

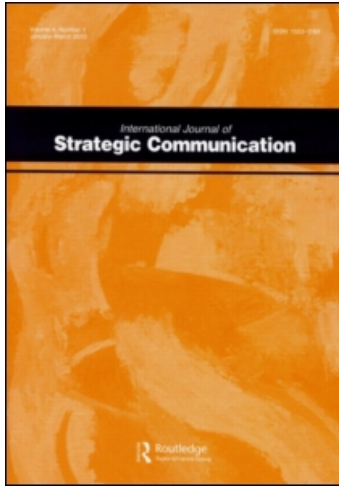
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### Social Media and Shared—or Divergent—Uses? A Coorientation Analysis of Public Relations Practitioners and Journalists

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# Social Media and Shared—or Divergent—Uses? A Coorientation Analysis of Public Relations Practitioners and Journalists

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Using a traditional coorientation model (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Broom, 1977) comparing the uses of social media among journalists and public relations practitioners, this survey found a similar though not perfectly aligned overall picture comparing the groups' uses and perceived importance of the tools. In fact, there were only minor differences between the groups with regard to agreement, accuracy, and congruency in social media use. In terms of understanding, reporters noted they were more likely to work with practitioners who were using social media tools. Thus, although usage gaps did emerge, journalists and practitioners appear to have overall convergence and shared orientations in their understandings of the other's use of social media, and important implications of these orientations on organizations' strategic visions emerge.

## INTRODUCTION

Social media exert strong influence and will no doubt continue to impact strategic organizational communication. Not only do social media present a vehicle to quickly deploy an emerging strategic communication approach in real time, but communicating through social media itself can be a strategic move for reaching particular audiences, whether target publics, reporters, or a journalist's potential sources. A perhaps ideal forum in an era of globalized media, an organization's social media presence enables it to reach transnational audiences and offer them dialogic communication. Of course, social media's potential to unite broad audiences is both an asset and liability as activist and dissenting voices are also granted a powerful forum with international, immediate reach. Virtually no organization can afford to neglect its online social media presence,

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and early evidence indicates both organizations and journalists are increasingly recognizing this reality.

An analysis of how these two groups of working communication professionals—practitioners and journalists—orient toward and use social media may reveal important disparities in their overall roles in organizations' communication plans, specifically in how practitioners present and journalists cover those organizations. Given that organizational presence in social media demands maintenance and monitoring, practitioners must know and understand which specific social media tools journalists are using as story sources. When there is shared value of a given tool, such as a social networking site, that tool is positioned as an ideal source of organizational information, story source for journalists, and, ultimately, a critical, international forum for the organization's publics. In sum, communication professionals in organizations may be well-served by a rich understanding of how their strategic vision for social media use aligns with that of journalists.

There is much research on relationships between journalists and public relations practitioners; scholarly, trade, and professional publications contain both research and anecdotes illustrating similarities and differences in values, practices, and cultures of the two groups. Generally, whether relationships are marked by cooperation or contentiousness, there is recognition on both sides of mutual need and dependence, creating a symbiosis in which they coexist. Twenty-first century technology is revolutionizing practices of journalists and public relations professionals. Although there are certainly differing rates of technology adoption among communication professionals (Sweetser, Porter, Chung, & Kim, 2008), there is little doubt that public relations and journalism as well as many other communication professions are scrambling to determine how and which of the new available tools are accessible, appropriate, and useful for their trades.

We initiated this study in order to explore how these two broad areas—journalist/public relations practitioner relationships and professional use of communication technology—are related. Knowing that a key and strategic target audience for public relations practitioners is the journalist, this study sought to determine the alignment between the two communicators' uses of emergent industry tools. Specifically, this study examines whether, and if so how, online social media impact the journalist/public relations practitioner relationship. Data from national surveys of corporate public relations persons and business journalists are analyzed through a coorientation perspective in order to examine how social media may be altering the relationship dynamic.

For more than a half century, coorientation has provided a useful diagnostic framework in which to analyze how two differing agents orient themselves to each other and to a mutual object of judgment (May & Mumby, 2005). Originated by Newcomb (1953), coorientation has proved highly heuristic and applicable broadly to numerous relationships—individuals, groups, and organizations. With social media as the object of judgment, how journalists and public relations practitioners orient toward these new tools and each other is a logical application of this theory. Additionally, we believe it is important to revisit the journalist/practitioner relationship in light of technological advances and consider whether online social media may be enhancing, equalizing, or otherwise changing the relationship dynamic. Much research has previously documented the “love-hate, ignore/depend” nature of the reporter/public relations practitioner relationship. Is it possible that greater perceptual accuracy, as well as enhanced agreement between the two groups, will result in greater congruency, and less ambivalence in how each regards the other, as a result of mutual uses of social media?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite digital media's powerful influence on news dissemination, it is unlikely to displace the crucial relationship between public relations sources and the reporters upon whom they depend for placement of their organizations' stories. Even as research focus may shift toward how digital media can enhance the practice of public relations in story placement—to be sure, a pressing line of inquiry—it is important not to overlook the continuing gatekeeping roles of journalists. Research on the evolving quality and effectiveness of those source-journalist relationships is far from passé, as it is highly unlikely new media will enable practitioners to ever completely circumvent gatekeepers when seeking to place their stories in the news. Instead, extant source-reporter research must be extended to increase our understanding of how new technologies such as social media may enrich or hinder relationships between public relations practitioners and journalists. Further, analysis of the influence of social media must take into account implications for relationships of the organization as a whole with members of the media, which extends much of the relational maintenance beyond direct control of the practitioner. Prior to discussing these working relationships and how use of these interactive tools may affect them, a review of the current state of social media's use in journalistic and practitioner contexts is in order.

### Strategic Communication and Social Media

Social media are rapidly changing communication within organizations and throughout their global networks. From a strategic communication perspective, social media creates an instantly available avenue through which to disseminate messages. This can be useful with regard to quick response or even testing the saliency of messages among target publics. Additionally, the deployment of a message through social media can be seen as strategic if it is aimed at a public who uses the social tool frequently.

An increasingly frequent topic among public relations bloggers and other strategic communications professionals concerns the responsibility for and ownership of social media. There is widespread agreement that public relations practitioners hold the organizational responsibility for using social media (Falls, 2008; Odden, 2006; Rose, 2008). However, there is scant empirical support for this claim; social media use will likely penetrate many communications arms of organizations, including information technology, marketing, and customer service. Further, all organizations will be charged with an increasingly expected presence and maintenance online in social media, regardless of whether or not they have public relations practitioners to monitor their use.

One of the earliest studies of public relations practitioners and their adoption of new technologies concluded that practitioners were “laggards” (Anderson & Reagan, 1992). A decade-later study reached a similar conclusion and suggested that technology adoption enhances public relations' ability to sit at the management table (Porter, Sallot, Cameron, & Shamp, 2001). In one of the most recent surveys across numerous industries (including education, which may affect overall results as educators are largely higher adopters and users of new technology than other fields [Fryer, 2009]) a high 78% of organizations reported using blogs, 63% online video, 56% social networks, and 49% podcasts (Gillin, 2008).

Other academic studies have not produced such high percentages of users, however. Findings of a recent online survey of public relations practitioners found that the most popular online tools used were the most traditional ones; 96% of respondents in a study self-reported used e-mail and 68.2% internal Intranets (Eyrich, Padman, & Sweetser, 2008). In fact, practitioners in that study reported using an average of 5.97 online tools out of 18 listed. Blogs, the most highly used social media tool, were used by 41.7% of those respondents. Another recent report of U.S. corporate public relations departments' uses of online tools also found technology use highest for traditional Web sites, with more than half (52.2%) of corporate practitioners indicating these are where they most often seek information about companies (Lariscy, Avery, Sweetser, & Howes, 2008). Consistent with the Eyrich, Padman, and Sweetser (2008) study, blogs were the most frequently reported used social media tool (45%); blogs were followed by video-sharing, reportedly used by 42.3% (Lariscy et al., 2008).

It does seem that when public relations practitioners use social media tools they see themselves as having more power within their organizations (Porter, Sweetser Trammel, Chung, & Kim, 2007; Porter & Sallot, 2005; Sallot, Porter, & Acosta-Alzuru, 2004). Porter and colleagues (2007, p. 94) conclude that practitioners who blog feel they have more expertise and prestige within their organizations than those who do not. To date, other online media tools, such as Twitter and Facebook, have not been similarly analyzed for any potential additive power perception.

### Journalism and Social Media

Since the early part of this decade, surveys have cited journalists turning to so-called nontraditional information sources gathering in their writing of stories. One of the more popular of these surveys, conducted in conjunction with Columbia University in 2005, found that more than half of journalists used blogs to either break scandals, find sources, or inspire story ideas (EURO Magnet, 2005). Business journalists appear to more heavily rely on such sources, as Arketi Group's (2007) survey reported 72% of business journalists read blogs. At the same time these staggering numbers were being released, other journalists decried bloggers as being amateurs with poor writing skills (Regan, 2003). Bloggers were quoted as having similarly disdainful opinions of journalists, citing the professionals to be elitist (Regan, 2003).

Although not a traditional coorientation model approach, Sweetser et al. (2008) examined how public relations practitioners and journalists perceived and used blogs in their professional work; they concluded that practitioners should be aware of and employ social media content because journalists widely reported using such content to write stories. They found that journalists perceived a higher impact of blogs on the industry than did public relations practitioners. Paradoxically, Sweetser et al. (2008) found that journalists were engaging in more interactive uses for blogs whereas public relations practitioners favored more research-based activities. Both groups did not find blogs to be credible, but journalists assigned a slightly higher level of credibility than public relations practitioners. Sweetser et al. (2008) note public relations practitioners lagged journalists in both use and perception, marking a dangerous future for public relations. This disparity may in fact plague any organizations' strategic communications if so-called "info-entials," those who multiply sources of information and then share the sum of knowledge, increase reliance on social media content (Edelman, 2008).

## Practitioner/Organization and Journalists Relationships

The current state of the working relationships between public relations sources and journalists will likely moderate the incorporation of social media into those relationships, particularly in terms of how they can enrich the practice, and how disparities in use and perceived importance may hinder the crucial flow of information therein. The relationships between journalists and public relations practitioners have garnered much scholarly attention for more than four decades; even 12 years ago there were more than 150 studies examining practitioners as source and journalists as gatekeeper relationship (Cameron, Sallot, & Curtin, 1997).

These relationships are often characterized as contentious, particularly with regard to journalists' perceptions of public relations practitioners (Shin & Cameron, 2004). Practitioners' information subsidies are often viewed as lacking news value and motivated by self-interest, but they are considered the "crux of the newsgathering process" (Sallot & Johnson, 2006, p. 151) and remain critical even as newsgathering and release may increasingly shift online. In interviews with 418 journalists conducted from 1991–2004, Sallot and Johnson (2006) revealed a somewhat steady expression of love-hate sentiments of journalists toward practitioners, although their perceived value to journalists did increase longitudinally. In fact, on average journalists over that span of 13 years estimated that 44% of news content in the United States was driven by the efforts of public relations practitioners.

The quality of that subsidized information and the quality of relationships between practitioners and journalists may be moderated by several situational factors. Adopting a coorientational approach to study the relationships between health public information officers and journalists, Avery and Lariscy (2007) revealed convergence between practitioners and journalists on the importance of more routine issues on the local public health agenda. However, Lariscy, Avery, and Sohn (2007) found that on issues related to health crisis topics, great divergence emerged in their perceived importance. These researchers note the quality of relationships between health information officers and journalists may be moderated by departmental structure; journalists evaluated their relationships with practitioners in state health offices as significantly better than those with practitioners in local and federal offices. Interestingly, though, the resources availed by federal-level practitioners were evaluated significantly more positively than those offered at the state and local levels.

Despite the sometimes adversarial relationship and factors that may moderate it, there is little doubt that this relationship is a mutually beneficial one for practitioners seeking coverage of their organizations' news and journalists in their story gathering and research. Social media will most likely exert increasing influence on these relationships; the nature of that influence remains to be seen. On one hand, social media offer practitioners a forum in which they can post and update unlimited, interactive information for journalists. However, practitioners may also take advantage of the unedited nature of social media, circumventing the media gatekeepers of traditional media, and focus more energy on targeting publics via new media at the expense of the "old." Perhaps in the presocial media days one source of conflict between the two groups was the inherent difference between overarching goals, i.e., for journalists the objective representation of news, for practitioners the truthful advocacy of a perspective, organization, person, or point of view. In social media there may well be greater convergence of goals, as information sources merge, enhanced assessment of accuracy as information is more readily shared, and ultimately there is more agreement on overall news values represented in a particular story.

Further, social media efforts, although coordinated by practitioners, represent the organization's presence online as a whole instead of the more personal relationships cultivated by sources and reporters through more direct, traditional person-to-person information subsidies such as the press release. A possible increasing shift to organization-journalist relations from the more personalized source-journalists relationships may be a rising force on the news-gathering and releasing process, especially given that journalists have "expressed concerns that increasing use of Internet-based technologies is de-personalizing their relationships with practitioners, which journalists view as damaging to relationships" (Sallot & Johnson, 2006, p. 158). Further, journalists may evaluate practitioners whom they know and with whom they have cultivated relationships more favorably (Jeffers, 1977), suggesting that as social media and other new technologies are more organization-centered, sometimes depersonalized sources of information, they may be detrimental to relationship-building with members of the media.

This organization-media relationship is largely understudied, with little theoretical development on organization-media relationships beyond analysis of the practitioner-journalist relationship (Desiere & Sha, 2007). In their exploratory analysis, which shifts from a micro- (source-reporter) to mesolevel (organization-media) relational focus, Desiere and Sha (2007) revealed that honesty, accuracy, responsiveness, reliability, and preparedness—central also to microlevel relationships—are critical to the development of organization-media relationships, with honesty being of the utmost importance.

Given that information on social media in most cases enters the public domain without journalistic editing, it will be interesting to see how and if perceived honesty is compromised in journalists' impressions of organizations' information subsidies on social media. Furthermore, given the unedited nature of online information, unlike that in other media, practitioners may increasingly circumvent more traditional routes of story placement, and the critical components of responsiveness and reliability may suffer. Finally, Desiere and Sha (2007) found symmetrical communication through organizations' adaptation to media, while remaining mindful of their own interests, was also of great importance to the organizational-media relationship. The same mutually beneficial outcomes of two-way communication, respect and mutual credibility, critical to micro-level relationships were key to healthy mesolevel relationships. Social media do offer practitioners and journalists promising new avenues for two-way communication given their interactive nature.

Desiere and Sha (2007) noted the size, scope, and influence of media will increase with technological advances online, so "analyzing the media relations function as an organization-level practice, not merely as an individual practitioner skill, will allow media relations to keep up with, and be included in, future advancement in public relations theory" (p. 98). To be sure, media relations studies must stay prevalent in public relations scholarship given the ever-growing power of new media, and this study marks a critical first investigation into the use of social media in source and reporter contexts, its current use and importance in story placement and writing, and its role in journalists' satisfaction in working with practitioners. Through a coorientational approach, interviews with practitioners and the journalists with whom they work will illuminate how social media may shape traditional working relationships with media.

## Coorientation

The coorientation model of public relations is derived from psychology and communication. Originally developed to explain why people change attitudes in relationships with other people

(Heider, 1946), the model assumes that people strive for psychological balance. People maintain an orientation toward an object as well as an orientation toward another person, and they strive to have these orientations compatible with one another. Newcomb (1953) extended the coorientational model from psychology to communication and launched a plethora of studies in primarily interpersonal communication. He advanced that when people in relationships had psychological imbalance due to differing judgments of an object or activity (i.e., smoking cigarettes) communication should be the tool to resolve this situation (Newcomb, 1956).

Coorientation was first elaborated on and defined in terms of its application to public relations by Broom (1977). Grunig and Hunt (1984) adapted the variables and their interrelationships from an interpersonal model developed and called coorientation by McLeod and Chaffee (Chaffee & McLeod, 1970; McLeod & Chaffee, 1973) and used the model to explain relations between organizations and their publics. Accuracy is postulated as a primary goal of effective public relations (Broom, 2005). There are four key variables in the model that describe how close or distant the views of organizations are with their publics and vice versa (Broom & Dozier, 1990). Congruency is the degree to which each group believes the other is like them; accuracy is the degree to which those perceptions or evaluations are right. Agreement is the degree to which each side shares similar evaluations, and understanding is the degree of similarity between the groups' conceptualizations. Recent applications of coorientation in public relations include an analysis of international relationships between Slovenia and Croatia (Vercic, Vercic, & Laco, 2005) and an analysis of patient/provider relationships in health (Bowes, 1997).

One timely line of inquiry that extends coorientation research asks how practitioners and journalists coorient with regard to use and perceived importance of social media for both journalists and organizations. Analysis of disparities in how social media is used for professional purposes between the two contexts will reveal how social media factor into the flow of information (ideally two-way) between the source and journalists and, ultimately, to their publics. Finally, correlations between journalists' satisfaction in working with practitioners who embrace social media tools and perceived importance of those tools may offer important considerations and directives for practitioners. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of this particular coorientational model.

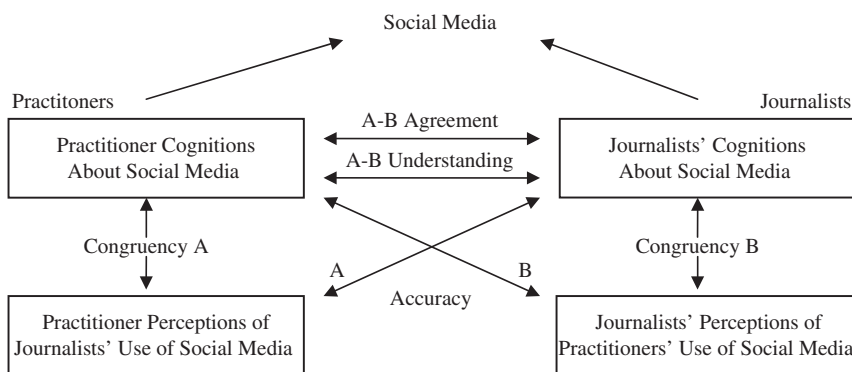


FIGURE 1 Coorientation model for practitioners' and journalists' social media use and perceptions.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Figure adapted from McLeod & Chaffee (1973).



To explore the model, the following research questions are asked to reveal differences in social media use between organizations and journalists through a coorientational methodological lens.

## Research Questions

Research questions are asked to measure each of the four key variables of coorientation: agreement, accuracy, congruency, and understanding (Broom & Dozier, 1990). Each question is presented below along with a brief explanation of its respective domain of coorientation:

*Agreement.* These questions assess practitioners' and journalists' use of social media to reveal similarities both in individual tool use and in the two groups' similarity of evaluations of social media's value for various professional functions. By measuring their cognitive orientations toward the tools we receive a clearer picture of their ultimate use. Key functions are analyzed in RQ2 to reveal disparities in perceptions of social media's use for critical organizational strategic communications.

RQ1. Do journalists and public relations practitioners orient themselves to various social media tools in similar or different ways, e.g. in time spent using the tools for professional purposes each day?

RQ2. What differences emerge in orientations toward social media tools between journalists and practitioners for the following functions:

- a. identifying and tracking emerging issues?
- b. placing stories [for practitioners] and generating stories [for journalists]?
- c. countering a rumor or negative story [for practitioners] and investigating a rumor or negative story [for journalists]?
- d. collecting and presenting objective information?

*Accuracy.* In order to reveal the accuracy of perceptions of the "other side's" use in the next set of questions on congruency, the following is asked to identify the journalists' and practitioners' perceived importance of social media tools.

RQ3. What differences in perceived importance emerge between journalists and public relations practitioners for various social media tools?

*Congruency.* The following questions explore to what extent journalists and practitioners believe the other's use of social media orients similarly to their own.

- RQ4. a. Do journalists and practitioners perceive the "other side's" extent of use of social media differently?
- b. Do journalists and practitioners perceive the "other side's" extent of faith in social media information differently?

*Understanding.* Given that understanding represents similarity of evaluation, it is important to reveal if journalists' satisfaction in their working relationships with practitioners who use social media tools correlates to the overall importance they assign to that use to reveal orientation in understanding in how the tools are used to enrich both practice and relationships. Thus, the following is asked:

RQ5. Is there a relationship between journalists' satisfaction in working with public relations practitioners who use social media tools for their organizations and their overall perceived importance of practitioners' professional use of social media tools?

## METHODS

To investigate differences in practitioners' and journalists' uses of social media, a telephone survey was conducted with corporate public relations practitioners at Fortune 500s primarily and Fortune 1000s across the United States and the business journalists who are covering their stories, adopting a coorientation approach. The IRB-approved study was funded by a grant from the Public Relations Society of America Foundation, and all data collection was conducted by a university survey research center following a structured interview format. Interviewers at the university's survey research center attended rigorous training sessions to ensure standardization and quality control of administration. Interviews were conducted with a computer assisted telephone interview system that recorded and coded all interview data, minimizing error resulting from human data entry and coding.

### Sample

The first step in recruiting participants was a letter mailed to each practitioner and journalist that fell within sample parameters. Times were arranged for a telephone interview for those respondents willing to participate. For practitioners, the recruiting population was a comprehensive list of primarily Fortune 500 companies and public relations contacts at each company; these names were obtained from Web sites, directories, and annual reports. The initial list of practitioners at Fortune 500s yielded 200 interviews, thus the sampling parameters were broadened to practitioners at Fortune 1000s. Once a corporation's participation was procured, interviewers asked to speak with someone in the public relations department knowledgeable about social media use. Of course, corporate privacy policies prohibited the participation of many respondents. Of 599 companies contacted from the Fortune 500 and 1000 lists, a total of 200 companies participated of those who were eligible, resulting in a 20% overall response rate, which is satisfactory for this difficult to access population.

Recruitment of business journalists was a two-step process. First, public relations practitioner respondents were asked to provide the name and contact information of one business journalist who covers their stories or with whom they communicate on a regular basis. Although many practitioners were unwilling or could not respond due to corporate policy, 36 of the interviews with business/financial journalists were garnered through this procedure. Next, business journalists at national daily newspapers were randomly selected from a list compiled by the survey research center. Journalist respondents represented a wide range of national newspapers including the *Wall Street Journal* and *Financial Times*. So, the initial 36 interviews were conducted with journalists whose information was provided by practitioners with whom they worked. To recruit a sample equal in size to that of practitioners, the survey research center randomly selected and contacted journalists until an additional 164 participants were acquired. Overall, 200 interviews were completed with business journalists, representing a 27% response rate.

## Instrument

To measure basic use of social media tools – which include blogs, podcasting, video sharing, social networks, photo sharing, wikis, virtual worlds/gaming, and social bookmarking – practitioners and journalists were asked if they did or did not use each tool in their practice. Both samples were also asked to indicate the importance of each tool to their work on a 1–5 scale, with 1 being “not at all important” and 5 being “very important.” To measure time spent on social media per day, each respondent was asked to indicate the number of hours he or she spends using social media in a professional capacity each day. Practitioners and journalists were also asked a series of questions on perceptions on the extent of faith and use of the “other side” with social media.

One or both populations were also asked to indicate if they use social media for business “a great deal,” “some” or “not at all” for the following purposes: to identify and track emerging issues, to collect and present objective information, to place stories (practitioners), to find stories (journalists), to investigate a negative story or rumor (journalists), and to counter a negative story or rumor (practitioners). To measure perceptions regarding the importance of monitoring social media, both sets of respondents were asked to indicate their extent of agreement with the following statement on a scale of 1–5, “Monitoring social media is as important as monitoring more traditional media.” Finally, journalists were asked how important it was for practitioners to use social media tools and their level of satisfaction with those practitioners who use and maintain social media tools for their organizations. They also indicated their extent of agreement with the following statements: “Practitioners are doing a good job of using social media tools” and “I am more likely to use stories from practitioners who maintain social media tools.” For the majority of data analysis, given this study’s coorientational focus, a series of paired sample *t*-tests were most appropriate as the same measurement was made in different conditions with matched samples.

## RESULTS

### Agreement

The first research question was asked to investigate differences in journalists’ and practitioners’ uses of social media tools, including blogs, podcasting, video sharing, social networks, photo sharing, wikis, virtual worlds/gaming, and social bookmarking. A series of independent samples *t*-tests were run to compare uses of those social media tools and revealed four tools with significant difference in use. Use of blogs for journalists ( $M = .31, SD = .465$ ) and practitioners ( $M = .45, SD = .499$ ) was significantly different;  $t(376) = -2.70, p = 0.06$ . Use of podcasting for journalists ( $M = .16, SD = .368$ ) and practitioners ( $M = .31, SD = .465$ ) was also significantly different;  $t(374) = -3.51, p = 0.000$ . Finally, use of video sharing sites for journalists ( $M = .22, SD = .417$ ) and practitioners ( $M = .42, SD = .494$ ) was significantly different;  $t(375) = -4.137, p = 0.000$ , and use of social bookmarking for journalists ( $M = .08, SD = .274$ ) and practitioners ( $M = .15, SD = .362$ ) was significantly different;  $t(372) = -2.181, p = 0.000$ . Analysis of means indicated that practitioners used all four tools significantly more. To further analyze differences in use, respondents were asked how many hours they spend per day using

social media; the two groups' time difference was not significant [ $t(223) = -1.744, p = 0.08$ ] for journalists ( $M = 1.36, SD = 2.512$ ) or practitioners ( $M = .201, SD = 2.784$ ).

The next set of questions (RQ2a-d) investigates differences in journalists' and practitioners' uses of social media tools for a variety of professional functions. Each group was asked if social media is useful to identify and track emerging issues and responded on a 1–5 scale with 1 being “strongly agree” and 5 being “strongly disagree.” Use of independent samples  $t$ -test revealed use of social media to identify and track emerging issues for journalists ( $M = 2.91, SD = 1.209$ ) and practitioners ( $M = 3.38, SD = 1.184$ ) was significantly different;  $t(247) = -2.845, p = 0.005$ , with journalists using social media more for the monitoring function.

For the next three functions, each group was asked if they use social media for the following functions a great deal (1), some (2), or not at all (3). A paired-samples  $t$ -test revealed significant difference in use of social media to find or place stories; practitioners use social media to place stories ( $M = 1.60, SD = .716$ ) more than journalists use them to find stories ( $M = 2.33, SD = .681$ ), at a significant level [ $t(358) = 9.908, p = 0.000$ ]. Practitioners also use social media to counter a negative story or rumor ( $M = 1.47, SD = .614$ ) more than journalists use them to investigate a rumor or negative story ( $M = 2.22, SD = .653$ ), at a significant level [ $t(362) = 11.293, p = 0.000$ ]. As a place to collect and present objective information, social media are also used significantly more [ $t(364) = 6.379, p = .000$ ] by practitioners ( $M = 1.73, SD = .701$ ) than journalists ( $M = 2.20, SD = .713$ ).

### Accuracy

Research Question 3 explores differences in practitioners' and journalists' perceived importance of each of the following social media tools: blogs, podcasting, video sharing, social networks, photo sharing, wikis, virtual worlds, and social bookmarking. Importance was measured on a 1 to 5 scales with 1 being “not at all important” and 5 being “very important.” Differences in importance were significant for every tool except for wikis (correlations and  $t$ -values for video sharing and social bookmarking could not be computed due to the small numbers of users that resulted in inadequate cell sizes): blogs were more important for practitioners ( $M = 3.07, SD = 1.191$ ) than journalists ( $M = 2.29, SD = 1.285$ ), [ $t(144) = -3.697, p = .000$ ], podcasting was more important for practitioners ( $M = 2.68, SD = 1.202$ ) than journalists ( $M = 1.46, SD = .637$ ), [ $t(89) = -5.405, p = .000$ ], video sharing was more important for practitioners ( $M = 3.14, SD = 1.201$ ) than journalists ( $M = 2.21, SD = 1.312$ ), [ $t(103) = -3.698, p = .000$ ], social networks were more important for practitioners ( $M = 2.89, SD = 1.197$ ) than journalists ( $M = 1.96, SD = 1.068$ ), [ $t(85) = -3.821, p = .000$ ], and photo sharing was more important for practitioners ( $M = 3.47, SD = 1.195$ ) than journalists ( $M = 3.01, SD = 1.219$ ), [ $t(153) = -2.313, p = .022$ ].

### Congruency

Having explored differences between the two groups' uses and perceived importance of social media tools, Research Questions 4a and 4b explored each group's perceptions of the other's extent of use of and extent of faith in social media. When practitioners were asked to agree or disagree with the statement “reporters put much faith in social media” on a 1–5 scale, where 1 was “strongly agree” and 5 was “strongly disagree” (and reporters asked the same of practitioners

on the same scale), there was significant difference in perceptions [ $t(311) = 2.041, p = .04$ ]. Practitioners perceived reporters to put significantly more faith in social media ( $M = 2.73, SD = .961$ ) than journalists did for practitioners ( $M = 2.95, SD = 1.009$ ). There was no significant difference in each side's perceptions of the other's use of social media [ $t(332) = .445, p = .650$ ].

### Understanding

Finally, analysis of RQ5 explores journalists' satisfaction in working with practitioners who use social media and the relationship of that satisfaction with their overall perceived importance of the use of social media tools in public relations using a crosstab analysis. The Pearson's correlations revealed that the relationship between the two was not significant [ $\chi^2(1, 169) = 3.186, p = .076$ ]. The journalists' satisfaction in working with practitioners who use and maintain social media mean score of 3.12 was only slightly higher than that for their perceived importance in using social media in public relations practice ( $M = 3.01$ ), but the two did not correlate significantly ( $r = .137$ ).

## DISCUSSION

As often found in studies comparing journalists to public relations practitioners, there are fewer differences between the two groups than believed from the onset. Though their jobs are distinctly different, their symbiotic and often codependent relationships typically result in fewer differences between the two professions within the communication industry. Here we again find this to be the case, as statistically significant differences do exist, but in many cases these differences are marginal. As such, we see coorientation here with regard to agreement is high, though not perfect, in that both practitioners and journalists are using social media similarly with minor yet some statistically significant differences. We suggest that social media may in fact serve as a bridge of convergence between the two groups; they may coorient in even more similar ways in part due to shared social media information, vehicles, and meanings.

It is important to first point out that overall use of social media by these groups is low, and again lower than might be expected for two professions who rely on communication (Sweetser et al., 2008). Although previous studies noted slightly more use of the social media tool of blogs by journalists (Sweetser et al., 2008), the data here show public relations practitioners are now using this tool more and thinking more highly of it. Widening that original comparison of practitioner to journalist on tool use, this data also finds practitioners use podcasting, video sharing, and social bookmarking more frequently than journalists. This may be the case because the practitioners' job is to strategically communicate a specific message on behalf of their companies, whereas the reporters' job is to investigate and analyze information about these companies.

In this case, public relations practitioners have a more vested interest in casting a wider net of tools in their communications campaigns. Furthermore, the tools used more by practitioners represent excellent promotional tools as well as opportunities to engage in two-way relationships with the companies' publics. Focusing on the differences in time dedicated to social media use, practitioners log more hours presumably because they are using more tools at greater rates and creating content in addition to simply monitoring it.

The purpose-laden uses of social media by these two groups in the communication industry also differed. Different from earlier reported findings of these groups' uses of blogs for tracking and monitoring issues (Sweetser et al., 2008), this data found that when considering all social media tools business journalists used social media more than public relations practitioners for tracking emerging issues. Given that "issues management is a dominant paradigm of research and practice in public relations" (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001, p. 156), it is somewhat surprising—and perhaps disappointing—that practitioners are not using social media as much, if not even more, than journalists for this critical surveillance function. Interestingly, public relations practitioners were overall neutral on use of social media for surveillance ( $M = 3.33$ ). To the extent that monitoring the external environment may enable practitioners to prevent organizational crises by revealing mounting threats (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001), the rapidly growing use of social media presents an imperative domain in which issues management must occur.

Presumably, we see here that journalists are continuing to turn to social media for inspiration, assistance, and information in doing their jobs. Keeping up with information through social media has enabled these journalists to maintain a larger set of informants and contacts as they perform their watchdog function. The neutral responses from public relations practitioners on this item present an area of concern; if they do not take as aggressive of a monitoring stance as the watchdog journalists, public relations may be blindsided by a crisis they would have seen brewing online. Even though practitioners are not monitoring issues online to the extent journalists are, they are using social media to place stories, counter negative messages, and present objective information significantly more than journalists. Here we see that contrary to earlier findings (Sweetser et al., 2008), practitioners are now engaging their publics online and using social media as an additional platform for communicating their message, which indicates some progress among practitioners who may have initially lagged in social media adoption. Hopefully, practitioners will likewise increasingly use social media to monitor and track online issues that have the potential to become overnight sensations.

Overall, there is a fair level of convergence in terms of the agreement component in practitioners' and journalists' orientation to social media and their shared evaluations thereof (Broom & Dozier, 1990), despite some disparities in use of particular tools and functions. Of course, any claims of agreement in their coorientation are tempered by the fact that overall use of social media in the two professional capacities is surprisingly low, particularly given that communication is perhaps the primary function of both professions be it for relationship maintenance or information dissemination. Future research should investigate reasons underlying this resistance, and longitudinal research should track adaption and agreement among practitioners and journalists to reveals temporal implications on their relationships.

Given that practitioners are using more of the social media tools investigated in this study, dedicating more time to that use, and engaging their publics via these tools more than journalists are, it only makes sense that practitioners would perceive these tools as being more important. When companies invest in these tools, be it through personnel or money, it indeed sends a signal that such tools are important. We find that echoed throughout these results in that a number of tools are noted as being more important in the eyes of public relations practitioners than journalists.

One question that arises, then, is how attuned to that corporate signal are journalists, and are they leading or following practitioners' adoption and use? This analysis establishes a benchmark

in the two groups' perceived importance of social media tools that enables future research to examine changes in evaluations of importance as well as the degree to which the perceptions of the other's use and importance are correct.

Continuing that examination into perceived importance through the congruency construct of coorientation, the degree to which each group believes the other is like them (Broom & Dozier, 1990), practitioners felt journalists had more faith in social media than journalists felt practitioners had. This finding may explain the increase in practitioner perceptions of social media from earlier reports (Sweetser et al., 2008). If practitioners feel journalists have great faith in social media, practitioners would invest more efforts in social media as a means not only to engage their publics but also to provide additional avenues to journalists. Yet, it may be too early to discern whether or not journalists endorse this approach, as there was no significant relationship between journalists' satisfaction in working with public relations practitioners who use social media tools and their overall perceived importance of use of social media tools in public relations practice in measurement of the understanding variable of coorientation.

Given understanding represents similarity of evaluation, it may be too early to conclude that these two groups are coorienting in the most productive, beneficial way. Yet, despite the disparity in faith in social media attributed to the other group, there was no significant difference in each side's perceptions of the other's extent of use of social media; in fact, those means for those scores were almost identical. Thus, although use gaps did emerge, journalists and practitioners appear to have convergence and shared orientations in their understanding of the others' use of social media.

### Limitations and Future Research

This study is not without limitation. While the coorientation model and approach here did take into account the relationship between practitioner and journalist, future research should better match the individual pairs of practitioners with corresponding journalists and explore differences on that 1-to-1 relationship in the aggregate to supplement and extend the conclusions here reached through a more "overall picture" of the two groups. In that pursuit, that research should delve deeper into the individual constructs of coorientation, extending the overall conclusions of the model presented here and seeking to thoroughly understand the more nuanced differences that were reported. Given that these participants were corporate practitioners and business journalists, future research should also investigate social media use in other areas of practice. Furthermore, scholars can look deeper into the specific constructs through extended, depth interviews. Future research can also explore the broader relational implications of social media use among practitioners and journalists.

### CONCLUSION

This coorientation model revealed a similar though not perfectly aligned picture for both practitioners and journalists. Though differences exist with practitioners using social media slightly more than journalists with regard to agreement, accuracy, and congruency, these differences were minor. Interestingly, however, use of social media by practitioners does matter to journalists as

found when investigating the understanding construct, as reporters noted they were more likely to work with practitioners using such tools.

Coorientation, as studied here among journalists and practitioners, provides important insights for strategic planning. Through survey research, determination is made of attitudes of each population group toward both the other group as well as toward a number of issues. Then, differences are assessed, and strategies are developed to increase agreement between orientations held by one group and those held by the other. The resultant strategic plan [program of action, list of recommendations for media relations, etc] has as its goal to improve the overall relationships between both groups.

What is perhaps unexpected from this co-orientation analysis, however, is that utilization of social media in and of themselves may be enhancing all the components of the co-orienting relationship. As hinted throughout this study, as both journalists and practitioners increase their use of social media, they may well be sharing sources, sharing information, sharing insights in such manner that there is more agreement among them, confirming accuracy of information, and ultimately converging more on opinions about the particular news event or story than ever previously—and this may be an unintentional byproduct of both groups utilizing social media.

Such findings provide an important path for the future of strategic communication research. Not only does this signal that public relations practitioners can reach a key strategic public (journalists) through social media to the desired effect, the mere use of the coorientation model presents an intuitive approach to understanding the effect of strategic communication. An essential component of successful strategic communication is to first reach a key set of publics. The coorientation model tells researchers if that happened, which allows researchers to then delve deeper to understand message salience and whether the desired outcome occurs. Without knowing whether the message reached the publics through the vehicle deployed (in this case, social media) and how that message may have traveled through other channels, the researcher is blindly drawing conclusions without a clear picture of what happened with the message in-between the release and desired outcome.

In the end, we find practitioners and journalists are not as different as some may argue in regard to their orientations toward social media and the other's use of those tools.

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