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## Full length article

# Exposing one's identity: Social judgments of colleagues' traits can influence employees' Facebook boundary management



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## ABSTRACT

Research has shown that the willingness to interact with colleagues in offline contexts mostly depends on morality traits. However, little is known about how social judgments of traits can influence online intentions to interact with colleagues. Specifically, we investigated the effects of colleagues' morality, sociability, and competence traits on employees' boundary management on Facebook. An experiment ( $N = 289$ ) was conducted using a (morality: high vs low) by 2 (sociability: high vs low) by 2 (competence: high vs low) design. Results revealed that employees' preference to separate (vs. integrate) professional and private contacts on Facebook was determined by both morality and sociability traits, whereas no effects of competence traits were found.

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## 1. Introduction

The emergence of Social Network Sites (SNS), and of Facebook in particular, has brought about important opportunities for users to make, and maintain, connections with people from different parts of their lives. This has come with great potential for users to participate in the social capital of their personal and professional networks (Ellison, Gibbs, & Weber, 2015; Steinfield, DiMicco, Ellison, & Lampe, 2009), but also with the difficulty of presenting themselves in ways that could be both appropriate and recognizable within the different domains of their lives (Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard, & Berg, 2013; Van Dijck, 2013). According to Marwick and Boyd (2010), users of SNS experience a “context collapse”, i.e. they respond to the need to appeal to networks from different parts of one's life by unifying their audiences and representing themselves as a “common denominator” of different identities.

Especially as the appeal of SNS has extended to adult and professional users, managing the online boundary between work and private life has become increasingly difficult. In fact, whilst specific norms apply in work contexts concerning what is considered to be

professional behavior (Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006), no guidelines exist online. On the one hand, disclosing private information on SNS means extending the ownership of such information to a variegated audience that includes professional contacts (Frampton & Child, 2013), which can lead to feelings of boundary turbulence, if not full boundary violation (De Groot & Vik, 2017). Some organizations encourage employees to be restrictive in the private information that they share with colleagues, thereby influencing employees' decisions regarding their SNS network (Frampton & Child, 2013). Occasionally, organizations will determine through regulations the limits of employees' audiences (Skeels & Grudin, 2009). On the other hand, the disclosure of personal information can also promote stronger feelings of likability and connectedness among one's colleagues (Collins & Miller, 1994; Utz, 2015). Recent research has even linked the inclusion of professional contacts within employees' SNS to increased job satisfaction (Hanna, Kee, & Robertson, 2017; Robertson & Kee, 2017) and job performance (Huang & Liu, 2017). The type of effort employees make whilst using SNS is therefore one of boundary management, where they determine the degree of permeability of the boundaries they set between private and professional identities (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000), deciding thereby on how separate (versus integrate) they should be (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013).

The willingness of employees to integrate professional and

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private identities is likely to depend, among other factors, on their perception of the personality traits of their colleagues. Forming an impression of the traits of others is a basic and essential process that underlies interpersonal interactions, as these impressions can help people to comprise expectations of the benefits and costs that an interaction with other individuals can bring them (Asch, 1946; Ybarra, Chan, & Park, 2001). Due to the focus of SNS on interpersonal interactions, people's social judgments of others' traits might also be relevant in SNS contexts, given that these traits could inform people about the risks or benefits that are associated with the disclosure of personal information (Gibbs, Ellison, & Lai, 2011; Gross & Acquisti, 2005; Taddei & Contena, 2013; Wang et al., 2011).

Similarly, when the online boundary between one's professional and private life is crossed due to the inclusion of colleagues in SNS networks, the impression of these colleagues' traits might provide people an indication of the severity of the consequences when one accidentally fails to comply to professional norms online. Indeed, research has indicated that employees experience tensions when mixing professional and private identities due to concerns about, for example, embarrassing reactions from family and friends or inadvertently disclosing company-confidential knowledge (Skeels & Grudin, 2009). In the current research we aim to address the possible influence of colleagues' personality traits on employees' decision to separate (or integrate) professional and private identity on Facebook. Supporting our hypotheses with theories of boundary management and social judgment, and basing our analyses on an experiment ran on a sample of 289 participants, we wish to contribute to the existing body of research on online boundary management.

### 1.1. Contributions of the current research

The emergence of SNS like Facebook, and the growth in popularity of their app-based version, have had a substantial effect in what Ashforth et al. (2000; p.474) defined as the "permeability" of the boundary between private and professional lives, i.e., "the degree to which a role allows one to be physically located in the role's domain but psychologically and/or behaviorally involved in another role". This happens largely through SNS-based interaction: Professional users are facilitated in exchanging information with the multiple constituencies to which they belong, negotiating through their different expectations (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). However, especially with Facebook, previous research has also identified its notifications and requests of action as an incentive to task-switch between work and leisure, increasing the permeability of the boundary in-between (Rosen, Carrier, & Cheever, 2013). The number of studies that focus on employees' use of social technologies is growing (El Ouiridi, El Ouiridi, Segers, & Henderickx, 2015). For example, research has focused on the link between employees' online self-disclosure strategies and their perceived likeability (Batenburg & Bartels, 2017), and on the prevalence and function of work-related topics in tweets (Van Zoonen, Verhoeven, & Vliegthart, 2016). Nevertheless, several research gaps can be observed in the literature on online boundary management. For example, whereas research has separately addressed the impact of occupational pressure on offline private lives (Rothbard, Phillips, & Dumas, 2005), and the management of online boundaries in samples consisting of various groups (e.g., students; Karl & Peluchette, 2011; teenager hospital patients; Rosen et al., 2013; Van Der Velden & El Emam, 2013), few studies have actually investigated online boundary management by employees (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). Moreover, empirical questions regarding which factors can contribute to employees' decisions to separate their professional and private identities online thus far remain unanswered. The current research aims to extend the understanding of online

boundary management by specifically focusing on the tension between identities that employees might experience when using Facebook, and whether perceptions of colleagues' traits might impact this process.

Furthermore, the current research also contributes to social judgment research by examining the effects of perceived personality traits of others in a Facebook context, in which people are often faced with diluted boundaries between different groups with which they identify (Lampinen, Tamminen, & Oulasvirta, 2009; Marwick & boyd, 2010; Tufekci, 2008). Most users of Facebook are likely to have contacts in their network that are members of different groups and that thereby represent different aspects of users' life domains. Consequently, it can be challenging for Facebook users to present themselves in a way that is consistent with the norms and expectations of all the groups that are represented in their network. Whereas previous research has primarily focused on the effects of social judgments in offline contexts (Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014; Leach, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2007; Van Prooijen & Ellemers, 2015)—where users' life domains are less likely to constantly collide and traits of a single individual or group tend to be considered—it can be argued that the role of social judgments might be more complex in a Facebook context due to the often mixed audience, as users might consider how Facebook interactions with members of one group could be evaluated by members of other groups.

Finally, social judgment research has thus far tended to center on which impressions we form of groups with varying traits, how inclusion in these groups can affect our identity, and whether we are willing to interact with group members (Brambilla, Sacchi, Pagliaro, & Ellemers, 2013; Leach et al., 2007). The current study, however, expands this line of research by focusing on employees' willingness to *engage in online self-disclosure* to a work team of which they have formed an impression. Specifically, we examine whether people are willing to expose themselves on Facebook to work team members with whom they are also expected to interact in a professional context. There is some evidence to suggest that the social judgments of traits might promote different effects when people anticipate on interactions with a group—which reflects a basic goal of Facebook use—than when people have to evaluate a group. For example, a recent study revealed that the evaluation of a work team and the physiological responses during the anticipation of a team decision-making task were predicted by different perceived traits (Van Prooijen, Ellemers, Van Der Lee, & Scheepers, 2016). This could imply that different traits might promote the tendency to separate or integrate professional and private identities than the traits that thus far have been shown to dominate offline group evaluations.

### 1.2. Social judgment dimensions

People routinely engage in processes to form an impression of the traits of other individuals and groups (Abele, Cuddy, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2008; Rosenberg, Nelson, & Vivekananthan, 1968; Wojciszke, 2005). The fundamental dimensions underlying these social judgments have extensively been examined in previous studies (Abele et al., 2008; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). Two core dimensions tend to be identified in most of these studies: Warmth, which reflects how a person functions in social relationships (e.g., trustworthiness, friendliness, tolerance); and competence, which reflects the achievements and abilities of a person (e.g., capability, skillfulness, intelligence; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008). Warmth provides an indication of whether others have beneficial or harmful intentions toward us, while competence indicates whether others have the ability to pursue and fulfill their intentions (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002).

However, other research has shown that warmth is actually a composite variable consisting of two theoretically and empirically distinct components that are commonly conflated: Morality and sociability (Goodwin et al., 2014; Leach et al., 2007). Whereas sociability refers to people's willingness to form connections to and engage with others, morality refers to the perceived rightness of social behavior (Ellemers, Pagliaro, & Barreto, 2013). Thus, although morality and sociability can both be seen as falling into a general 'social goodness' dimension (Rosenberg et al., 1968), these components should nevertheless be operationalized as separable dimensions of social judgment. People might be sociable (e.g., likeable, friendly) toward others while also being immoral (e.g., untrustworthy, dishonest), and vice versa (Leach et al., 2007). The current research therefore focuses on the influence of three (rather than two) dimensions of social judgment (i.e., morality, sociability and competence) on online boundary management.

### 1.3. Consequences of social judgments

Research has consistently shown that morality is a more important determinant of whether we desire to belong to a group than is sociability or competence (Ellemers et al., 2013; Leach et al., 2007). People are more interested in information regarding morality traits than in information regarding sociability or competence traits when they form an impression of individuals and groups, possibly because engaging with immoral others can lead to harmful consequences for themselves (Brambilla, Rusconi, Sacchi, & Cherubini, 2011; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). In line with this reasoning, research has shown that people are more prone to recognize trustworthiness in faces than sociability or competence (Willis & Todorov, 2006). The detection of moral traits is likely to inform people about others' intentions, which in turn has been argued to serve as a fundamental mechanism for human survival (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992).

Furthermore, morality has a stronger impact on group identification, group pride, and overall evaluations of the groups to which we belong than do sociability and competence (Leach et al., 2007). Similar effects have been obtained when examining behavioral intentions: People are more likely to adapt their behavior to morality-based group norms than to competence-based group norms (Ellemers, Pagliaro, Barreto, & Leach, 2008; Pagliaro, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2011), and people's willingness to interact with others depends on their morality rather than their sociability or competence levels (Brambilla et al., 2013). Even when people have to evaluate organizational contexts—which tend to be oriented toward competence-related traits—morality has nevertheless shown to be a stronger predictor of perceived organizational attractiveness as a potential employer and of work team attractiveness than did competence (Van Prooijen & Ellemers, 2015).

Thus, previous research has repeatedly shown that morality has a stronger impact on how people evaluate others than sociability or competence (Ellemers et al., 2013; Leach et al., 2007). Nevertheless, few studies have addressed the role of impression formation processes in an online context. There is some evidence to suggest that morality also plays an important role in SNS settings. For example, the trustworthiness (a morality trait; Leach et al., 2007) of other SNS users is a key factor in content sharing on SNS (Kim & Ahmad, 2013; Kim & Phalak, 2012), and has been shown to function as an antecedent to user self-disclosure (Henderson & Gilding, 2004). We therefore expect that, similar to offline contexts, morality will also be considered to be a more important source of value than competence in SNS settings. However, in contrast to offline contexts, we also predict that sociability will play an equally important role in SNS settings as morality. We will elaborate on this prediction in the following section. Thus, we hypothesize that:

**H1.** (a) Morality of colleagues has an impact on the preference to separate professional and private identities, whereas (b) competence of colleagues does not have an impact on the preference to separate professional and private identities.

### 1.4. The association between sociability and motivations to engage on Facebook

Research has identified different motivations behind Facebook use (Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011), highlighting however an overarching need for users to connect to others and build a social relationship with them (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Previous studies have in fact highlighted the potential of Facebook to generate social capital among users (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011; Ellison et al., 2007; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009), strengthening their connections and providing them with a feeling of mutual support. Facebook can also be the source of social validation for users (Bazarova & Choi, 2014), as messages from contacts are often supportive and friendly (Lu & Hampton, 2016; Sas, Dix, Hart, & Su, 2009). This, in turn, can promote a sense of group belonging among Facebook users (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012).

It can be argued that Facebook contacts have the potential to fulfill the socialization needs of the Facebook user if they are sociable. The dominating motives underlying Facebook use are directly associated with sociability traits, which reflect the ability to connect with others (Ellemers et al., 2013). Moreover, when Facebook contacts are not sociable, it could be less likely that they will participate in supportive activities that most users are hoping for, such as the liking of or offering a friendly response to the user's messages. Although sociability has shown to have little impact on the evaluation of groups (Brambilla et al., 2013; Leach et al., 2007), it can be expected that—considering the centrality of sociability in Facebook contexts—sociability might be a key characteristic that Facebook users value in their friends.

We suggest that the importance of sociability is likely to also apply when colleagues send a friendship request. Although little research has focused on which motives promote the use of Facebook in a work context, results from a study by Skeels and Grudin (2009) suggest that building stronger and more personal relationships with colleagues is a key reason for employees to integrate identities on Facebook. Similarly, in offline work contexts, people prefer to connect with a friendly but incompetent colleague rather than a competent unfriendly colleague, even if a performance-related goal is being pursued (Casciaro & Lobo, 2005). We therefore expect that the sociability of colleagues is an important predictor of the preference to separate or integrate one's professional and private identities:

**H2.** High levels of colleagues' sociability will lead to lower preference to separate professional and private identities than low levels of colleagues' sociability.

Moreover, it is likely that employees will value morality and sociability of colleagues equally when managing their boundaries on Facebook. Compared to offline contexts, employees might be more demanding in terms of the traits that they desire to observe in others when they determine whether they are willing to interact with these others online. Whereas morality functions as an essential indication of the potential benefits or dangers that such an interaction can offer (Brambilla et al., 2011; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987), sociability can be perceived to be a central resource that is needed in SNS contexts. Thus, we predict that employees require colleagues to be both moral *and* sociable before they opt for an integration of professional and private identities on Facebook. Specifically, we hypothesize the following:



**H3.** People are least likely to prefer a separation of professional and private identities when colleagues have high levels of morality and high levels of sociability.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

A convenience (snowball) sampling technique was used to recruit participants. The questionnaire was distributed online through various platforms (primarily Facebook) in May 2016. All items were formulated in Dutch. Participants were invited to fill in the online questionnaire if they were employed. The data of 289 participants (214 females, 75 males) were suitable for analyses. Participants who did not complete the online questionnaire or who needed more than one hour to complete it were excluded from the sample. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 70 years ( $M = 29.67$ ,  $SD = 11.27$ ). The majority of participants held a permanent (52.2%) or a fixed-term employment contract (33.6%). A few participants indicated that they worked on an on-call basis (10.7%). Participants worked 26.44 h per week on average ( $SD = 14.02$ ). Participation in the study was on a voluntary basis.

### 2.2. Design and procedure

A 2 (morality: high vs low) by 2 (sociability: high vs low) by 2 (competence: high vs low) between-subjects design was used to test the hypotheses. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight conditions. The control variables 'privacy concerns' and 'Facebook use' were first assessed (see the 'Materials' section for more details). After completing the control measures, a scenario was introduced to the participants, in which the features of colleagues were described. This scenario contained the experimental manipulation. The outcome measure 'preference for differentiation' was then assessed, which was followed by demographic questions. Items were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), unless indicated otherwise. All measures were constructed from the constitutive averaged items.

### 2.3. Materials

#### 2.3.1. Experimental manipulation

A scenario was used to manipulate the features of colleagues. The traits that were adopted to represent the morality, sociability and competence features were based on Leach et al. (2007), who showed that these features are theoretically and empirically distinct. In each scenario, participants were explicitly asked to imagine that they worked in close collaboration with the colleagues, and that they had worked for the organization for some time. Morality was manipulated by stating: "You perceive your colleagues as (un) trustworthy. You feel that they are (dis) honest about their intentions and you experience the contact that you have with your colleagues as (in) sincere." Sociability was manipulated by the following description: "Your colleagues are (un) likeable.

Your colleagues are (un) friendly and warm (cold) toward you when you have a conversation with them." Finally, competence was manipulated by stating: "You see your colleagues as (in) competent. Your colleagues are (not) intelligent and (un) skilled in the completion of their tasks." The traits were positively or negatively framed depending on the experimental condition.

#### 2.3.2. Manipulation checks

The experimental manipulations were checked with 3 items. Participants were asked to indicate how they estimated the morality, friendliness, and competence of the colleagues (1 = *very low*, 7 = *very high*).

#### 2.3.3. Outcome variable

Participants' preference to differentiate between colleagues and private contacts on Facebook was assessed with eight items,  $\alpha = 0.87$ . Example items are: "I would accept a friendship request from one of these colleagues on Facebook" and "I would separate these colleagues from my private contacts on Facebook." Items were recoded such that a high score reflects a stronger preference to distinguish between private contacts and colleagues. The list of items of this measure is presented in Table 1.

A Principal Component Analysis (PCA) using an oblique (oblimin) rotation was conducted to assess the dimensionality of the outcome variable. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin was .89, which indicates that the sampling was adequate for the PCA to yield reliable factors. Bartlett's test of sphericity suggested that the correlations between items were sufficiently large,  $\chi^2(28) = 1078.09$ ,  $p < .001$ . All items loaded on one factor, as intended. The factor explained 53.73 of the total variance, and had an eigenvalue of 4.30.

#### 2.3.4. Covariates

Previous research has shown that the use of social network sites and concerns about online privacy can impact people's online boundary management (Fieseler, Meckel, & Ranzini, 2015). We will therefore examine whether the analysis of the outcome variable should control for these variables. Six items (adapted from Vitak, 2015) were used to assess privacy concerns,  $\alpha = 0.85$ . An example item is: "I am worried that the personal information that I share on Facebook might be used for other purposes without my approval." Facebook use was measured with three items (adapted from the Facebook Intensity Scale; Ellison et al., 2007),  $\alpha = 0.75$ , with items such as: "I feel out of touch when I have not logged onto Facebook for a while." An overview of the control variable items is presented in Table 2.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Manipulation checks

The experimental manipulations were checked using a series of 2 (morality: high vs low) by 2 (sociability: high vs low) by 2 (competence: high vs low) analyses of variance. The analysis of

**Table 1**  
Outcome variable items.

Preference for differentiation
1. I would accept a friendship request from one of these colleagues on Facebook
2. I would feel uncomfortable if one of these colleagues would send me a friendship request on Facebook
3. I would separate these colleagues from my private contacts on Facebook
4. I would allow these colleagues to see all the information that I share on Facebook
5. I would use a separate profile for these colleagues on Facebook
6. I would not make a distinction between private contacts and these colleagues when it concerns the information that I share on Facebook
7. I would shield some of the personal information on Facebook from these colleagues
8. I would more carefully select the information that I share on Facebook with these colleagues

**Table 2**  
Control variable items.

Privacy concerns
<i>I am worried that the personal information that I share on Facebook ...</i>
1. Might be used for other purposes without my approval
2. Is unintentionally publicly visible
3. Is used by others in a way that I did not anticipate
4. Is unintentionally made public
5. Will be hacked
6. Can be sold to companies for marketing purposes
Facebook use
1. I use Facebook daily
2. I would be sorry if Facebook shut down
3. I feel out of touch when I have not logged onto Facebook for a while

estimated morality of colleagues yielded a main effect morality,  $F(1, 281) = 112.64, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.29$ . Participants estimated colleagues to be more moral in the high morality condition ( $M = 4.50, SD = 1.52$ ) than in the low morality condition ( $M = 2.89, SD = 1.37$ ). The sociability manipulation had a significant main effect on estimated sociability of colleagues,  $F(1, 281) = 167.14, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.37$ . Colleagues were estimated to be more sociable in the high sociability condition ( $M = 4.99, SD = 1.32$ ) than in the low sociability condition ( $M = 2.90, SD = 1.57$ ). Finally, a significant main effect of the competence manipulation was obtained on the estimated competence of colleagues,  $F(1, 281) = 140.03, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.33$ . Estimations of the competence levels of colleagues were higher in the high competence condition ( $M = 4.99, SD = 1.32$ ) than in the low competence condition ( $M = 3.13, SD = 1.39$ ).

It is important to note that spillover effects of the morality,<sup>1</sup> sociability,<sup>2</sup> and competence<sup>3</sup> manipulations emerged. Nevertheless, a comparison of effect sizes (following the procedure from Rosnow & Rosenthal, 2002) showed that the size of all the intended effects were significantly larger than the size of the spillover effects, all  $Z$ 's  $> 3.25$ , all  $p$ 's  $< .001$ , which indicates that our experimental manipulations were perceived as intended. Similar spillover effects of the social judgment of traits have been reported in previous

research (Van Prooijen & Ellemers, 2015; Van Prooijen et al., 2016). These spillover effects suggest that people tend to assume that positive attributes on one dimension coincide with positive attributes on other dimensions. In comparison to observations in real-life contexts, our experimental design allowed us to maintain greater control over the perception of traits, as we manipulated them orthogonally.

### 3.2. Covariates

Before testing the hypotheses, we explored whether demographic variables (i.e., gender, age), work variables (i.e., type of contract, working hours), Facebook use, and privacy concerns might function as covariates of the preference to separate identities. Participants were significantly more likely to prefer distinguishing between private contacts and colleagues on Facebook when they were older,  $r(287) = 0.21, p < .001$ ; when they worked more hours,  $r(287) = 0.24, p < .001$ ; and when they were concerned about their privacy,  $r(287) = 0.23, p < .001$ . No correlation was found between Facebook use and preference for separation,  $p = 0.61$ . Furthermore, an independent  $t$ -test showed that men and women did not differ in their preference to separate identities,  $p = 0.75$ . A one-way ANOVA did not yield a significant effect of type of contract on the outcome variable,  $p = 0.27$ . Thus, the effects of the experimental manipulations on preference for separation were tested while controlling for the effects of age, working hours, and privacy concerns.

### 3.3. Preference for separation

A 2 (morality: high vs low) by 2 (sociability: high vs low) by 2 (competence: high vs low) analysis of covariance was conducted for the outcome variable preference for separation to analyze the effects of the experimental manipulations. Age, working hours, and privacy concerns were included in the analyses as covariates.

The analysis revealed a main effect of morality on the preference to separate private and professional identities,  $F(1, 275) = 19.47, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.07$ . Participants had a lower preference to separate private contacts and colleagues on Facebook when colleagues were high in morality ( $M = 3.69, SD = 1.37$ ) than when colleagues were low in morality ( $M = 4.27, SD = 1.23$ ). Effects that included the competence manipulation (i.e., main effect, two two-way interactions, and three-way interaction) were not significant, all  $p$ 's  $> .30$ . Thus, these findings support our first hypothesis, which stated that morality would have a stronger influence on preference for separation than competence. Furthermore, a main effect of sociability was found,  $F(1, 275) = 13.82, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.05$ . High sociability of colleagues resulted in a lower preference for separation of identities ( $M = 3.70, SD = 1.39$ ) than did low sociability of colleagues ( $M = 4.22, SD = 1.23$ ), thereby supporting our second hypothesis.

<sup>1</sup> A main effect of sociability on estimated morality was also found,  $F(1, 281) = 32.14, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.10$ . Participants in the high sociability conditions reported higher levels of perceived morality ( $M = 4.16, SD = 1.63$ ) than did participants in the low sociability conditions ( $M = 3.29, SD = 1.57$ ). Furthermore, the analyses yielded a main effect of competence,  $F(1, 281) = 7.44, p = 0.007$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.03$ , such that colleagues were estimated to be more moral in the high competence conditions ( $M = 3.89, SD = 1.68$ ) than in the low competence conditions ( $M = 3.49, SD = 1.61$ ). Finally, an interaction effect between morality and sociability emerged,  $F(1, 281) = 13.41, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.05$ . Bonferroni's post-hoc tests showed that, within the high morality conditions, high sociability resulted in higher estimated morality ( $M = 5.30, SD = 1.07$ ) than did low sociability ( $M = 3.82, SD = 1.52$ ),  $p < .001$ . Sociability did not influence estimated morality within the low morality conditions,  $p = 0.90$ . Other interaction effects were not significant, all  $p$ 's  $> .10$ .

<sup>2</sup> The morality manipulation also had a significant main effect on estimated sociability,  $F(1, 281) = 27.64, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.09$ . Estimations of the sociability levels of colleagues were higher in the high morality conditions ( $M = 4.25, SD = 1.89$ ) than in the low morality conditions ( $M = 3.49, SD = 1.61$ ). Furthermore, an interaction effect between morality and sociability was observed,  $F(1, 281) = 14.30, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.05$ . Bonferroni's post-hoc tests showed that, within the high sociability conditions, high morality promoted higher estimated sociability ( $M = 5.73, SD = 0.76$ ) than low morality ( $M = 4.28, SD = 1.36$ ),  $p < .001$ . The morality manipulation did not have an effect on estimated sociability within the low sociability conditions,  $p = 0.99$ . Other effects were not significant, all  $p$ 's  $> .23$ .

<sup>3</sup> The analysis also yielded a main effect of morality on estimated competence,  $F(1, 281) = 7.37, p = 0.007$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.03$ . Participants in the high morality conditions estimated competence levels of colleagues to be higher ( $M = 4.28, SD = 1.67$ ) than participants in the low morality conditions ( $M = 3.88, SD = 1.60$ ). Other effects were not significant, all  $p$ 's  $> .20$ .

In line with our third hypothesis, the analysis also yielded a two-way interaction between morality and sociability,  $F(1, 275) = 18.97$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.06$ . As cell sizes (32–40 participants per experimental cell) and variances,  $F(7, 278) = 1.34$ ,  $p = 0.23$ , were relatively equal, it was decided to use Bonferroni's post-hoc tests to further examine the two-way interaction. Results revealed that participants in the high morality-high sociability conditions reported a lower preference to separate identities than did participants in other conditions,  $p$ 's  $< .001$ . The other conditions did not differ,  $p$ 's = 0.99.

In addition, significant effects were found of the control variables age,  $F(1, 275) = 8.63$ ,  $p = 0.004$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.03$ , working hours,  $F(1, 275) = 8.49$ ,  $p = 0.004$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.03$ , and privacy concerns,  $F(1, 275) = 10.56$ ,  $p = 0.001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.04$ . Higher age, more working hours, and more privacy concerns were associated with a stronger preference to separate private contacts from colleagues.

#### 4. Discussion

The current study focused on the roles of social judgments of colleagues' traits in the intention to integrate or separate private and professional identities on Facebook. Previous research has shown that morality tends to be considered as the main source of value in offline contexts (Ellemers et al., 2013; Leach et al., 2007). However, no research has been dedicated to the role of social judgment dimensions in employees' Facebook boundary management. The results of the current study highlighted the importance of perceived sociability in others, as well as perceived morality, in the decision between users take to integrate, or rather separate their private from their professional identity. In particular, users appeared to be more likely to integrate their identities on Facebook when exposed to high morality and high sociability, rather than high morality alone. This might mean that the option to access more (private) information about colleagues via social media could lead users to become more selective in terms of the traits they want to see in others, before they expose their own private information.

The results of the current study also show that competence does not seem to have a relation to users' decision to integrate or separate private and professional identities. Previous research in offline contexts already showed that morality was more important than competence for perceived organizational or work team attractiveness (Van Prooijen & Ellemers, 2015), and that likeability rather than competence predicts employees' interest in collaborating with colleagues on performance-related tasks (Casciaro & Lobo, 2005). In line with this research, the current study demonstrates that, when employees have to decide on the extent to which they are willing to disclose information on Facebook to colleagues, morality and sociability perceptions play a more important role than competence perceptions.

Higher privacy concerns were also related to the tendency to set stronger boundaries between identities, confirming findings by Vitak (2015) on the restriction of audience as impression management. In addition, higher age was associated with more reluctance to integrate identities, which resonates with earlier research findings showing that a higher age reduces the use of social media (Correa, Hinsley, & de Zúñiga, 2010). Finally, a higher number of working hours was related to a stronger preference to separate identities. It is possible that spending more time in work contexts makes it more challenging to manage boundaries, which might in turn promote the adoption of a Facebook boundary management strategy in which the different life domains are segmented.

#### 4.1. Limitations and future directions

Although this study improves our understanding of employees' decision-making in terms of their Facebook boundary management, it is not without limitations. First, our sample was relatively broad, as the only criterion that needed to be met to participate in this study was that participants were employed. It would be useful to learn whether work-related variables such as job status, general social media use within an organization, and industry type could impact employees' responses to the perceived traits of their colleagues. However, we did not have access to this information for this study. Furthermore, the current research does not provide insights into the underlying processes that can explain why both morality and sociability traits promote more willingness to integrate identities on Facebook. Whereas previous research has demonstrated that morality traits can provide people an indication of whether others have harmful or beneficial intentions toward them (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992; Willis & Todorov, 2006), less is known about how sociability traits can impact people's expectations regarding the risks or benefits that an interaction with others can bring them. Examining how perceived traits can affect anticipations about interpersonal interactions on Facebook could therefore provide an interesting avenue for future research. Additionally, given that people's Facebook audience tends to include different networks from separate life domains (Lampinen et al., 2009; Marwick & Boyd, 2010; Tufekci, 2008), it would be merited to investigate whether perceived traits can influence user's concerns about their impression management.

#### 4.2. Theoretical and practical implications

Although the importance of online boundary management for employees has been emphasized in several recent studies (Batenburg & Bartels, 2017; Van Zoonen et al., 2016), little empirical research is available on managing boundaries between online private and professional identities (Bareket-Bjomel, Moran, & Shahar, 2016; Fieseler et al., 2015; Hoffmann & Suphan, 2017). To our knowledge, the current study is the first to empirically examine whether employees' social judgments of colleagues' traits can function as antecedents of online employee behavioral intentions. Within the results of our study, the decision to set permeable boundaries between professional and private identities appears to be influenced by the morality and sociability traits employees perceive in their peers. This suggests that the integration between identities might be perceived as valuable for professional users if their peers fit into specific characteristics, which perhaps make them better fitting for entering their private realm.

Previous research has indicated that the integration of private and professional roles can yield advantages for professional users. For example, using permeable identity boundaries on Facebook can give users the opportunities to exploit resources and social capital from different realms of their lives (DiMicco & Millen, 2007), while maintaining the option to achieve an optimal level of integration between what is private and what is professional. Organizations can also have advantages in leaving users room to integrate private and professional identities on Facebook, as it has been previously connected to a stronger organizational identification (Fieseler et al., 2015). As other elements, such as confidence in social media use (Fieseler et al., 2015), can influence employees' preferred level of online identity integration, organizations should consider allowing users to decide how much they wish to blend professional and private elements, for example highlighting posts as "personal" and not part of the organization's communication.

Thus far, the role of social judgments has primarily been studied in offline contexts, in which morality has been shown to be the



primary trait on which people base their evaluations of other individuals and groups (Goodwin et al., 2014; Leach et al., 2007). The current research findings suggest that there might be a difference between offline and SNS contexts in the influence of social judgments. Whereas the willingness to interact with others offline is fully determined by morality traits (Brambilla et al., 2013), our research illustrates that the willingness to interact on Facebook is determined by both morality and sociability traits. Previous research has indicated that situational demands might promote different responses to perceived traits when people anticipate on interacting with others (Van Prooijen et al., 2016). It might therefore be possible that the difference between offline and SNS contexts emerges due to the affordances that Facebook offers, which are mainly targeted at facilitating connections with others (Ellison et al., 2007). These affordances might in turn create situational demands that strongly depend on sociability traits. The current findings thereby indicate that contextual factors might alter the value that people attach to the social judgment dimensions.

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