

## **Job Burnout among Communication Professionals in Hong Kong: An Exploratory Study**

Kara CHAN & Anqi HUANG

Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong S.A.R., China

Katharina KRÄINER, Sandra DIEHL & Ralf TERLUTTER

Alpen-Adria Universitaet Klagenfurt, Austria

**Abstract:** A qualitative study was conducted to examine work stress and burnout among practitioners in the journalism, advertising, and public relations industry in Hong Kong. Demerouti and her colleagues' (2001) job demands and resources model was adopted as the theoretical framework. Altogether 13 Chinese interviewees aged 20 to 45 were recruited through a quota sampling. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted and analyzed by the NVivo 10.0 software. Results found that management of clients' expectation and deadlines as well as striving for perfection were main job demands. Job variety and social support from colleagues were major job resources. Information communication technology (ICT) was perceived more often as job resources than as job demands. The power of ICT in connecting people and the ability to access information anyplace anytime was seen as job resources. However, ICT also caused job demands as the line between work and non-work was blurred.

**Keywords:** Organizational behavior; interactive communication technology, qualitative study, occupational health

### **1. Background**

Work stress and work-life imbalance have negative impacts on staff performance and health conditions of the staff. The Hong Kong government recognized the need to improve work-life balance by replacing the five and a half day working week with a five-day working week in the civil services in July 2006. A survey among 1,027 employees in Hong Kong found that the average working hours per week was 49.6. Nearly two-thirds of respondents reported undertaking of unpaid overtime work on a regular basis. Altogether 82 percent of respondents reported that they suffered stress and 75 percent suffered from lack of exercise. Nearly 46 percent felt exhausted from their jobs. Twenty-seven percent of respondents took sick leave to recover from work exhaustion. Younger and male respondents aged below 30 worked the longest hours among all demographic groups. They were also most likely to leave their jobs in the next 12 months (Welford, 2008).

The mass communication industry in Hong Kong refers to the journalism, the advertising, and the public relations sectors (Vocational Training Council, 2014). Hong Kong is a media rich society. With a population of more than eight million, in 2014 was home to 56 daily newspapers, 727 periodicals, five domestic television service licensees, 19 regional and global television service licensees, one government-funded public service broadcaster, and four sound

broadcasting licensees (Information Services Department, 2014). Press freedom, advanced communication technology, and the government's non-interference policy encourage many international news agencies, as well as regional and global magazines and broadcasters, to have their offices or headquarters in Hong Kong (Information Services Department, 2014). This creates an environment in which the communication employees of this international metropolis are engaged in media productions that serve beyond the local audience. As a result, a study of the Hong Kong work place provides us with a view of practices of media production from the intercultural communication perspective.

The mass communication industry in Hong Kong employed 32,243 persons and was accountable for 0.8 percent of the total labor force (Vocational Training Council, 2014). The staff turnover rate was high with 12 percent of employees having changed jobs in the past 12 months (Vocational Training Council, 2014). With the wide adoption of information communication technology (ICT) in the mass communication industry, it is expected that employees can work almost without boundaries in time and space (Allvin, Aronsson, Hagstrom, Johansson & Lundberg, 2011). How do the employees in the communication industry experience work stress and burnout? To what extent is the stress related to the use of communication technology? Understanding the factors leading to or relieving from burnout among professionals in the communication industry will enlighten communication organizations to reflect on measures to reduce job stress in their specific industry context. Furthermore, the results will also inform social science researchers to design effective health communication campaigns on work-life balance. In the long term, the wellbeing of employees of the communication industry can be enhanced through studies in this research line. With these objectives and goals, we conducted the present study.

## **2. Literature Review**

Burnout has been defined as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment among employees (Maslach, 1982). The current study adopts Demerouti and her colleagues' job demands and resources model (JD-R model) of burnout (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli, 2001). The JD-R model proposes that the working conditions can be classified broadly into two dimensions, i.e. job demands and job resources. Job demands are defined as physical, social, or organizations aspects of the jobs that require physical or mental efforts. Job resources are defined as physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that might help the employee to achieve work goals, or reduce job demands, or stimulate personal development. These two dimensions had differential impact on specific outcomes (Demerouti et al., 2001). The JD-R model proposes that burnout arises from either one of the following two processes. First, job demands induce constant overtaxing and this leads to exhaustion. Second, lack of resources induces withdrawal behavior and disengagement from work. Accordingly, Bakker, Demerouti, and Euwema (2005) found that high job demands and low job resources lead to increased level of exhaustion and cynicism. It was also found that high job demands and low job resources led to more burnout and work disengagement (Hu et al., 2001). The two-factor structure was evidenced across different occupational groups (Demerouti et al., 2001).

The JD-R model does not explicitly elaborate the roles of information communication technology (ICT) in the two components of job demand and job resources. ICT, including the internet and mobile devices, has a great impact on work conditions. Access to the communication technology enables the employees to have the flexibility to work in a boundary-free environment. It also means that the employers are able to assign jobs to and monitor their employees' output constantly (Lundberg & Cooper, 2010). With modern communication technology, work can be conducted anytime anywhere, enabling employees to benefit from increased work time and place flexibility (Jarvenpaa & Lang, 2005; Diaz et al., 2012). In other words, employees can work at homes or during hours that are supposed to be delegated for relaxation. Although most employees are performing their duties in a specified office with a specific start and end time schedule, there is an increasing number of employees that do not have a clear specification of working hours or work place (Lundberg & Cooper, 2010). Knowledge workers and freelance communication professionals employed in the knowledge-intensive industries are vulnerable to overworking. For them, organizational improvement in the physical work environment is not able to improve their working conditions.

The use of ICT in the work place can both create job demands and provide job support (Day, Scott & Kelloway, 2010). Empirical evidence was found to support a multidimensional scale in measuring work place specific ICT demands and support (Day, Scott, Paquet & Hambley, 2012). In this framework, work place ICT demands comprised eight dimensions, including hassles, information overload and response expectation, availability, workload, lack of control, learn, monitor, and poor communication (Day et al., 2012). Work place ICT support comprised two dimensions, including ICT personal assistance and ICT upgrades (Day et al., 2012).

The communication industry is an example of a knowledge-intensive industry. According to the Hong Kong government's manpower survey, the journalism and mass communication industry covers the journalism, public relations and advertising professions (Vocational Training Council, 2014). Quick response time is one of the key elements to succeed in the communication industry. With news media going online and the presence of 24-7 news platforms, journalists are pressured to produce news around the clock ahead of the competitive news channels. According to a study of newspaper journalists in the US, in addition to the old stresses of deadlines, competition, and work overload, the new stresses included declining newspaper circulation and advertising revenues, new technology, and massive layoffs. The respondents perceived high levels of cynicism and moderate levels of work efficacy, making them closer to reaching burnout (Reinardy, 2011). Another survey of newspaper journalists and non-reporting staff in South Korea found that respondents perceived more emotional exhaustion than cynicism or diminished professional efficacy. Overload, non-supportive environment, lack of promotional prospects, as well as dissatisfaction with the work were job stressors that would lead to burnout (Jung & Kim, 2012).

Public relations professionals need to maintain close contacts with key stakeholders. In crisis situations, public relations practitioners need to respond to enquiries from all parts of the world within hours, or even minutes. Jin (2010) found that public relations practitioners themselves were often caught in work-life conflicts when the demand from work became incompatible to demands from their personal life. A random sampling survey of 565 active members of the Public Relations Society of America identified three types of stressors arising

from time-based, strain-based, or behavior-based conflicts. Respondents were more likely to adopt rational thinking or action-taking to cope with work-related pressure. On the other hand, respondents were more likely to adopt denial and avoidance strategies to cope with non-work-related pressure (Jin, Sha, Shen & Jiang, 2014).

Advertising professionals are expected to create new marketing communication on a regular basis. Employees are under tremendous work pressure to come up with creative and innovative marketing communication solutions all the time. In a competitive brand environment such as that in Hong Kong, marketers also need to monitor competitive activities and respond to competitive events within a short period of time. Nevertheless, there is a lack of empirical study to measure job demands among advertising practitioners.

### 3. Research Objectives

In order to enhance work-life balance among employees in the communication industry, companies need to understand how employees experience work-related stress and their perceptions of burnout. The current study had the following research objectives:

1. To identify job demands of the communication industry that are related to burnout;
2. To identify job resources of the communication industry that are related to burnout;
- and
3. To investigate the roles of ICT in the job demands and resources model related to work stress and burnout

### 4. Methodology

The study employed an interpretivist approach (Neuman, 2003) using a qualitative methodology. Individual face-to-face interviews were adopted as they could best solicit different interviewees' personal experience as well as views, generate insights that might not be obtained in a group interview setting and create a basis for hypotheses development in quantitative research (Schonfeld and Farrell, 2010; Silverman, 2005). The objective was to create a context in which meanings and perceptions associated with work stress and burnout could be expressed verbally.

Thirteen Chinese interviewees aged 20 to 45 were recruited using quota sampling in order to have at least four interviewees from each of the advertising, public relations, as well as journalism industries. The interviewees were recruited through personal networks. The demographic and work profile is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics and Industry Experience of Interviewees

No.	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Job Experience	Education	Industry
01	F	21-25	Single	7 months	master degree	Advertising (agency)
02	F	21-25	Single	1.5 years	master degree	PR (in-house)
03	F	31-35	Single	6 years	master degree	PR (agency)
04	F	31-35	Single	11 years	master degree	PR (agency)

05	F	36-40	Married with no kid	15 years	first degree	PR (in-house)
06	M	21-25	Single	1.5 years	first degree	Journalism (news magazine)
07	F	41-45	Married with no kid	20 years	high school	PR (agency)
08	M	21-25	Single	2.5 years	first degree	Advertising (agency)
09	F	21-25	Single	2.5 years	first degree	Journalism (broadcast)
10	M	26-30	Single	3.5 years	first degree	Advertising (agency)
11	M	26-30	Single	4 years	first degree	Advertising (agency)
12	F	26-30	Single	4 years	first degree	Journalism (broadcast)
13	M	20-25	Single	6 months	first degree	Advertising (agency)

One of the authors conducted one interview. A female research assistant with a master's degree in communication, who was employed for the project, conducted the remaining twelve interviews. The duration of the interviews ranged from 21 minutes to 66 minutes. The interviews were conducted at interviewees' work places or public places such as cafés and fast food restaurants. The study was conducted in Cantonese or in Putonghua, according to the preference of the interviewees, from February to April 2014.

An interview protocol with eleven carefully worded open-ended questions was used to guide the sessions (for translations, see Appendix 1). These questions were generated from the research literature. The interviewees were first asked to describe their job nature and their normal work schedule. The questions moved on to prompt their perception of burnout and elaborate on their personal experience of job stress and burnout. All interviews were audio-recorded.

The audio recording was later transcribed and translated into English by the research assistant. Representative quotes were selected by the authors. Each full transcript was coded using the computer software QSR NVivo 10.0. The coding process involved reading the text and classifying sections of the interviews into themes question-by-question. Throughout the analysis, Marshall and Rossman's (1999) comparison analysis method was used to link data by constantly comparing and contrasting statements (Strauss, 1987). Without imposing any themes, the full transcripts were read through once, and then they were read through again and nodes were created from possible emerging themes. The data were then compared to the themes. Once a statement had been coded under a certain theme, it was removed. The process of reading, coding and refining the themes continued until no further statements remained to be coded and the list of themes had stabilized. To avoid double counting, each segment of an interview was coded into one theme only.

One of the authors coded the interviews. To fulfill the first and the second research objectives, the coder looked for descriptions and elaborations related to job requirements and coded them under the categories of job demands, as well as supports of the job and coded them under the categories of job resources. This was the first round of coding. In the second

round of coding, whenever information communication technology was brought up, the coder would code whether the technology was described as supporting the job or as creating job requirements. These descriptions were coded as ICT as job resources or ICT as job demands respectively. Another author read through the transcripts and the coding. This other author agreed with 84 percent of the coding of the sub-categories. Disagreement was settled through discussion, working back and forth through the transcript, and negotiation.

Because of the small size and the non-random sampling method, the qualitative results can only be considered exploratory. Therefore, they were not categorized by demographic or job experience variables.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Job Demands

Regarding job demands that may lead to burnout, interviewees identified eight themes (see Table 2). The most frequently mentioned themes were difficult clients (reported 6 times), heavy workload (5 times), tight deadlines (4 times), and striving for perfection (4 times). Typical quotes for each of the four themes were listed below respectively.

Table 2. Job Demands and Resources Related to Job Burnout

<b>Job Demands</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Difficult Clients	6
Heavy Workload	5
Tight Deadline	4
Strive for Perfection	4
High Standard/Expectation from Supervisor	3
Coworkers not Friendly	2
Not Being Appreciated/Valued	2
Conflicting Views with Supervisor	1
High Standard/Expectation from Colleague of Another Department	1
<b>Job Resources</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Job Variety and Autonomy	9
Social Support from Colleagues	6
Social Support from Management	4
Social Support from Supervisor	3
Compensation Leave	2
Monetary Reward and Bonus	2
A permanent Contract	1

*Difficult clients:* [No.13] Clients are always picky until the last moment before the deadline. However, the picky clients wouldn't make me burnout. If time permits, I can revise the work according to the clients' requirement. However, the clients are always very busy. Sometimes, they are too busy to check our work. But we have no rights to make the final decision. I think the pressure mainly comes from the deadline.

*Heavy workload:* [No.1] Boss is boss. He/she won't consider if you have had a lot of tasks on hand. Man power has been reduced a lot in the media industry. However, the workload hasn't been reduced. The workload of 6 people in the past may now load onto 2 employees or even one.

*Tight deadline:* [No.12] We are required to do accurate reporting in a short period of time. As journalists, we collect information, arrange it and report it to our superior. For example, I have to work on a longer version when a shorter version was submitted to the superior. After recording on video (ROV) and sound on tape (SOT), the following work is video editing. I need to finish all this work within 2 hours. It is very rushed.

*Striving for perfection:* [No. 6] I have my own standard for quality of reporting. I don't like to do the copy and paste work. I want to have interviews and add new ideas. I am serious in writing style and the word choice. It should not be that casual.

## 5.2. Job Resources

Regarding job resources that may prevent them from burnout, interviewees identified seven themes (see Table 2). Three interviewees reported receiving virtually no support to relieve them from the chances of burnout. For the remaining interviewees, job resources mainly come from job variety and autonomy (reported 9 times), support of colleagues (6 times), management (4 times), and supervisors (3 times). Other resources mentioned included compensation leave and monetary rewards. Interviewees most often reported that job variety and autonomy was able to give them job satisfaction. Job variety was important as it could provide new experience and learning opportunity. Job autonomy was able to give interviewees a sense of freedom. Here are two typical quotes:

*Job variety:* [No.7] I come into contact with many different tasks. Other companies may not be able to offer these opportunities. I can learn various things and earn experience.

*Job autonomy:* [No.6] I have much freedom in reporting. I can choose whatever topics that I want to report.

From these quotes, interviewees considered the job as a training ground for personal and career development. They also perceived that job autonomy gave them a sense of empowerment. Other than the job contents, job resources mainly come from the social support from colleagues and supervisors.

Here is a typical quote:

*Social supports and cooperation:* [No.12] My colleagues are also helpful. The cooperation is important. For example, the news clipping should be announced at 6 pm. My superior revises the article by 5:30 and I need to deal with subtitles and editing. Sometimes, the sound bite is in Putonghua. Some colleagues would offer help if they

are not busy. They would help me listen to the sound bite and type the subtitle first. Then, I can do the editing work. No one wants to work under a tremendous deadline every minute. Help from colleagues can release my pressure.

In this quote, the interviewee was trying hard to meet a broadcast deadline. Other colleagues who are not rushing for deadline would share the workload. This kind of support is tangible. According to the interviewees, colleagues could also offer emotional support through their willingness to listen, to understand, and to show empathy. Here is a typical quote:

*Social supports and empathy:* [No.10] Our team, our colleagues, superiors and subordinates are all helpful. Besides, colleagues of other departments also support us. Our account servicing department cooperates with creative, production or even the finance department. The colleagues understand us. They understand the toughness of our work. They would not make things more difficult for us.

The management of the supervisors and the companies were frequently reported as job resources. The social support from the supervisors mainly comes through an understanding of the heavy workload as well as communication. Interviewees reported that the supervisors were aware of the stress they were facing. The supervisors would show care of the interviewees by chatting with them. None of the interviewees however reported specific decisions or actions taken by supervisors to adjust their workload. Interviewees reported how certain management decisions were able to provide them with support. These include re-arranging job assignments, hiring of temporary staff, installing recreation facilities in the work place, as well as deciding not to continue a contract with a difficult client. Monetary rewards as well as compensation leave for working on weekends could also be seen as indirect measures employed by the management to provide necessary resources in the job context.

### **5.3. Roles of Interactive Communication Technology (ICT)**

The roles of ICT according to the JD-R model are summarized in Table 3. ICT was perceived as both job demands as well as job resources. Altogether twelve times ICT was reported as job demands. Eleven out of thirteen interviewees reported that they experienced longer working hours and information overload because of ICT. They reported that ICT creates more work strain for them. The main reasons were that their working hours were extended (reported five times) and they were accessible by their clients or their bosses even when they were on business trip or off from duty (reported three times). These two themes were related. The interviewees reported that because the clients or the supervisors could reach them outside office hours or during business trips, their working hours were extended to early morning or late night. Here are two typical quotes of the two themes.

Table 3. Roles of ICT in the JD-R Model

<b>ICT as Job Demands</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Extend Work to Non-office Hour	5
Accessible by Boss or Client Anytime	4
Information Overload	1
Intrude Private Life	1
Need Time to Learn the Functions of ICT	1
<b>ICT as Job Resources</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Better Communication with Colleagues at Different Locations	4
Able to Access Relevant Documents Anyplace Anytime	3
Better Communication with Clients	3
Better Connection with Informants	3
Save Time for Face-to-face Meeting and Business Travel	2
Better Connection with Suppliers	1
Informed about Job Progress Instantly	1
Monitor Public Opinion	1

*Extended working hours:* [No.11] I have a client who contacts me in the morning every day. He starts to work at 8:30 am, but I work from 10:30 am. He gives me “morning call” when he arrives at his office. He keeps sending me WhatsApp messages, asking me to respond as soon as possible. Every morning, when I turn off the alarm function on my mobile phone, I would see his messages. He texts me message “call me back” every day. Before my working hour starts, I have been chased by my client.

*Accessibility:* [No.6] My boss can check on me anytime. Once I travelled to Mainland China to write a story. It was already difficult to make contacts and conduct interviews. I had limited time for only one day and had to write the article at night. He/she kept asking me to find the core of the issue and dig out the manipulator behind the scene. He/she sat in the office in Hong Kong and typed these words on phone, but I was busy in asking questions on the spot. It is very annoying.

In the first quote, the office hours of the client and the interviewee were not the same. The interviewee usually went back to office at 10 am while the client started working at 8:30 am. It seemed that the client was aware of the interviewees’ working schedule. However, the client obviously did not want to wait for the interviewee to be in the office to contact him. The client demanded for the interviewee’s immediate attention before he started his working day.

In the second quote, the interviewee was working out of the office. He wanted to concentrate on his work. However, his supervisor was constantly checking his progress using ICT. He found it annoying. He wanted to be left alone.

Does ICT serve as job resources? The answer was also yes. All thirteen interviewees were able to describe in one way or another how ICT helps to improve work efficiency. The roles of ICT as job resources are summarized in Table 3. The most frequently reported benefits were better communication with colleagues at different locations (reported 5 times), being able to access to relevant documents anyplace anytime (3 times), better communication with clients (3 times), and having better connection with informants (3 times). WhatsApp was most often reported as the means to improve communication with colleagues. WhatsApp groups were set up to include team members of a specific task for updating information as well as work sharing. Here is a typical quote:

*Better communication with colleagues:* [No. 12] These ICT tools are very efficient in bringing everyone on the same ground in terms of information sharing. For example, our company has a Whatsapp group with a dozen colleagues. This is a typical situation when I am in a press conference. Once I receive the press release, I would take a photo of it and send it to my company. Or I would summarize it and make it into a 30-second news article. At the same time, the cameraman is shooting the scene. The editor is able to revise the article at the company. Both the colleagues inside and outside have a concept of what is going on in the press conference.

ICT enables interviewees to get access to information through the mobile devices. Interviewees reported that they did not need to waste time on waiting. Here is a typical quote:

*Ability to access:* [No. 03] For instance, if you have dinner with friends at night, but you still have something to deal with. In the past you had to wait for the mail, but now, you can check the email and contact clients via instant communication tools.

Three interviewees compared the workflow with or without ICT to illustrate the saving in time or the ability to get relevant and just-in-time information. A typical quote is as follows:

*Save-up-time:* [No. 07] In the past we used fax or courier (for delivery). Emails help a lot. People now are used to communicating via WhatsApp even in business. For example, we can't find someone immediately via email. He/she may have a conference, but he/she is able to check the WhatsApp message. We can inform them immediately. This makes the working efficiency higher. It shortens the time of communication.

The ICT tools that were most frequently mentioned as job resources were WhatsApp (22 times), email (15 times), and phone (9 times). The job resources referred to in the past without ICT were mail (2 times), fax and courier. From the comparison of ICT devices, we can see that ICT speeds up tremendously how information is being exchanged or delivered (via electronic way vs. physical way).

Judging from the number of responses alone, ICT was more frequently reported as job resources than as job demand.

## 6. Discussion

This was an exploratory study conducted to examine the application of the job demands

and resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001) in understanding burnout among communication professionals in Hong Kong. We had four observations from the findings.

First, the work stress related to serving an external client seemed to be higher than the work stress related to serving an internal client. Whenever an external client was involved, the deadlines seemed to be extremely demanding as well as non-negotiable. Clients were also reported to show little respect for the personal life of the employees in the advertising and public relations industry. This can be derived from the fact that the theme of difficult clients and tight deadlines were among the top three mentioned demands from the job.

To improve the wellbeing of the employees, the employers in the communication industry should consider helping junior colleagues to manage the expectation of the clients. As the advertising and public relations industry is extremely competitive, not many employers are willing to protect the interest of the junior colleagues at the expenses of the client-agency relationship.

Second, social support seemed to be the most important resource in the work environment of the communication industry. The interviewees had little expectation for organizational changes initiated by the employers. Very often, they expressed that the companies could do very little to improve the working conditions drastically to combat the burnout issue. Instead, the interviewees were seeking emotional support from colleagues and supervisors to cope with job stress.

Third, nearly all the interviewees were able to mention both advantages and disadvantages of ICT in work. They expressed a hate-love relationship in regard to the use of ICT. The improved efficiency was not without cost. The convenience and improved productivity came with a price that the employees were deprived of a buffer for relaxation that was created in the past because of waiting for new information.

Fourth, ICT increases the job demands in the communication industry because of a tighter deadline and more frequent last-minute changes. When information becomes instant, the employees were not able to enjoy any rest during the work process. In the client-agency setting specifically, the full use of the communication technology by the client becomes a major source of job demand on the agency services employees, because the clients expect that communication technology can speed up the turn-around time of the agency employees. When information can be transferred more quickly, people tend to perceive that change is easy. As a result, more changes are incurred and often at the very last moment. This helps to increase the job demand.

The themes generated by the present study for job demands and job resources were compared with the current literature. Job demands in the literature include workload, role ambiguity, and job insecurity while job resources in the literature include job control, job security, participation, social support, pay, and career opportunity (Bakker, Demerouti, de Boer & Schaufeli, 2003; Mauno, Kinnunen, & Ruokolainen, 2006). In our study, the sub-categories "heavy workload" and "tight deadline" coded for job demands correspond to "workload" in the current literature. Unfriendly co-workers, not being valued, and conflicting views with supervisors are related to lack of social support. The sub-categories "difficult clients" and "strive for perfection/high work standard" appear to be categories new to this study. "Role ambiguity" and "job insecurity" that appear in the literature (Mauno et al., 2006) are not reported explicitly in the present study.

Regarding job resources, all the sub-categories reported in the present study are found in the literature, including job control, social support, pay, and job security. However, “participation” and “career opportunity” that appear in the literature are not reported explicitly in the present study.

The themes generated from the present study for ICT as job demands and job resources were compared with the framework of work specific ICT job demands and resources (Day et al., 2012). Only four dimensions of ICT job demands proposed by Day and her colleagues are reported in the present study, including availability, monitoring, information overload, and learning. The other four dimensions, including hassles, workload, lack of control, and poor communication, are not reported in the present study. Regarding ICT as job resources, Day and her colleagues’ framework was not relevant as Day’s framework focused mainly on technology upgrades. Our proposed coding indicated that “improved communication”, “improved work efficiency”, and “job monitoring” are identified as ICT job resources.

## **7. Practical Implications**

Our findings have implications about what can be done by employers and the employees to mitigate work place burnouts. On the employer’s side, they should be aware of the job demands imposed on employees and should employ quantitative methods to measure such demands in their specific work contexts. While adjustments in workload are often difficult, employers can help employees to cope with job demands through training and work flow scheduling. Training in client services seems to be much needed in the marketing communication industry. Employers should respect the private lives of their employees and should refrain from excessive monitoring and supervision during non-office hours. Seeing the benefits of social support, employers can facilitate positive interaction among colleagues through social activities organized during lunch breaks or non-work hours. When employers consider the adoption of ICT to increase work efficiency, they should also assess its possible impact on employees’ health and well-being.

On the employees’ side, they can take an active role in soliciting social support through networking and seeking help. As “striving for perfection” was often reported as a job demand, employees should make realistic requirements of themselves that are based on their workload situations. Employees should also set boundaries on their accessibility during non-office hours.

Educators should consider designing courses to enable students to prepare for the job environments of the modern work place. Scholars can continue to carry out research on work engagement and empowerment to encourage good practices among employers and employees.

## **8. Limitations and Future Studies**

There are several limitations of the study. First, the interviewees came from a non-probability sampling and they may not be representative of all employees in the communication industry. Second, most of the interviewees were single or married without children. As a result, we expect that the job demand from balancing work-family roles is not as acute as for employees with children. Future studies can use survey methodology to measure the level of job stress in relation to the perceived job demands and resources, as well as the roles of ICT in a quantitative

manner. Further studies can also be conducted among employers in the communication industry to obtain their views on employee burnouts, and on the attention they pay to human strengths and positive experiences at work.

## 9. Conclusion

To conclude, the current study adopted the job demands and resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001) to investigate burnout among professionals in the communication industry in Hong Kong. Results indicated that management of clients' expectation and deadlines as well as striving for perfection were main job demands. Job variety and social support from colleagues were reported as major job resources. ICT was perceived more often as job resources than as job demands. The power of ICT in connecting people and the ability to access information anyplace anytime were seen as job resources. However, ICT also caused job demands as the line between work and non-work was blurred.

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### Author Note

Dr Kara Chan (Ph.D., City University of Hong Kong) is Professor at the School of Communication, Hong Kong Baptist University. She worked in the advertising profession and as a statistician for the Hong Kong Government before she joined the academia. Her research areas are about cross cultural consumer studies, consumer socialization, and health communication. She has published over 130 journal articles and book chapters. She was a Fulbright Scholar at Bradley University, Illinois and Visiting Professor at the Copenhagen Business School, Aarhus University, and Klagenfurt University. Her journal articles won five Emerald Literati Network Awards for Excellence.

Katharina Krainer is a PhD student and research assistant at the Department of Marketing and International Management at the University of Klagenfurt, Austria, where she is working on her interdisciplinary doctoral research project, comprising marketing, media and communication sciences. After receiving her degree in journalism and communication at the Department of Media and Communication Sciences in Klagenfurt, Krainer gained practical and scientific experiences in the area of organizational communication, communication consultancy, media and convergence management, and internationalization. Her current research and teaching interests include health communication, occupational stress, burnout, social marketing, and consumer behavior.

Sandra Diehl is Associate Professor at the Department for Media and Communication at the Alpen-Adria University Klagenfurt, Austria. She received her PhD and her habilitation in Business Administration from the Saarland University in Germany. Sandra Diehl has published in the areas of health and CSR communication, intercultural advertising and media management in such journals as the *International Journal of Advertising*, *Advances in International Marketing*, *Advances in Consumer Research*, *International Marketing Review* and *European Advances in Consumer Research*. She has authored and edited several books, among them the *Advances in Advertising Research*. She is board member of the European Advertising Academy.

Ralf Terlutter is Professor of Marketing and International Management and Head of the Department of Business Management at the Alpen-Adria Universitaet Klagenfurt, Austria. He received his Ph.D. and his habilitation from Saarland University, Germany. He has also worked in the international management consultancy Droege & Comp. AG, Duesseldorf, Germany. Ralf Terlutter has published in the areas of health and CSR communication, intercultural advertising and media management in journals such as *Journal of Advertising*, *International Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, *International Marketing Review*, *European Management Journal*. He was guest professor at several universities, among them San Diego State University, USA, Villanova University, USA, the University of the Basque Country, Bilbao, Spain, University of International Business and Economics, Beijing, China.

Anqi Huang (Master of Arts in Communication, Hong Kong Baptist University) is research assistant of Communication Studies at the Hong Kong Baptist University. She assisted the preparation of Professor Kara Chan's book manuscript *Girls and Media: Dreams and Reality* (City University of Hong Kong Press, 2014). She is now working in the public relations industry.

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### **Appendix 1. Questions for Interview**

1. Could you briefly introduce your working experience? On average, how many hours do you usually work in a week? How often do you work on weekends?
2. In general, what comes to your mind when you hear of the term "burnout" without referring to your own experience?
3. In your own experience, how do you experience "burnout"? Can you tell us more about these incidences (a recent one, or a most memorable one)? How often does this happen to you?
4. What are the demands in your work that may lead you to burnout?\*
5. How do ICT improve your work efficiency and make your work life easier?\*
6. How do ICT create more work strain for you?\*
7. What are the current supports from your work that may reduce your possibility of burnout?\*
8. What are the demands in your family that may lead you to burnout?
9. What are the current supports from your family that may reduce your possibility of burnout?
10. What coping strategies do you use to prevent yourself from burnout?

\*analyzed and reported in this paper