Administration, Zhejiang Gongshang University, No. 18, Xuezheng St., Xiasha University Town, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, People's Republic of China.

E-mail addresses: [zorrnsun@163.com](mailto:zorrnsun@163.com), [sunyuan@zjgsu.edu.cn](mailto:sunyuan@zjgsu.edu.cn) (Y. Sun), [1491238788@qq.com](mailto:1491238788@qq.com) (S. Fang), [justin.zhang@unf.edu](mailto:justin.zhang@unf.edu) (Z.(J. Zhang).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2021.102359>

Received 23 October 2019; Received in revised form 23 April 2021; Accepted 23 April 2021

Available online 3 May 2021

0268-4012/© 2021 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

1975). They can thus promote their sense of belonging and psychological well-being.

The recent development in ESMPs increasingly integrated impression management as one of their core applications (Paliszkievicz & MADra-Sawicka, 2016). The affordances featured on ESMPs provide employees with the opportunity to manage impressions strategically (Fox & Vendemia, 2016). In recent years, an increasing number of studies focused on how the affordances of ESMPs shape employees' impression management strategies (Pearce & Vitak, 2016). Prior research indicated that different affordances of ESMPs enable employees to intentionally stand out as a unique person or blend in as a group member. Thus, based on the extant literature, we adopt the affordances perspective to identify the potential of ESMPs in influencing employees' impression management strategies. Some existing studies considered the relationship between individual factors and impression management. For instance, individual motives may influence employees' impression management behaviours (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). Online impression management and boundary management can jointly form new strategies to affect others' judgements (Olliermalaterre, Rothbard, & Berg, 2013). However, prior studies did not pay much attention to the moderating effect of individual motives and individual boundary management on the relationship between affordances and impression management strategies. Thus, this study aims to answer the following research questions: a) *How do the affordances of ESMPs, directly and indirectly, influence employees' impression management strategies?* and b) *How do individual motives and individual boundary management moderate the relationship between affordances and employees' impression management strategies?*

To answer these research questions, we employ and expand Lynch and Rodell (2018) dichotomy of employees' impression management strategies—including blending-in and standing-out strategies—in the workplace to reclassify employees' online impression management strategies. Specifically, we recategorise the affordances related to impression management strategies and then synthesise the mechanism by which affordances influence employees' impression management strategies through a literature review. Our findings show that we can understand the positive effect of ESMPs' affordances on employees' impression management strategies through network characteristics and psychological outcomes, whereas we can explain the negative effect through privacy concern, impression management concern and institutional logics contradiction. This study makes both theoretical and practical contributions. It develops impression management theory by clarifying how ESMPs' affordances affect employees' impression management strategies. Moreover, it provides advice on the use of ESMPs to help employees manage impressions strategically to gain the favour of colleagues.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 explains the research methodology, specifically, how we conducted the literature review. Section 3 provides the theoretical background of impression management and affordances. Section 4 introduces the direct and indirect effects of affordances on employees' impression management strategies. Section 5 explores the contingent effects on the relationship between affordances and employees' impression management strategies. Section 6 discusses the theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and future research directions.

## 2. Methodology

To complete a systematic literature review and develop the conceptual framework, we used keywords such as social media, enterprise social media, affordance, impression management, self-presentation, information sharing, boundary management and others to search relevant articles published between 2000 and 2021 from multiple databases including ScienceDirect, EBSCO, Web of Science, ABI, Emerald and SpringerLink. The initial search focused on abstracts and found 150 articles. These articles were then read in full to ensure their relevance to

this study. This led to a final sample of 80 articles that were thoroughly reviewed to help identify the affordances of ESMPs related to impression management, employees' online impression management strategies, and their relationships. The specific processes are outlined as follows.

First, we used keywords for the search related to ESMPs, such as 'social media', 'enterprise social media', 'enterprise social networking sites', 'social media usage within organisation', 'communication/collaboration tools' and 'enterprise 2.0,' and keywords related to impressions, such as 'impression management', 'self-presentation' and 'information sharing'. We thus retrieved valid literature related to impression management strategies in ESMPs. We then integrated the impression management strategies with similar definitions and finally obtained ten different strategies. According to the two categories of employee impression management strategies—blending-in and standing-out—in the workplace proposed by Lynch and Rodell (2018), we reclassified these ten online impression management strategies with an expanded framework. Table 1 summarises the new categories of impression management strategies on ESMPs, including the definitions of the ten online impression management strategies and their related strategies and research.

Second, as ESMPs' affordances provide employees with the opportunity to manage impressions strategically (Fox & Vendemia, 2016), recent studies started to focus on how the affordances of ESMPs shape employees' impression management strategies (Pearce & Vitak, 2016). Therefore, we propose a conceptual framework to integrate affordances with impression management. We added 'affordance' to the previous set of keywords and used them to acquire studies on affordances and online impression management strategies. Reviewing the collected literature, we identified six types of affordances related to online impression management strategies by leveraging the explanatory mechanisms that involve affordances and online impression management strategies. Table 2 presents the categories of ESMPs' affordances in terms of impression management, including the six types of affordances and their definitions.

Third, we sorted out the antecedents of online impression management strategies and the mechanisms of affordances that affect impression management strategies. Then, we synthesised the direct and indirect effects of affordances on employees' impression management strategies. We report the direct effects in Table 3, which illustrates how affordances affect impression management strategies directly. Table 4 and Table 5 demonstrate how affordances affect impression management strategies indirectly, including both positive and negative impacts related to employees' psychological well-being and social network.

Finally, following the above three steps to continue reviewing the literature on individual motives and boundary management, we identified the contingent effects of individual motives and boundary management on the relationship between affordances and employees' impression management strategies. Previous studies considered the influence of individual motives on impression management strategies (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011) and the impact of the combination of individual boundary management and impression management (Olliermalaterre et al., 2013). However, it is still not clear how the interactions between individual motives and affordances and those between individual boundary management and affordances influence employees' online impression management strategies, which is the focus of our research in this step. Table 6 and Table 7 indicate how individual motives and boundary management affect the relationship between affordances and employees' impression management strategies. Fig. 1 displays the full conceptual framework of this research.

## 3. Theoretical background

### 3.1. Impression management

The concept of impression management was first proposed by Goffman (1959), which refers to managing one's impressions in satisfactory

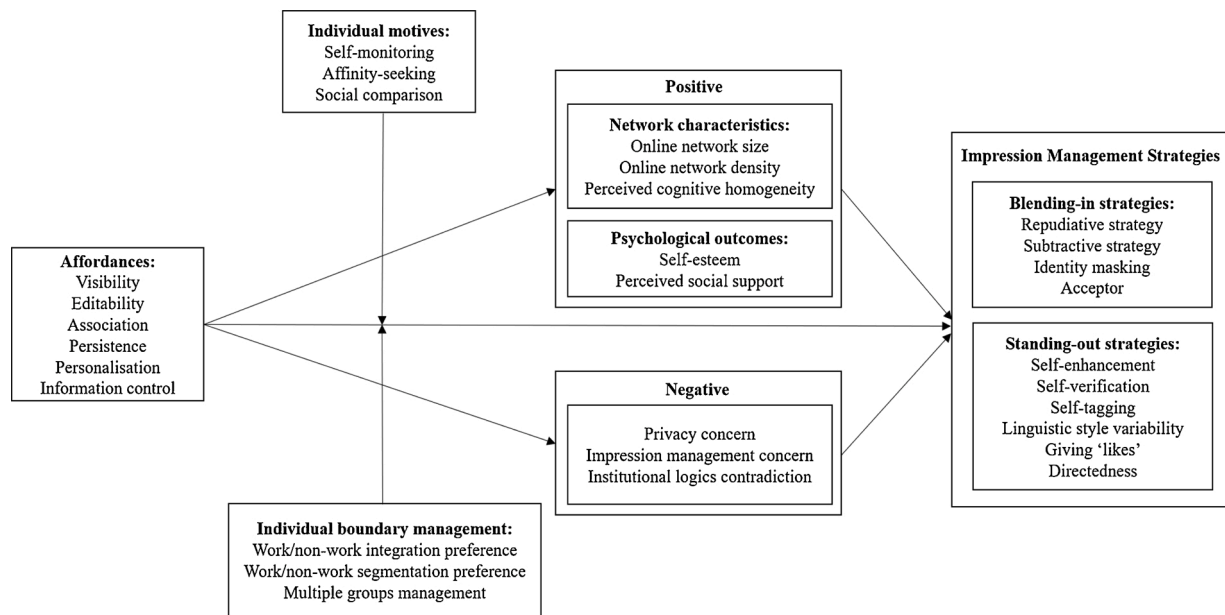


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework.

ways because they are related to others' evaluation and the many interpersonal behaviours that are influenced by others' impressions. Goffman's (1959) profound study is universally regarded as the cornerstone of later research on impression management. Leary and Kowalski (1990) described impression management as self-presentation, which denotes the process in which individuals consciously control their behaviours to influence the target audience's perception or impression of them. Paliszkievicz and MAĐra-Sawicka (2016) proposed an impression management model which includes two key figures: an 'actor' who participates in impression management behaviours and an 'audience' who communicates with 'actors' in different contexts. Carlson, Kacmar, Thompson, and Andrews (2019) introduced impression management in the organisational environment, which refers to a series of behaviours that individuals want to be regarded as favourable at work.

Nowadays, individuals strive to manage their impressions not only through face-to-face interactions but also through Internet-based communication tools (Vitak, 2015). Social media provides novel venues for impression management (Rui & Stefanone, 2013), enabling individuals to participate more actively in self-presentation (Walther & Burgoon, 1992). Online self-presentation is easier to control than offline activities because users can easily create, modify, and edit information about themselves (Burgoon & Walther, 2010). In the organisational environment, employees gradually use social media to create positive professional images because their personal information is visible to colleagues (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Online impression management is also increasingly attracting scholarly attention (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011).

Impression management is crucial to one's personal and professional life (Goffman, 1959). Paliszkievicz and MAĐra-Sawicka (2016) regarded impression management as a critical element for successful communication with collaborators, team members, and colleagues. Impression management on social media has a specific impact on online impression formation. Employees can use social media to highlight expertise (Treem & Leonardi, 2012) and enhance likability (Forest & Wood, 2012). On the other hand, online self-presentation behaviours promote social interactions (Nelissen & Meijers, 2011) and help make new acquaintances (Westerman, Heide, Klein, & Walther, 2008). Furthermore, a good self-image is also an essential factor to increase the personal sense of belonging (Zhou, Cai, Liu, & Fan, 2019). Thus, all people are motivated to manage their impressions by engaging in

various impression management strategies (Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2019).

However, most previous studies addressed only one or several impression management strategies, and very few systematically classified these strategies, which is the focus of our research. Specifically, we review the literature related to impression management in social media settings and reclassify the online impression management strategies based on the definition of blending-in and standing-out strategies proposed by Lynch and Rodell (2018) (see Table 1 for details).

### 3.1.1. Blending-in strategies

In a blending-in strategy, employees make themselves look no different from others and blend in as group members by being consistent with colleagues' stereotypes or obscuring their identities on ESMPs (Lynch & Rodell, 2018). The following are some specific strategies in this category.

(1) **Repudiative strategy** involves denying certain characteristics associated with themselves by opting for an 'innocence' defence, looking to justify themselves, or making compensatory self-presentations (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). The strategy now includes the following related behaviours: expressive information control, damage control, and scrubber. Expressive information control entails that individuals 'regulate the flow of information revealed/ expressed (verbally or nonverbally) during an interaction' (Kuo, Tseng, Tseng, & Lin, 2013). Damage control refers to the repair of damaged personal images (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). Scrubber refers to people's efforts to repair or restore online images that employees may view negatively during or after triggering events (Berkelelaer, 2017). (2) **Subtractive strategy** means that individuals remove unwanted information, such as disconnecting the link between themselves and a tagged photo or deleting unpleasant posts on their profile pages (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). The strategy is now typically manifested through behaviours such as the use of privacy settings, privacy information control, content deletion, and defensive self-presentation. Privacy setting means that people can set information related to themselves as visible or invisible to others (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). Privacy information control is a form of control over information flow, defined as people managing the quality of interaction (i.e., length, content and personality), controlling information disclosure and acknowledging or avoiding interpersonal conflicts in social situations (Kuo, Tseng, & Lin, 2013). Content deletion refers to eliminating user-generated content that may hurt a personal image (DeAndrea, Tong, & Lim, 2018).

**Table 1**  
New Categories of Impression Management Strategies on ESMPs.

**Blending-in strategies:** Employees aim to look no different from others and blend in as group members by being consistent with colleagues' stereotypes or obscuring their identities on ESMPs (Lynch & Rodell, 2018).

Strategy	Definition	Related strategy and research	Support
<b>Reputative strategy</b> (Rui & Stefanone, 2013)	Individuals deny certain characteristics associated with themselves; they opt for an 'innocence' defense, look to justify themselves or make compensatory self-presentations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Damage control-Image repair (Rosenberg &amp; Egbert, 2011)</li> <li>•Control over information flow-Expressive information control (Kuo et al., 2013)</li> <li>•Reputative strategies (Rui &amp; Stefanone, 2013)</li> <li>•Scrubber (Berkelaar, 2017)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Empirical</li> <li>•Case study</li> <li>•Empirical</li> <li>•Case study</li> </ul>
<b>Subtractive strategy</b> (Rui & Stefanone, 2013)	Individuals remove unwanted information, such as disconnecting the link between themselves and tagged photos or deleting unpleasant posts on their profile pages.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Damage control-Privacy settings (Rosenberg &amp; Egbert, 2011)</li> <li>•Control over information flow-Privacy information control (Kuo et al., 2013)</li> <li>•Content deletion (DeAndrea et al., 2018)</li> <li>•Subtractive strategies (Rui &amp; Stefanone, 2013)</li> <li>•Defensive self-presentation (Yang &amp; Ying, 2021)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Empirical</li> <li>•Case study</li> <li>•Empirical</li> <li>•Empirical</li> <li>•Empirical</li> </ul>
<b>Identity masking</b> (DeAndrea et al., 2018)	Individuals obscure their online identity or post contents anonymously.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Identification eschewal (Pearce &amp; Vitak, 2016)</li> <li>•Source masking (DeAndrea et al., 2018)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Case study</li> <li>•Empirical</li> </ul>
<b>Acceptor</b> (Berkelaar, 2017)	Individuals do not do anything differently in response to others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Acceptor (Berkelaar, 2017)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Case study</li> </ul>
<b>Standing-out strategies:</b> Employees actively play authentic or idealized roles to different audiences on ESMPs (Lynch & Rodell, 2018).			
<b>Self-enhancement</b> (Olliermalaterre et al., 2013)	Employees present themselves to others in a positive and socially desirable manner.	<p><b>Related strategy and research</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Self-promotion (Rosenberg &amp; Egbert, 2011)</li> <li>•Self-enhancement (Olliermalaterre et al., 2013)</li> <li>•Positive strivings (Crabtree &amp; Pillow, 2018)</li> <li>•Expression of positive emotions (Bazarova et al., 2013)</li> <li>•Selfie (Kienzle, 2017)</li> <li>•Self-enhancement (Gerhart &amp; Sidorova, 2017)</li> <li>•Strategist (Berkelaar, 2017)</li> <li>•Assertive self-presentation (Reed &amp; Saunders, 2020)</li> <li>•Proactive self-presentation (Yang &amp; Ying, 2021)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Empirical</li> <li>•Conceptual</li> <li>•Empirical</li> <li>•Empirical</li> <li>•Conceptual</li> <li>•Empirical</li> <li>•Case study</li> <li>•Empirical</li> <li>•Empirical</li> </ul>
<b>Self-verification</b> (Olliermalaterre et al., 2013)	Employees behave in a manner that confirms their own positive and negative self-views.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Self-expression (Hunt et al., 2014)</li> <li>•Self-presentation (Sievers, Wodzicki, Aberle, Keckeisen, &amp; Cress, 2015)</li> <li>•Dissent (Berkelaar, 2017)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Empirical</li> <li>•Empirical</li> <li>•Empirical</li> <li>•Case study</li> </ul>
<b>Self-tagging</b> (Raban et al., 2017)	An individual user assigns tags to herself(himself), representing the self's presentation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Self-tags (Raban et al., 2017)</li> <li>•Role-modeling (Rosenberg &amp; Egbert, 2011)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Empirical</li> <li>•Empirical</li> </ul>
<b>Linguistic style variability</b> (Gil-Lopez et al., 2018)	Language-based audience adaptation strategies with which people adjust their languages in response to group differences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Language style (Bazarova et al., 2013)</li> <li>•Linguistic style variability (Gil-Lopez et al., 2018)</li> <li>•The use of language (Birnholz et al., 2012)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Empirical</li> <li>•Empirical</li> <li>•Empirical</li> </ul>
<b>Giving 'likes'</b> (Hong et al., 2017)	Giving 'likes' is the behavior of clicking a 'like' button and is an acquisitive self-presentation strategy that helps build one's desired image as a form of online gifting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Giving 'likes' (Hong et al., 2017)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Empirical</li> </ul>
<b>Directedness</b> (Liu & Kang, 2017)	Directedness denotes that a message is targeted at a particular person.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Directedness (Liu &amp; Kang, 2017)</li> <li>•The tags the employee applied to other employees (Raban et al., 2017)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Empirical</li> <li>•Empirical</li> </ul>

Defensive self-presentation indicates that individuals delete their negative information and keep only the good news to prevent others from belittling their images (Yang & Ying, 2021). (3) **Identity masking** refers to behaviour aiming to obscure an online identity or posting contents anonymously (DeAndrea et al., 2018). Source masking is 'obscuring the identity of an online source' (DeAndrea et al., 2018). This strategy is also related to identification eschewal, which refers to using photos and names unrelated to one's identity to cover up the true identity to avoid negative outcomes (Pearce & Vitak, 2016). (4) **Acceptor** is the strategy with which employees accept requirements and do not do anything differently in response to others (Berkelaar, 2017).

3.1.2. *Standing-out strategies*

In a standing-out strategy, employees actively play authentic or idealised roles to different audiences on ESMPs (Lynch & Rodell, 2018). The following are some specific strategies in this category.

(1) **Self-enhancement** refers to employees presenting themselves to others in a positive and socially desirable manner (Olliermalaterre et al., 2013). It is closely related to the behaviours of self-promotion, positive strivings, expression of positive emotions, selfies, strategist, assertive self-presentation, and proactive self-presentation. Self-promotion means that individuals show their good side to get others' approval (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). Positive striving is defined by Crabtree and Pillow (2018) as the 'striving to present oneself positively'. Expression of positive emotions means that individuals express happy and pleasant emotions to build a positive image (Bazarova, Taft, Choi, & Cosley, 2013). Selfies refer to online identity performance or giving others a first impression (Kienzle, 2017). Another similar definition of self-enhancement refers to the acts and practices related to selectively presenting information that makes oneself acceptable to others (Gerhart & Sidorova, 2017). Strategist entails that individuals predict and use information and technology to achieve impression management goals

(Berkelaar, 2017). Assertive self-presentation is defined as showing personal advantages to gain strong social support (Reed & Saunders, 2020). Proactive self-presentation refers to demonstrating one’s positive aspects to actively shape and maintain an ideal image (Yang & Ying, 2021). (2) **Self-verification** occurs when employees behave in a manner that confirms their own positive and negative self-views (Olliermala-terre et al., 2013), which is closely related to the expression of negative emotions, self-expression, self-presentation and dissent. Expression of negative emotions means that individuals express their true feelings and experiences of depression and sadness (Bazarova et al., 2013). Self-expression is a creative expression that aims to reflect the real self (Hunt, Lin, & Atkin, 2014). Self-presentation is defined by Sievers, Wodzicki, Aberle, Keckeisen, and Cress (2015) as to create an ideal or real self through which individuals care about the impression they make on others in social interactions. Self-verification by dissidents reflects a passive resistance to social norms instead of the willingness or unwillingness to accept them (Berkelaar, 2017). (3) **Self-tagging** entails that an individual user assigns tags to herself or himself, representing the self’s presentation (Raban, Danan, Ronen, & Guy, 2017). This strategy is also related to role-modelling, in which individuals label themselves online to show their desirable traits and behaviours to create positive images (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). (4) **Linguistic style variability** refers to language-based audience adaptation strategies with which people adjust their languages in response to group differences (Gil-Lopez et al., 2018). Language style includes the relative use of functional words, emotional words and other linguistic categories to navigate multiple audiences (Bazarova et al., 2013). Birnholtz, Dixon, and Hancock (2012) labelled a similar strategy as the use of language, referring to the use of different language styles to maintain a positive impression. (5) **Giving ‘likes’** is the behaviour of clicking the ‘like’ button and is an acquisitive self-presentation strategy that helps build one’s desired image as a form of online gifting (Hong, Chen, & Li, 2017). Giving ‘likes’ is a kind of interpersonal interaction which reflects people’s intention to help their friends get the impression they want in front of others (Hong et al., 2017). (6) **Directedness** indicates that a message is targeted at a particular person (Liu & Kang, 2017). This is similar to the tags that an employee uses to tag other employees, allowing employees to judge others (Raban et al., 2017).

### 3.2. Affordances

Affordances are increasingly applied in information and communication technology (ICT) research in the organisational context (Rice et al., 2017). The concept of affordances was first proposed in ecological psychology by Gibson (1979), who defined it as the inherent functional attributes of a specific object generated in the relationship between participants and objects. Gibson (1979) believed that affordances are behavioural possibilities that need two entities but exist independently of participants’ perceptions. This concept is analogous to the ‘features’ or ‘attributes’ of communication tools proposed by media scholars (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987; Eveland, 2003; Tao & Bucy, 2007). An increasing number of scholars are showing interest in the affordances of social media from different perspectives. For example, Treem and Leonardi (2012) proposed four functional affordances in various social media types: visibility, editability, persistence, and association, which are closely related to the technical features of social media. Majchrzak, Kane, Azad and Faraj (2013) explored the social media affordances related to online knowledge sharing from the group level as meta-voicing, triggered attending, network-informed associating and generative role-taking.

With the widespread use of social media in organisations, the affordances of ESMPs provide technical support for employees’ online impression management (Fox & Vendemia, 2016). This study aims to clarify how affordances affect employees’ impression management to explore future research opportunities. We reviewed articles to investigate impression management on ESMPs from the perspective of

affordances and then identified the following six types of affordances related to impression management by leveraging the explanatory mechanisms involving affordances and impression management strategies (see Table 2 for details).

(1) **Visibility** refers to the possibility to view discussion contributions, public messages to others, network connections and positions and profile information (Berkelaar, 2017). (2) **Editability** denotes the ability to create or modify content before or after communication (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). (3) **Association** represents the ability to connect individuals with others, individuals with content or an actor with a presentation (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). (4) **Persistence** describes the relative permanence of communication in terms of viewing past information (e.g., comments, messages) (Fox & Mcewan, 2017). (5) **Personalisation** is the ability to direct a message to a specific individual or group as a communicative affordance (Fox & Mcewan, 2017). (6) **Information control** is a media affordance that affects an individual’s ability to regulate or restrict social information flow during interactions over a medium of interpersonal communication (Feaster, 2010).

## 4. Direct and indirect effects of affordances on employees’ impression management strategies

### 4.1. Direct effects

The affordances featured on ESMPs provide employees with the opportunity to strategically manage their impressions (Fox & Vendemia, 2016). Recent studies explored how the affordances of ESMPs shape employees’ impression management strategies (Pearce & Vitak, 2016). By reviewing the literature in this research stream, we first classified six types of affordances related to online impression management strategies. These six types are identified from the affordances directly studied in prior literature and synthesised from relevant studies with similar definitions of affordances. We then systematically reviewed the relationship between the six types of affordances and their corresponding online impression management strategies. Table 3 summarises the relationship between affordances and impression management strategies.

Visibility allows colleagues to judge employees through online information, which forms a wide range of monitoring (Berkelaar, 2014). Thus, employees will avoid showing a bad image in front of colleagues in response to such monitoring; they repair online images that colleagues may view negatively (Berkelaar, 2017) and delete some discomfort-causing user-generated content (Smock, 2010).

**Table 2**  
Category of ESMP Affordances in Impression Management.

Affordance	Methodology	Definition
Visibility (Berkelaar, 2017)	Case study	The possibility of viewing discussion contributions, public messages to others, network connections and position and profile information.
Editability (Treem & Leonardi, 2012)	Conceptual	The ability to create or modify content before or after communication.
Association (Treem & Leonardi, 2012)	Conceptual	The ability to connect individuals with individuals, individuals with content or an actor with a presentation.
Persistence (Fox & Mcewan, 2017)	Empirical	The relative permanence of communication with which users can view past information (e.g. comments, messages).
Personalisation (Fox & Mcewan, 2017)	Empirical	The ability to direct a message to a specific individual or group as a communicative affordance.
Information control (Feaster, 2010)	Empirical	A media affordance that affects an individual’s ability to regulate or restrict social information flow during interactions over a medium of interpersonal communication.

**Table 3**  
The Relationship between Affordances and Impression Management Strategies.

	Blending-in strategies				Standing-out strategies					
	Repudiative strategy	Subtractive strategy	Identity masking	Acceptor	Self-enhancement	Self-verification	Self-tagging	Linguistic style variability	Giving 'likes'	Directedness
Visibility	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	
Editability	✓	✓			✓		✓			✓
Association	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Persistence	✓	✓								
Personalisation					✓	✓				✓
Information control	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	

Communication visibility increases employees' cautiousness about speaking online, and they therefore choose to mask their true identities (DeAndrea, Van der Heide, & Easley, 2015). Information visibility offers employees an acceptable attitude without any objection in front of their colleagues (Berkelaar, 2017). Visibility allows employees to present themselves to colleagues. To build good impressions, employees post positive content related to themselves to gain respect (Olliermalaterre et al., 2013), create tags for themselves to help colleagues obtain a better understanding of themselves (Raban et al., 2017) and they give others 'likes' to establish contacts (Hong et al., 2017).

Editability allows employees to craft or revise published contents (Rice, 1987), which helps employees hide information they do not want to disclose, including denying negative characteristics (Rui & Stefanone, 2013) or deleting unfavourable contents (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Content editability allows employees to strategically select how to share personal information with others (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). For example, employees share their achievements to show their perfect selves or express negative emotions to show their true selves (Hunt et al., 2014). In addition, as a form of impression management, employees use self-tagging to highlight their characteristics (Allam, Bliemel, Spiteri, Blustein, & Ali-Hassan, 2019). Editability enables employees to create detailed information when communicating with different people (Gil-Lopez et al., 2018). For example, when facing different colleagues, they will use different language styles (Pennebaker & King, 1999) or send information to specific colleagues to establish close relationships (Bazarova, 2012).

Association helps employees to contact any colleagues on ESMPs (Pee, 2018). To make a good impression on colleagues, employees will avoid revealing their shortcomings, such as denying others' negative evaluations of them (Rui & Stefanone, 2013) or masking their identities to avoid conflicts when giving advice (DeAndrea et al., 2018). Additionally, employees will actively present themselves in front of others, such as posting positive or negative contents (Olliermalaterre et al., 2013), setting tags on themselves (Raban et al., 2017) or establishing intimate connections with others, such as using different language styles (Birnholtz, Dixon, & Hancock, 2012), giving 'likes' to others (Hong et al., 2017) and targeting information at a particular person (Liu & Kang, 2017).

Persistence implies that information on ESMPs does not disappear if it remains accessible (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). That is, colleagues can see the contents and comments posted by employees in the past. Therefore, employees will be concerned about their negative information records being discovered by colleagues, so they will choose to deny others' negative comments on themselves and delete unfavourable information (Smock, 2010).

Personalisation allows employees to target messages at only one person or group, which helps them manage their images in front of one person or group (Daft et al., 1987). They display positive aspects of work or life to gain favour (Gerhart & Sidorova, 2017), talk about their troubles to show their true selves (Hunt et al., 2014) or target information at a particular person to promote intimacy (Liu & Kang, 2017).

Information control helps people manage social information flow,

including expressive, privacy and image information control (Kuo et al., 2013). Expressive information control affordance is supported by specific social media features such as uploading a personal status, commenting, and clicking the 'like' button, allowing employees to choose better ways to build friendly relationships (Kuo et al., 2013). For example, employees post positive or negative content about themselves (Olliermalaterre et al., 2013), correct misconceptions about themselves in comments (Rui & Stefanone, 2013) and give 'likes' to colleagues (Hong et al., 2017). Privacy information control affordance is realised by privacy settings. Employees can use such settings to minimise embarrassment and conflicts (Kuo et al., 2013), such as deleting information that will have a negative impact (Rui & Stefanone, 2013) and masking their true identities (DeAndrea et al., 2018). Image information control affordance is reflected in media features such as avatars, nicknames, personal profiles, and others (Kuo et al., 2013). To deepen their colleagues' impression of themselves, employees will choose to set personal tags to show themselves (Raban et al., 2017).

#### 4.2. Indirect effects

In addition to the direct effects, affordances indirectly impact employees' impression management strategies. The positive impact of affordances on impression management strategies received much attention in previous studies, but there are also negative effects. We reorganised the positive and negative influencing mechanisms of affordances on employees' impression management strategies, which we discuss in detail below and summarise in Fig. 1. Unlike previous research, we extract the critical influencing mechanisms and uncover why affordances could negatively impact employees' impression management strategies.

##### 4.2.1. Positive effects

Previous studies explored mainly the positive effects of ESMPs' affordances on employees' use of impression management strategies from the perspective of network characteristics and psychological outcomes.

**4.2.1.1. Network characteristics.** We can explain the impact of ESMPs' affordances on employees' impression management strategies using network characteristics (Gerhart & Sidorova, 2017). Network characteristics represent the features of a person's social network, including online network size, online network density and perceived cognitive homogeneity (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). Online network size denotes the number of people in a person's online network (Gil-Lopez et al., 2018). Online network density is the extent to which members in an online social network are connected (Crabtree & Pillow, 2018). Perceived cognitive homogeneity represents the extent to which a person perceives members of his or her SNS network to share his or her views and beliefs (Gerhart & Sidorova, 2017). Table 4 shows which affordance could affect employees' use of different impression management strategies through network characteristics.

The visibility of ESMPs helps employees see what other people

publicly publish and understand their colleagues' careers and interests, which allows them to break organisational boundaries to build new relationships and increase their online network size (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Visibility helps employees understand others and increase interactions with others, thereby enhancing online network density (Majchrzak, Kane, Azad, & Faraj, 2013). Visibility helps employees observe the contents published by different colleagues in social networks; when the contents are consistent with their own views, they can help form employees' perception of cognitive homogeneity (Gerhart & Sidorova, 2017).

Association on ESMPs supports employees reach any colleagues on ESMPs, which helps them establish new relationships and increase the size of their online network (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Association can help employees make more convenient and frequent contacts with colleagues in good relationships or close working relationships, thereby increasing their online network density (Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2010).

Personalisation of ESMPs allows employees to transmit information to a specific person. It enables employees to have one-on-one interactions with colleagues in existing network relationships, increasing their online network density (Fox & Mcewan, 2017). In other words, personalisation makes information transmission more accurate and useful, facilitates closer work and life contacts between employees and colleagues, and enhances the depth and richness of their existing connections.

When employees have a large online network size, they will connect with more people. However, a more extensive online network will more easily expose their negative information. To address this problem, employees tend to adopt protective self-presentation strategies, such as explaining their negative news and deleting negative information (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). Simultaneously, employees with an extensive network size need to maintain their images to integrate themselves into a team, such as hiding their identity to express their views (DeAndrea et al., 2018) and accepting the work arrangement of colleagues (Berkelaar, 2017). A large online network size encourages employees to present themselves strategically (Binder, Howes, & Sutcliffe, 2009), such as posting their achievements (Rui & Stefanone, 2013), tagging themselves (Raban et al., 2017) and using different language styles with different

people (Gil-Lopez et al., 2018).

Colleagues with a higher online network density keeping closer contacts with specific people are more willing to share their positive information and negative emotions with them (Maksl & Young, 2013) and maintain intimacy through giving 'likes' (Hong et al., 2017) and targeting information at them (Liu & Kang, 2017).

Employees with a higher level of perceived cognitive homogeneity tend to trust the mutual understanding between them and their colleagues, so they are more willing to share their positive and negative contents on ESMPs (Gerhart & Sidorova, 2017). Furthermore, they may take the initiative to give 'likes' to these colleagues (Hong et al., 2017) and send specific information to them to deepen their impressions of themselves (Liu & Kang, 2017).

4.2.1.2. *Psychological outcomes.* Table 4 shows how other scholars explained the impact of ESMPs' affordances on employees' impression management strategies through psychological outcomes. Psychological outcomes refer to people's psychological responses to external stimuli, which involve self-esteem and perceived social support (Pentina & Zhang, 2017). Self-esteem represents one's appraisal of the value or worth of oneself (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). Perceived social support denotes the resources that employees perceive from their colleagues to enhance their well-being, including emotional support, esteem support, informational support, and network support (Jung, Song, & Vorderer, 2012).

Association of ESMPs can help promote employees' social interaction with others (Pee, 2018). Frequent online communication and social interaction increase employees' bonding capital and reduce their loneliness (Burke et al., 2010), positively affecting psychological outcomes such as self-esteem (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006). People with self-esteem avoid getting involved in adverse events to maintain their images, such as denying negative news about them and deleting uncomfortable contents on profile pages (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). People with a strong sense of self-esteem create positive images consciously and believe that self-presentation is essential, so they are more likely to strategically manage their general impressions (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). For instance, they tend to publish positive content (Crabtree & Pillow,

**Table 4**  
Positive Impacts of Affordances.

	Blending-in strategies				Standing-out strategies					
	Repudiative strategy	Subtractive strategy	Identity masking	Acceptor	Self-enhancement	Self-verification	Self-tagging	Linguistic style variability	Giving 'likes'	Directedness
<b>Visibility</b>	Online network size	Online network size	Online network size	Online network size	Online network size; Online network density; Perceived cognitive homogeneity	Online network density; Perceived cognitive homogeneity	Online network size	Online network size	Online network density; Perceived cognitive homogeneity	Online network density; Perceived cognitive homogeneity
<b>Editability</b>	No positive mediating variables.				Online network size; Online network density; Perceived social support	Online network density; Perceived social support	Online network size; Self-esteem	Online network size	Online network density; Perceived social support	Online network density; Perceived social support
<b>Association</b>	Online network size; Self-esteem	Online network size; Self-esteem	Online network size	Online network size						
<b>Persistence</b>	No positive mediating variables.				Online network density	Online network density			Online network density	Online network density
<b>Personalisation</b>										
<b>Information control</b>	No positive mediating variables.									

Notes: The variables corresponding to affordances and impression management strategies in the table are the positive mediating variables between affordances and impression management strategies.

2018) and associate their characteristics with labels (Raban et al., 2017).

Association helps employees build more extensive social networks and perceive more social support, such as accessing more information and getting emotional help (Troom & Leonardi, 2012). Employees who perceive a higher level of social support are more willing to share expressive information on ESMPs by posting their positive content and expressing their negative emotions (Pentina & Zhang, 2017). Employees who perceive a higher level of social support in online social networks prefer to interact with others to maintain their images, for instance, giving ‘likes’ to others (Hong et al., 2017) and sending messages to a specific person to enhance intimacy (Liu & Kang, 2017).

Most existing studies explored the impact of affordances on psychological outcomes and impression management strategies from the perspective of association. Future research can explore other types of affordances.

#### 4.2.2. Negative effects

The affordances of ESMPs affect employees’ use of different impression management strategies, both positively and negatively. We identify three negative effects: (1) privacy concern, (2) impression management concern, and (3) institutional logics contradiction. For ESMP users, privacy concerns emerge when users worry about the disclosure of their private information (Shin, 2010). Impression management concerns describe people’s concerns about the impressions they are making, especially when they disclose their problems to unfamiliar people (Zhu & Bao, 2018). Institutional logics contradictions refer to the conflicts between two types of logic: the logic of the profession and the logic of the corporation. The logic of the profession induces employees to engage in discussions with their colleagues for personal knowledge development. In contrast, the logic of the corporation inhibits employees from sharing too much information and knowledge with their colleagues to protect their status in the organisation (Oostervink, Agterberg, & Huysman, 2016). Table 5 summarises the specific affordances that can bring about these negative effects.

The visibility of ESMPs makes employees’ information visible to

many audiences, which to a certain extent causes the rapid flow of private information; some privacy risk problems may increase employees’ concerns about privacy issues (Bazarova et al., 2013). Since visibility exposes employees’ contents in public, they may worry about their impressions in other colleagues’ minds (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). The affordance of visibility allows employees to see what their peers are engaged in and join their discussions to share knowledge. However, the logic of corporations requires employees to excel in their work, so employees will reduce the expression of opinions and knowledge sharing to protect their status in the organisation, leading to institutional logics contradictions (Oostervink et al., 2016).

The association aspect of ESMPs enables colleagues in the online network to communicate with each other. Private information leakage in the communication process may cause privacy concerns (Bazarova et al., 2013). Association enables employees to conduct social interactions with different people, but communication in organisations is complex. Therefore, employees often worry about people’s impressions of them because of the contents they publish (Zhu & Bao, 2018). Association enables employees to communicate and share knowledge with their colleagues. Still, under the enterprise’s governance, employees will worry that too much expression of opinions and knowledge sharing may be detrimental to their career development, resulting in institutional logics contradictions (Oostervink et al., 2016).

The persistence of ESMPs allows the platform to store employees’ private information relatively permanently, so their colleagues can search, find, and notice them. Thus, employees may be concerned about their private information being revealed to their colleagues (Dhir, Kaur, Chen, & Pallesen, 2019). Persistence enables colleagues to view an employee’s past contents, which can make an employee worry that their negative information records will create a wrong impression among colleagues (Zhu & Bao, 2018).

Due to visibility and association, employees’ privacy concerns urge them to check and correct their inappropriate contents to protect their images. For instance, they try to justify the negative posts related to themselves and delete inappropriate content (Ranzini & Hoek, 2017).

**Table 5**  
Negative Impacts of Affordances.

	Blending-in strategies				Standing-out strategies					
	Repudiative strategy	Subtractive strategy	Identity masking	Acceptor	Self-enhancement	Self-verification	Self-tagging	Linguistic style variability	Giving ‘likes’	Directedness
<b>Visibility</b>	Privacy concern; Impression management concern	Privacy concern; Impression management concern			Privacy concern; Impression management concern; Institutional logics contradiction	Impression management concern		Privacy concern; Impression management concern; Institutional logics contradiction		
<b>Editability</b>	No negative mediating variables.									
<b>Association</b>	Privacy concern; Impression management concern	Privacy concern; Impression management concern			Privacy concern; Impression management concern; Institutional logics contradiction	Impression management concern		Privacy concern; Impression management concern; Institutional logics contradiction		
<b>Persistence</b>	Privacy concern; Impression management concern	Privacy concern; Impression management concern								
<b>Personalisation</b>	No negative mediating variables.									
<b>Information control</b>	No negative mediating variables.									

Notes: The variables corresponding to affordances and impression management strategies in the table are the negative mediating variables between affordances and impression management strategies.



Simultaneously, this privacy concern will push employees to strategically re-create their images when publishing content in the online network. By doing this, employees attempt to change their negative impressions because of privacy problems, including actively posting their positive contents and changing their language styles with different people (Ranzini & Hoek, 2017).

Employees' impression management concerns resulting from visibility, association and persistence motivates employees to observe how others react to their words and published content. Such concerns prompt them to manage their images wisely (Bazarova et al., 2013). For instance, they may deny their negative information and delete discomfort-causing contents to protect their images (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). They post their positive content to gain respect from others (Olliermalaterre et al., 2013) and use different language for different people to manage their impressions in different network relationships (Gil-Lopez et al., 2018). Furthermore, employees' concerns about impression management propel them to express their real negative emotions. This expression will allow them to create an authentic image to obtain help (Bazarova et al., 2013).

Institutional logics contradictions due to visibility and association urges employees to publish their positive work-related contents to meet the requirements of both professional logic and corporate logic. Meanwhile, institutional logics contradictions also encourage employees to use different language styles when communicating with various members represented by these two logics, and thus alleviate the conflicts between the two logics (Oostervink et al., 2016).

Employees' privacy concerns resulting from persistence encourages them to carefully review personal contents to manage their images, such as denying their bad characteristics published by others and deleting their own improper words (Vitak, 2015).

## 5. Contingent effects on the relationship between affordances and employees' impression management strategies

Previous studies considered the influence of individual motives on impression management strategies (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011), as well as the combination of individual boundary management and impression management to form new strategies to affect others' judgements (Olliermalaterre et al., 2013). However, it is still unclear how the interactions between individual motives and affordances and those between individual boundary management and affordances affect employees' online impression management strategies. Addressing the research gap, we propose some contingent effects of individual motives and individual boundary management on the relationship between affordances and employees' impression management strategies through a literature review, which helps to clarify the impact of employees' different needs on their use of affordances to manage their images. Individual motives and individual boundary management influence the relationship between affordances and employees' impression management strategies (see Fig. 1), which we review in the context of ESMPs as follows.

### 5.1. Individual motives

An individual's motives, including self-monitoring, affinity-seeking, and social comparison, critically affect employees' impression management. Table 6 shows how an individual's different motives moderate the relationship between affordances and employees' impression management strategies.

Self-monitoring motivates individuals to regulate their behaviour to showcase traits that are desirable and perceived favourably by others (Snyder, 1974). People with a higher level of self-monitoring have more frequent social comparisons with others and more desire to control their images and manage their impressions on others in social situations (Back & Snyder, 1988). At the same time, individuals with high scores in self-monitoring are better at strategic self-presentation and can adjust

their behaviours according to social situations (Berscheid, Graziano, Monson, & Dermer, 1976). Therefore, they are more willing to publish their positive content to create positive images by taking advantage of the affordance of information visibility on ESMPs (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). They are more motivated to use editability to publish their positive information and send messages with different language styles to other people to deepen their impressions (Ranzini & Hoek, 2017). They are more willing to use association for impression management, such as sharing positive messages with others (Gerhart & Sidorova, 2017) and applying different styles of language to impress different people (Birnholz et al., 2012). Personalisation can better stimulate high self-monitors to manage impressions from specific people, such as encouraging positive posts for their interests (Fox & Mcewan, 2017). The affordance of information control can further drive them to control information flow to obtain favourable comments on themselves, such as posting positive information to gain colleagues' favour (Feaster, 2010).

Affinity-seeking is the motivation for individuals to attempt to get others to like and to feel favourably toward them (Bell & Daly, 2016). People who seek affinity aspire to gain others' likes and positive endorsement through active social interactions (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). They are skilful at using a variety of affinity-seeking strategies to maintain or enhance their impressions in the hearts of others (Bell & Daly, 2016). Thus, information visibility of ESMPs is more likely to inspire strong affinity-seeking people to manage their images in public, such as writing positive posts (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011) and giving others 'likes' (Hong et al., 2017). People who are more active in affinity-seeking are more likely to use editability to edit positive information for their audience (Crabtree & Pillow, 2018). They are more motivated to fully use association to adopt a self-enhancement strategy and give 'likes' to colleagues (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). Personalisation can further stimulate them to publish achievements about themselves to be liked by specific people (Fox & Mcewan, 2017). Information control can better encourage them to upload positive content and give 'likes' to gain others' favour (Kuo et al., 2013).

Social comparison drives individuals to evaluate their opinions and abilities by comparing themselves to other people (Jung et al., 2012). People with a strong desire for social comparison tend to compare other people to themselves by reading other people's information and comments (Pavitt, 1994) to highlight the uniqueness and value in their contents for impression management (Jung et al., 2012). Hence, employees with a high degree of social comparison are more capable of exploiting ESMPs' affordances of visibility, editability, and information control to avoid their shortcomings and highlight their value. Notably, they will tend to deny their negative information and delete inappropriate contents (Rui & Stefanone, 2013), while releasing positive contents and setting labels for themselves (Raban et al., 2017). They are also more motivated to manage their images in an environment where they can communicate with anyone. For instance, they will want to rebut bad qualities in comments (Berkelaar, 2017), posting positive content to others and setting self-tags for others to see (Bazarova et al., 2013). Because of the persistence of information on ESMPs, they are more inclined to erase their negative footprints by refuting negative information and deleting inappropriate contents to repair their images (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). They can make better use of the affordance of personalisation to distribute positive content to specific colleagues, hoping to improve their colleagues' perceptions of them (Gerhart & Sidorova, 2017).

### 5.2. Individual boundary management

Individual boundary management refers to personal work and non-work boundary management, which describes how individuals coordinate between work and personal life (Kossek, Ruderman, Braddy, & Hannum, 2012). Boundary management is a common challenge in organisations. On the one hand, the professional domain usually has strong and clear norms and expectations for appropriate professional

**Table 6**  
Individual Motives Moderating Affordances-Impression Management Strategies.

	Blending-in strategies				Standing-out strategies					
	Repudiative strategy	Subtractive strategy	Identity masking	Acceptor	Self-enhancement	Self-verification	Self-tagging	Linguistic style variability	Giving 'likes'	Directedness
<b>Visibility</b>	Social comparison	Social comparison			Self-monitoring; Affinity-seeking; Social comparison		Social comparison		Affinity-seeking	
<b>Editability</b>	Social comparison	Social comparison			Self-monitoring; Affinity-seeking; Social comparison		Social comparison	Self-monitoring		
<b>Association</b>	Social comparison				Self-monitoring; Affinity-seeking; Social comparison		Social comparison	Self-monitoring	Affinity-seeking	
<b>Persistence</b>	Social comparison	Social comparison								
<b>Personalisation</b>					Self-monitoring; Affinity-seeking; Social comparison					
<b>Information control</b>	Social comparison	Social comparison			Self-monitoring; Affinity-seeking; Social comparison		Social comparison		Affinity-seeking	

Notes: The variables corresponding to affordances and impression management strategies in the table are the individual motives moderating the relationship between affordances and impression management strategies.

behaviours (Rothbard, Phillips, & Dumas, 2005). On the other hand, employees' career contacts may be willing to see different aspects of their personal lives because personal information sharing and frequent social interactions often increase their likability (Collins & Miller, 1994). Altman (1975) considered boundary management from the perspective of privacy and took multiple groups' settings to measure boundary control. Thus, individuals have unique preferences for separating or integrating work/non-work elements, which affect the strategies they use to manage conflicts between these two domains (Copp, 1997).

The use of individual boundary management can influence the use of impression management strategies. However, very few studies considered boundary management when discussing impression management. Individual boundary management includes work/non-work integration preference, work/non-work segmentation preference and multiple group management. Table 7 shows how different boundary management strategies affect the relationship between affordances and impression management strategies.

Work/non-work integration preference means that individuals prefer associating with more flexible and permeable boundaries that enable people to blend elements from the work domain with those from the non-work domain (Bulger, Matthews, & Hoffman, 2007). Employees with a high work/non-work integration preference do not mind others seeing their work and personal life on ESMPs. Instead, they are more willing to share information and manage such information to shape their images to deepen others' understanding of themselves and gain favour (Zoonen & Banghart, 2018). Thus, the affordances of visibility, editability, and information control on ESMPs allow employees who prefer to combine work and non-work to further hide their shortcomings to

integrate into teams and share their uniqueness to stand out. Specifically, they will tend to challenge others' opinions about their weaknesses, remove negative contents (Rui & Stefanone, 2013), distribute positive information and set self-tags (Berkelaar, 2017) to attract others' attention (Singh & Singh, 2012). Information persistence further encourages them to check and correct information related to themselves, such as clarifying others' misunderstandings about themselves and deleting inappropriate posts (Zoonen & Banghart, 2018). They are more motivated to take full advantage of the affordance of personalisation to express their positive emotions (Bazarova et al., 2013).

Work/non-work segmentation preference indicates that individuals desire to maintain rigid and impermeable boundaries to separate work elements from those in the non-work domain (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006). Employees with a stronger desire to divide work and non-work fields are more inclined to use ESMPs as professional tools. They are better at using some strategies to shape their professional images (Olliermalaterre et al., 2013). Hence, employees with a high work/non-work segmentation preference can fully use editability and association to manage their professional images. For instance, they tend to employ a diverse set of communication styles to interact with colleagues at different levels (Birmholtz et al., 2012) and share professional information with specific colleagues (Fox & Mcewan, 2017). Personalisation can better stimulate them to disclose their work information or job achievements to particular people to create a professional image to gain respect from colleagues (Liu & Kang, 2017).

Multiple group management is an effective means of private segmentation of social media content by setting up multiple groups (Stutzman & Hartzog, 2012). Employees who manage various groups do not worry too much about privacy problems. On the contrary, they are

**Table 7**  
Individual Boundary Management Moderating Affordances-Impression Management Strategies.

	Blending-in strategies				Standing-out strategies					
	Repudiative strategy	Subtractive strategy	Identity masking	Acceptor	Self-enhancement	Self-verification	Self-tagging	Linguistic style variability	Giving 'likes'	Directedness
Visibility	Work/ non-work integration preference	Work/ non-work integration preference			Work/ non-work integration preference		Work/ non-work integration preference			
Editability	Work/ non-work integration preference	Work/ non-work integration preference			Work/ non-work integration preference		Work/ non-work integration preference	Work/ non-work segmentation preference; Multiple groups management		Work/ non-work segmentation preference; Multiple groups management
Association	Work/ non-work integration preference				Work/ non-work integration preference		Work/ non-work integration preference	Work/ non-work segmentation preference; Multiple groups management		Work/ non-work segmentation preference; Multiple groups management
Persistence	Work/ non-work integration preference	Work/ non-work integration preference								
Personalisation					Work/ non-work integration preference					Work/ non-work segmentation preference; Multiple groups management
Information control	Work/ non-work integration preference	Work/ non-work integration preference			Work/ non-work integration preference		Work/ non-work integration preference			

Notes: The variables corresponding to affordances and impression management strategies in the table are the individual boundary management strategies moderating the relationship between affordances and impression management strategies.

more willing to share information on ESMPs and implement different impression management strategies for colleagues in different groups (Stutzman & Hartzog, 2012). Therefore, by editing information and associating with others on ESMPs, people with multiple groups tend to present separate images to different groups. With distinct language styles, they communicate with people in different positions (Gil-Lopez et al., 2018) and message certain groups (Liu & Kang, 2017). Personalisation is also more likely to motivate them to target information at specific groups or people to gain their colleagues' goodwill (Liu & Kang, 2017).

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1. Conceptual framework and research propositions

As a growing number of studies explored the impact of ESMPs' affordances on employees' impression management strategies, there is a need to comprehensively synthesise the potential of ESMPs to influence employees' impression management strategies from the perspective of affordances. The conceptual framework proposed in Fig. 1 provides an overview of the complex relationship between ESMPs' affordances and employees' impression management strategies. Two new categories of impression management strategies in the context of ESMPs were developed, namely blending-in strategies and standing-out strategies. They contain ten specific strategies (repudiative, subtractive, self-enhancement, self-verification, etc.) that help identify six types of affordances related to online impression management strategies. The framework clearly illustrates the direct and indirect effects of ESMPs' affordances on employees' impression management strategies. The

figure explains the indirect effects comprehensively from both the positive and negative perspectives. On the one hand, prior studies agreed that network characteristics (i.e., online network size, online network density, and perceived cognitive homogeneity) and psychological outcomes (i.e., self-esteem and perceived social support) promoted by affordances are essential to the adoption of impression management strategies. On the other hand, negative outcomes (i.e., privacy concern, impression management concern and institutional logics contradiction) caused by affordances are vital reasons that employees adopt impression management strategies. This study also considers the contingent effects of individual motives (i.e., self-monitoring, affinity-seeking and social comparison) and individual boundary management (i.e., work/non-work integration preference, work/non-work segmentation preference, and multiple groups management) on the relationship between affordances and impression management strategies because different people will shape different images based on various individual factors. To contribute to further advancements in this area, we next outline several research propositions which we developed from the literature review and that align with the relationships within the framework.

**Proposition 1.** *ESMPs' affordances directly affect employees' impression management strategies, represented by blending-in and standing-out strategies.*

As ESMPs' affordances allow employees to manage their online impression with sufficient technical support, recent research focused more on how ESMPs' affordances shape employees' impression management strategies. In previous studies, ESMPs' affordances are represented by visibility, editability, association, persistence, personalisation, and information control. These representations allow colleagues to

access (Berkelaar, 2014), permanently store (Treem & Leonardi, 2012) and easily modify (Rice, 1987) employees' information on the ESMP. The variety of ESMPs' affordances enables employees to establish connections with one or more colleagues (Daft et al., 1987; Pee, 2018) and manage the flow of their social information (Kuo et al., 2013). The findings from prior studies showed that ESMPs' affordances motivate employees to avoid projecting a bad image (Berkelaar, 2017) or actively present themselves to create good impressions (Olliermalaterre et al., 2013).

However, very few studies tested the relationship between ESMPs' affordances and employees' impression management strategies empirically. More research is needed to advance affordance and impression management theory and explore their intricate relationships.

**Proposition 2.** *ESMPs' affordances promote employees' impression management strategies (represented by the blending-in and standing-out strategies) through network characteristics.*

The visibility, association and personalisation of ESMPs allow employees to observe the contents posted by colleagues to understand their interests (Treem & Leonardi, 2012), establish connections with any colleagues (Pee, 2018) and transmit information to specific recipients (Fox & Mcewan, 2017). In these ways, employees can build new relationships to expand their online network size (Treem & Leonardi, 2012), interact more frequently and closely with colleagues to increase the density of their online network (Majchrzak et al., 2013) and identify colleagues with common interests and views to enhance perceived cognitive homogeneity (Gerhart & Sidorova, 2017). These network characteristics, driven by ESMPs' affordances, increase employees' exposure to more colleagues, thus enabling them to develop close and mutual understanding relationships with their colleagues. Such effects of network characteristics prompt employees to avoid projecting a negative image with the repudiative, subtractive, identity masking and acceptor strategies (DeAndrea et al., 2018; Rui & Stefanone, 2013). Instead, they are encouraged to show positive and real images to their colleagues using self-enhancement, self-verification, self-tagging, linguistic style variability, giving 'likes' and directedness (Gil-Lopez et al., 2018; Hong et al., 2017; Liu & Kang, 2017; Maks & Young, 2013).

However, very few studies examined the role of network characteristics in mediating the impact of ESMPs' affordances on employees' impression management strategies. Longitudinal case studies and empirical research should be conducted to understand how ESMPs' affordances drive network characteristics to promote employees' impression management strategies.

**Proposition 3.** *ESMPs' affordances promote employees' impression management strategies (represented by the blending-in and standing-out strategies) through psychological outcomes.*

Association on ESMPs enhances the social interactions between employees and colleagues. The resultant frequent interactions enable employees to reduce loneliness, realise their own values and improve their self-esteem (Burke et al., 2010; Valkenburg et al., 2006). People with a high level of self-esteem will adopt the repudiative or subtractive strategy to avoid getting involved in negative events (Rui & Stefanone, 2013), and they are more willing to show the positive sides of themselves with the strategies of self-enhancement and self-tagging (Crabtree & Pillow, 2018). The frequent interactions within the expanded social networks brought by association can also enhance employees' perceived social support, including informational and emotional support (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Employees who perceive a higher level of social support are more likely to present positive and true images with the strategies of self-enhancement, self-verification, giving 'likes' and directedness (Liu & Kang, 2017; Pentina & Zhang, 2017).

However, very few studies examined how psychological outcomes mediate the impact of ESMPs' affordances on employees' impression management strategies. Therefore, there is a need for longitudinal case studies and empirical analyses on this topic.

**Proposition 4.** *ESMPs' affordances promote employees' impression management strategies (represented by the blending-in and standing-out strategies) through negative outcomes.*

Some studies showed that although the visibility, association, and persistence of ESMPs afford employees certain benefits, they will also cause some negative outcomes (Bazarova et al., 2013). Due to these affordances, employees may hesitate to disclose their private information and display personal images because of privacy concerns (Shin, 2010) and the potential for negative impressions (Zhu & Bao, 2018). These affordances may also result in conflicts between the logic of the profession and the logic of the corporation, leading to a potential institutional logics contradiction (Oostervink et al., 2016). These negative outcomes caused by such affordances compel employees to pay more attention to impression management. Employees tend to adopt the repudiative and subtractive strategies to repair negative images (Ranzini & Hoek, 2017), the self-enhancement and linguistic style variability strategies to present positive images (Gil-Lopez et al., 2018; Olliermalaterre et al., 2013) and the self-verification strategy to present a real image to close colleagues (Bazarova et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, it is still unclear how negative outcomes mediate the influence of ESMPs' affordances on employees' impression management strategies, which can be another future research direction.

**Proposition 5.** *Individual motives interact with ESMPs' affordances to promote employees' impression management strategies (represented by the blending-in and standing-out strategies).*

Prior studies investigated the impact of individual motives on impression management strategies (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). However, it remains unclear how individual motives and affordances jointly affect employees' online impression management strategies in the context of ESMPs. This study proposes the contingent effects of individual motives on the relationship between affordances and employees' impression management strategies, which helps to understand the role of employees' motives. People with a higher level of self-monitoring are more anxious to control their images to gain others' favour (Back & Snyder, 1988). They are more willing to use the strategies of self-enhancement and linguistic style variability to present themselves positively by taking advantage of the affordances of visibility, editability, association, personalisation and information control (Ranzini & Hoek, 2017; Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). People with high affinity-seeking motivation are good at gaining endorsement through active social interactions (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). They are skilful at using the strategies of self-enhancement and giving 'likes' to show a positive image by utilising the affordances of visibility, editability, association, personalisation and information control (Crabtree & Pillow, 2018; Hong et al., 2017). People with a strong motivation for social comparison tend to show their advantages and conceal negative information by comparing themselves with others (Jung et al., 2012). They are more inclined to exploit the relevant affordances to avoid negative images with repudiative and subtractive strategies (Rui & Stefanone, 2013) and show positive images with self-enhancement and self-tagging (Raban et al., 2017).

Thus, it will be interesting for researchers to empirically validate how individual motives interact with ESMPs' affordances to promote employees' impression management strategies. It is vital to identify other critical individual motives and explore their moderating effects.

**Proposition 6.** *Individual boundary management interacts with ESMPs' affordances to promote employees' impression management strategies (represented by the blending-in and standing-out strategies).*

Previous studies considered how individual boundary management and impression management jointly form new strategies to affect others' judgements (Olliermalaterre et al., 2013), but it is still unclear how individual boundary management interacts with affordances to impact employees' online impression management strategies in the context of

ESMPs. This study proposes the contingent effects of individual boundary management on the relationship between affordances and employees' impression management strategies, which helps to clarify the role of employees' boundary management preferences. People who have work/non-work integration preferences are more willing to share work and personal life information and pay attention to removing negative information (Zoonen & Banghart, 2018). They tend to adopt the repudiative and subtractive strategies to hide their shortcomings and use the self-enhancement and self-tagging strategies to manifest their values by utilising the relevant affordances (e.g., visibility, editability, association, persistence, personalisation and information control) (Berkeelaar, 2017; Rui & Stefanone, 2013). People with work/non-work segmentation preference desire to divide work and non-work fields and regard ESMPs as professional tools to shape their professional images (Olliermalaterre et al., 2013). They are inclined to exploit the affordances of editability, association and personalisation to share professional information with the linguistic style variability and directedness strategies (Birnholtz et al., 2012; Fox & Mcewan, 2017). People who prefer multiple group management have few privacy concerns about sharing information in different groups (Stutzman & Hartzog, 2012). They are more willing to adopt the strategies of linguistic style variability and directedness to present different images by using the affordances of editability, association and personalisation (Gil-Lopez et al., 2018; Liu & Kang, 2017).

Therefore, it is of great significance for researchers to empirically validate how individual boundary management interacts with ESMPs' affordances to promote employees' impression management strategies. It is also necessary to identify other critical individual boundary management preferences and explore their moderating effects.

### 6.2. Theoretical implications

Previous studies on impression management strategies focused mainly on offline strategies, while online impression management strategies remained scattered as very few scholars aimed to classify them. By reviewing the literature on impression management in the context of enterprise social media according to the two categories of employees' impression management strategies—blending-in and standing-out—in the workplace proposed by Lynch and Rodell (2018), we reclassified various employees' online impression management strategies and extended their application scope. Our classification is of great significance to the theoretical development and further study of impression management strategies.

We reviewed and expanded previous studies and proposed a conceptual framework to illustrate the impact of ESMPs' affordances on employees' impression management strategies. In addition to the direct effects, we also summarised the mechanisms of the indirect effects from the positive and negative perspectives. While previous studies considered the influence of individual motives on impression management strategies (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011) and the collective impact of individual boundary management and impression management (Olliermalaterre et al., 2013), it remains unclear how the interactions between individual motives and affordances and those between individual boundary management and affordances influence employees' online impression management strategies. Thus, this study investigated the moderating effects of individual motives and individual boundary management on the relationship between affordances and impression management strategies through a literature review. Our systematic literature review is mostly conceptual and without supporting empirical tests, which provides opportunities for future studies to conduct empirical analyses to verify our proposed framework based on practical evidence. Additionally, although previous studies on ESMPs' affordances examined their impact on work-related outcomes, such as knowledge sharing (Pee, 2018; Sun, Zhou, Jeyaraj, Shang, & Hu, 2019), job performance (Chen, Wei, Davison, & Rice, 2019) and creative performance (Sun, Wang, & Jeyaraj, 2020), very few of them are related to

employees' impression management. The six types of affordances identified by our research that influence impression management strategies on ESMPs can help advance the existing affordance theory. In particular, the findings from our review suggest new ways to explore the relationship between ESMPs' affordances and impression management. Future research can investigate the direct effects of ESMPs' affordances on impression management as well as how ESMPs' affordances impact impression management through positive indirect effects (network characteristics and psychological outcomes) and negative indirect effects. Our conceptual framework lays a solid foundation for further developing other models.

### 6.3. Practical implications

This study has three practical implications. First, it summarised and introduced employees' impression management strategies on ESMPs, which helps employees use blending-in strategies (such as denying or deleting negative or inappropriate information, obscuring online identities and accepting others' requirements) to avoid shortcomings and integrate themselves into teams, and apply standing-out strategies (such as showing themselves in a positive manner, expressing their true emotions, assigning tags to themselves, using different language for different audiences, giving 'likes' and sending messages to specific people) to present themselves and shape a positive image. Employees' impression management is crucial in organisations, which is conducive to effective work communication and helps employees gain respect and favour from colleagues, thereby improving their sense of self-fulfilment and organisational belonging. This study also shows that people who differ in their selection of blending-in and standing-out strategies vary by individual motives and individual boundary management preferences. Employees may use these findings to choose appropriate impression management strategies based on their own characteristics to shape their own images.

Second, this study captures the influencing mechanisms of affordances on employees' impression management strategies, including the direct effects and positive and negative indirect effects. Managers should consider different the influencing mechanisms and facilitate impression management accordingly. They can promote the use of ESMPs in their organisations and guide employees to use ESMPs' visibility, editability, association, persistence, personalisation and information control to expand their online network size, increase online network density, gain a sense of identity, improve self-esteem, obtain social support and stimulate the adoption of blending-in and standing-out strategies to manage impressions strategically. At the same time, managers also need to regulate ESMPs to avoid the negative effects of ESMPs' affordances. For example, managers can formulate ESMP-related policies to help employees to use ESMPs reasonably, including the reasonable use of both work and social aspects and appropriate ESMPs use time to reduce employees' privacy concerns and impression management concerns. Managers also need to encourage employees to share knowledge in work-related fields to reduce the institutional logics contradiction. All these actions can inspire employees to present themselves better. In addition, this study points out that people with different motivations and boundary management preferences will adopt different strategies to manage their own images, which helps managers better understand employees' choices and guide them to adopt appropriate impression management strategies according to their different characteristics.

Third, we propose the contingent effects of individual motives and individual boundary management on the relationship between affordances and employees' impression management strategies. Individuals with different motives and different boundary management strategies will display different images, which implies that they will use different impression management strategies to manage their images by taking advantage of ESMPs' affordances. Therefore, ESMP developers should design more functions to meet employees' needs to motivate employees to manage their images better. For example, employees with a high level

of self-monitoring and affinity-seeking and a preference for social comparison and work/non-work integration will share more important and more positive information, so ESMPs' developers can design functions such as a circle of colleagues so that employees can post their updates and be visible to more colleagues, and design reward systems with points to trigger the sharing of valuable information among employees. ESMP developers can also design homepage tag settings so that employees can position their images and design the functions of 'likes', 'comments' and '@' to help employees project their images to specific people. Those who prefer work/non-work segmentation and multiple groups management will show different images to different audiences, so ESMPs' developers can design functions such as group management to enable employees to control information flow. In addition, ESMP developers need to design functions such as 'message withdrawal', 'information deletion', 'anonymity' and 'only visible to themselves' to reduce employees' privacy concerns and impression management concerns.

#### 6.4. Limitations and future directions

This study still has a few limitations, which provide new opportunities for future research. First, we proposed a literature review research framework at only the conceptual level. Future research can consider extending this conceptual framework to empirical studies, case studies, and even field experiments. Furthermore, in addition to collecting data through a questionnaire survey on employees, scholars can use second-hand data on ESMPs for research.

Second, we classified the positive and negative effects of affordances and their impacts on employees' impression management strategies, but there may exist reciprocal causation among them. For example, employees' impression management strategies may affect online network size, online network density, and perceived social support. Therefore, future research can further examine such relationships.

Third, this study discusses the positive and negative effects of affordances on impression management strategies separately. Thus, future research could explore the contradictory influencing mechanism of affordances on impression management strategies simultaneously.

## 7. Conclusions

The widespread use of ESMPs in organisations provides employees with digital arenas for self-presentation, enabling them to construct and maintain their online images. This study aimed to provide a comprehensive literature review to understand the potential impact of ESMPs on employees' various impression management strategies from the perspective of affordances. By collecting 80 studies on ESMPs' affordances and impression management and reviewing them systematically, we reclassified employees' impression management strategies in terms of ESMPs into the blending-in and standing-out strategies. We further proposed a conceptual framework and research propositions to show that ESMPs' affordances will not only directly affect employees' impression management strategies but also have positive and negative indirect impacts on them. Furthermore, individual motives and boundary management will bring potential contingent effects on the relationship between affordances and employees' impression management strategies.

This research provides valuable implications for research and practice. In the context of ESMPs, the reclassification of impression management strategies and the identification of affordances help promote the development of impression management and affordance theories. We proposed a conceptual framework and research propositions that future studies could verify using primary and secondary data. This study also pointed out the main limitations of the existing research and identified fruitful directions for future research.

Based on our results, employees can adopt blending-in and standing-out strategies to shape their images to enhance colleagues' respect and

favour. This study can help managers understand the influencing mechanisms of affordances on employees' impression management strategies and how employees with different characteristics choose specific impression management strategies. Managers can thus develop guidance and policies on the use of ESMPs. Additionally, ESMP developers can use our results to design various technical functions to meet employees' needs to motivate employees to better manage their images.

## Acknowledgements

This work was supported by grants awarded by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (71772162), Zhejiang Provincial Philosophy and Social Sciences Leading Talent Cultivation Project (21QNYC14ZD), and Project of Key Research Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at Universities-Modern Business Research Center of Zhejiang Gongshang University (2020SMYJ03ZC), Special Funds Project for Promoting the Level of Running Local Colleges and Universities in Zhejiang Province (Interdisciplinary Innovation Team Building of Internet and Management Change). This research is the achievement of New Key Specialized Think Tank of Zhejiang Province (Zheshang Research Institute).

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**Yuan Sun** is a Professor at Zhejiang Gongshang University, China. His main research interests include IT/IS usage, IT/IS Innovation, enterprise social media and electronic commerce. His research has been published in various journals, such as *Information & Management*, *Journal of Enterprise Information Management*, *International Journal of Information Management*, *Enterprise Information Systems*, *Electronic Markets*, *Computers in Human Behavior*, *Computers in Industry*, *Computers & Education*, *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, and *Journal of Computer Information Systems*. Prof. Sun is currently serving as a Senior Editor for *Information Technology & People*, and an Associate Editor for *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research* and *Journal of Global Information Management*. He is a member of the council of the China Association for Information Systems.

**Shuyue Fang** is a student at the School of Business Administration, Zhejiang Gongshang University, China. Her research focuses on impression management, enterprise social media and online virtual community.

**Zuopeng (Justin) Zhang** is a faculty member in the Coggin College of Business at University of North Florida. He was previously an Associate Professor of Management, Information Systems, and Analytics at State University of New York at Plattsburgh. He received his Ph.D. in Business Administration with a concentration on Management Science and Information Systems from Pennsylvania State University, University Park. His research interests include economics of information systems, knowledge management, electronic business, business process management, information security, and social networking. He is the editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Global Information Management*, an ABET program evaluator, and an IEEE senior member.