WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND WORK-LIFE CONFLICT OF FEMALE COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONALS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract: This paper explores work-life balance and work-life conflict in public relations and marketing professions, focusing on the role of gender differences in shaping employee well-being. Based on a review of recent literature, the study identifies key industry-specific stressors, including constant availability, high workload, and blurred boundaries between professional and private life. Attention is given to the gendered nature of these professions, emphasizing the additional challenges women face due to caregiving responsibilities and workplace inequalities. The findings suggest that both concepts result from the interaction of individual, organizational, and societal factors. While digital transformation intensifies work demands and increases stress, organizational support, flexibility, and effective coping strategies can mitigate negative outcomes. The paper highlights the importance of fostering supportive work environments and integrating stress management and well-being topics into professional development.

Keywords: work-life balance, work-life conflict, public relations, marketing, well-being, gender differences

1. INTRODUCTION

Work-life balance (WLB) and work-life conflict (WLC) are important concepts in contemporary research on organizational behavior, employee well-being, and career sustainability. These concepts are particularly relevant in industries characterized by intense communication, high job demands, short deadlines, and constant need for availability, such as public relations, marketing, and the broader communications industry. The development of digital platforms, social networks, and hybrid work models has further blurred the boundaries between professional and private life, increasing the risk of stress, burnout, and mental health impairment. At the same time, the literature (e.g. De Clercq et al., 2021; Nagy, 2020; Zeman, Miletić, Topić, 2025) increasingly suggests that WLB and WLC are not gender-neutral phenomena, as women in the highly feminized communications industry more often take on a greater share of family and informal responsibilities, while also facing gender stereotypes, discrimination, and greater pressures to prove themselves professionally.

Given the above challenges, the aim of this paper is to analyze the theoretical foundations of the concepts of work-life balance and conflict between these spheres, with a special focus on the specificities of the professions in the field of public relations and marketing. The paper specifically considers the impact of gender inequalities on the experience of WLB and WLC among communication professionals.

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2. THE CONCEPTS OF WLB AND WLC

Employee well-being research frequently identifies WLB and WLC as central themes, given their strong implications for both individual health and organizational outcomes. Maintaining a healthy balance between work and personal life is therefore widely recognized as a critical factor in protecting employees' physical and psychological wellbeing while fostering sustained job satisfaction over time. As Shen (2019) points out, WLB represents a state in which professional and private roles are compatible, while WLC occurs when the demands of one sphere interfere with functioning in the other. These constructs are grounded in several foundational theoretical frameworks that explain how individuals navigate responsibilities across professional and personal domains.

WLB refers to an individual's ability to successfully balance the demands of professional and personal roles in a way that allows for satisfaction and effective functioning in both spheres of life. Theoretical explanations of WLB often rely on Boundary Theory (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000), which suggests that individuals create physical, temporal, and psychological boundaries between work and private life, attempting to maintain balance through segmentation or integration of different life domains. On the other hand, WLC is a situation in which the demands of one life sphere make it difficult to fulfill obligations in another, leading to stress, exhaustion, and reduced satisfaction with life and work. Shen and Jiang (2013) defined it as a mismatch between expectations arising from different roles. This concept is often explained through Role Conflict Theory, introduced by Kahn et al. (1964), and Role Strain Theory, proposed by Goode (1960), which assume that individuals simultaneously perform multiple social roles and that their resources are limited. When work-related demands, such as long working hours, high workloads, or constant digital availability, begin to interfere with family and personal activities, time, strain, or behavioral conflict occurs. Building on these perspectives, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) further demonstrated that organizational conditions, interpersonal expectations, and personal circumstances all shape the emergence of role conflict, as well as the coping mechanisms individuals adopt. Prolonged WLC can lead to burnout, mental and physical health problems, increased absenteeism, and intention to leave the organization, which is why this concept is considered an important indicator of the quality of the work environment and the sustainability of human resources.

3. GENDER DIMENSION

The gender dimension of WLB and WLC is a significant topic in contemporary literature, as men and women do not experience work and family responsibilities in the same way. Although research shows that both men and women attach great importance to achieving work-life balance, women often face greater challenges in achieving it (Nagy, 2020; Zeman, Miletić & Topić, 2025). These inequalities are often the result of gender discrimination, social stereotypes and prejudices that shape expectations about the "traditional" roles of men and women, which are particularly pronounced in developing countries (Panda, 2018). Such structural factors further exacerbate work-life conflict and limit women's professional opportunities. Research indicates that the burden of family responsibilities can negatively impact women's income, limit their ability to develop their careers, and reduce their motivation to expand their business activities (Pareek & Bagrecha, 2017; Neneh, 2021). In such circumstances, the conflict between

work and private roles becomes more intense, which can lead to chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, burnout, and slowed professional advancement.

On the other hand, research shows that achieving balance between work and private sphere has significant positive effects on women's work performance, productivity and overall job satisfaction (Neneh, 2021). Therefore, a gender perspective is crucial for understanding the concepts of WLB and WLC, as well as for creating organizational policies that support a more equal work environment.

4. WLB AND WLC ISSUES OF COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONS

Contemporary literature increasingly positions WLB, WLC and employee well-being as central issues in public relations, advertising, and marketing communications, given the dynamic nature of these professions, high client expectations, and constant pressure to respond rapidly to market changes (Smith, 2010; Shen & Jiang, 2013; Fullerton & Kendrick, 2014; Rando-Queto et al., 2022; Luo, Yang & Jiang, 2025; Luo, Yang & Jyng, 2025). Well-being is typically understood through three dimensions: job satisfaction, opportunities for personal and psychological development, and positive workplace relationships (Muñiz-Velázquez et al., 2022), all of which are particularly relevant in communication professions that rely heavily on interpersonal skills and emotional labor.

With the modern transformation of the communications industry, primarily through digitalization and the expansion of social networks, the challenges in the field of marketing and public relations have become even more complex. Research by Jiang, Luo, and Kulemeka (2017) showed that professionals working in digital marketing and social media management agencies are under constant pressure to be available in real time, keep up with rapid technological changes, and maintain a personal professional brand that demonstrates current expertise. These working conditions often lead to professional burnout and are particularly challenging for employees who also have family responsibilities, especially mothers who face the additional burden of childcare. Similarly, Jiang, Luo, and Kulemeka (2017) showed that the use of social media platforms in strategic communications may lead to certain unwanted negative effects, such as demands for constant availability, real-time crisis situations, or loss of control over the workflow. In such conditions, employees are more likely to experience time- and stress-related work-life conflict.

Empirical evidence shows that a significant proportion of communication professionals experience daily stress and difficulties managing these demands, with women being particularly affected (Zerfass et al., 2023). This is further complicated by the feminized nature of the profession, since women make up the majority of employees, which further highlights the issues of gender inequality in the context of experience of WLB and WLC and well-being at work (Shen, 2019; Anton, 2025). Based on surveying a national sample of members of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), Jiang and Shen (2013) indicated that gender plays a significant role in the experience of conflict, especially when it comes to psychological strain as well as the fact that career breaks can have different consequences for women's professional development. Similarly, Shen and Jiang (2013) showed that employees who care for children or elderly family members, more often experience higher levels of stress and problems balancing different roles. Study conducted by Chakraborty, Gohain, and Saha (2020) showed that there is a positive relationship between WLB and employee engagement among women in marketing positions and this relation is largely conditioned by organizational policies, family circumstances, and societal expectations.

Research by Zeman, Miletić and Topić (2025) indicated that employees in the PR and communications sector often have difficulty balancing work and private life, and that many have witnessed or been victims of gender discrimination and sexual harassment during their careers. Their research showed that gender differences exist in all dimensions of well-being and that women more often suffer the negative consequences of organizational inequalities. In addition, Anton (2025) points to a gap between formal organizational support for well-being of public relations and communication professionals and actual practice in organizations. Although companies often declaratively support mental health and work-life balance, concrete support measures are often lacking. Women are more likely to experience stress related to networking, as well as various forms of gender discrimination and sexual harassment. Similarly, Cunha, Cruz and Belim (2025), who analyzed the subjective well-being of PR professionals, found out that women were more likely to report work overload, lack of recognition, and mental health problems related to poor WLB.

A range of organizational and individual mechanisms can mitigate work-related imbalance and reduce work–life conflict. Prior research consistently highlights autonomy, flexibility, and organizational support as key factors, particularly for women in communication professions, where these elements help alleviate tensions between professional and private roles (Chakraborty et al., 2020). Similarly, evidence from PRSA samples shows that family-supportive organizational environments significantly reduce perceived WLC, while supportive supervisors and a culture that values WLB further enhance employees' ability to cope with competing demands (Jiang & Shen, 2013; Jin et al., 2014). Conversely, negative organizational climates tend to intensify conflict, although strong identification with the professional community may buffer some of these adverse effects (Shen et al., 2015).

Beyond structural factors, individual capacities also play an important role. Luo, Yang, and Jyng (2025) indicated that emotional intelligence can be an important protective factor by contributing to the development of key PR competencies, which then directly and indirectly influence the reduction of emotional exhaustion, professional burnout, and impaired work-life balance. At the same time, the growing complexity of the profession underscores the need to better prepare future practitioners. In this regard, Barlik (2024) emphasized the importance of preparing students and early-career professionals with skills for stress management, boundary-setting, and maintaining mental health, suggesting that these competencies should be more systematically integrated into educational curricula and professional development programs.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The literature review shows that public relations and marketing professionals are exposed to a number of specific stressors that make it difficult to achieve a balance between work and private life. Intensive digital communication, a culture of constant availability, a high level of responsibility and emotional labor, as well as increasingly blurred boundaries between work and leisure time, contribute to the emergence of various forms of role conflict. These challenges are further emphasized through gender inequalities, generational differences and the specificities of the organizational environment, which indicates the complexity of this phenomenon and the need for a multidimensional approach to its study.

On the other hand, the research results indicate that adequate organizational support, flexible working arrangements, the development of emotional intelligence and the application of proactive coping strategies can significantly contribute to reducing conflict and improving work-

life balance. In this regard, organizations, educational institutions, and professional associations have an important role to play in creating policies and programs that support employee well-being. Future research should further deepen the understanding of these relationships, especially in the context of rapid technological change and the evolution of work practices, in order to ensure a sustainable and inclusive work environment for communication professionals.

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