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ABSTRACT

Extending the focus on the potential for context collapse in news diffusion to diverse audiences, we investigated whether and how news sharers took account of audience characteristics to reach audiences from diverse contexts, interacted only with similar others, or remained silent (to avoid social risks). Results from surveys of 395 individuals suggest that depending on the symmetricity of social media environments, different types of similarity between news sharers and their audience increased news sharing in different ways, but the extent of context collapse did not. Implications for news sharing with similar social media audiences are discussed.

The contemporary media environment enables individuals to take active roles in online news sharing through both mass and interpersonal communication means (Walther & Valkenburg, 2017). Individuals spread news to massive audiences, often through social media, taking on a traditional function of mass media. At the same time, online news sharing is as much a human communication behavior involving the sender and the audience as a journalism-related behavior. News sharers take account of who their audiences are and manage what news to share with them to maintain their self-images and relationships with their audiences (Ihm & Kim, 2018).

In the integrated mass and interpersonal communication process occurring on social media, news sharers encounter context collapse of their audiences, a situation that communicators seldom experienced before the

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advent of social media. Users communicate with diverse groups of audiences in various relational contexts, different relationship origins, and distinctive norms and cultures (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Previous research suggests that social media users take advantage of context collapse to reach a diverse audience and engage in cross-cutting discussions (Beam et al., 2018; Vitak, 2012).

However, context collapse may prevent news sharers from pleasing every member of their audience. When context collapse is greater, sharing news with audiences generates greater risks of disappointing diverse audience expectations and ruining their self-images and relationships with the audience. As a result, some individuals may decide to share news only when their perceived audience consists of like-minded others, otherwise remaining silent (Hoffman & Lutz, 2017; Liu et al., 2017; Noelle-Neumann, 1991). In other words, context collapse on social media environments does not guarantee that users will take advantage of diversity during news sharing. How news sharers take account of audience contexts may determine whether news reaches diverse audiences or whether the spiral of silence intensifies.

This study explores how social media users deal with the diverse relational contexts of and their own similarity to their audience when they share news. Specifically, we investigate how users in different media environments navigate such complexities and appraise the receptivity of their audience in different ways. Investigating how and when news sharers deal with these situations may provide a deeper understanding of the news diffusion process, including the diffusion of misinformation and lessening of cross-cutting discussion. If distinctions between how social media environments design users' interactions make a critical impact on news-sharing patterns, it may be possible to implement proactive measures or solutions for the media platforms that surround every aspect of our lives. The present study will ultimately offer theoretical implications on how democracy may develop or regress through social media.

Context Collapse and News Sharing as an Interpersonal Process

Most studies of online news sharing have paid attention to the informational aspects of news. They have approached the news-sharing behavior as a diffusion of information and identified what types of news articles are more spreadable in the online environment (e.g., surprising, controversial, or interesting news, Cappella et al., 2015; Chen & Berger, 2013).

However, this study directs attention to individual news sharers who decide to share and determine the path of news on social media environments. When individuals interact with others in their everyday lives, they "perform" for an audience to please that audience and maintain ideal self-images; that is, they exhibit self-presentation motivation (Baumeister &

Hutton, 1987; Goffman, 1959). In the same way, when users share news with others, they do not only diffuse the informational content of that news. They carefully take account of audience characteristics and choose what news to share, even editing or adding their opinions to the content, so that they could present themselves without undermining their self-images or relationships with the audience (Ihm & Kim, 2018).

Social media platforms also provide features for users to segment audiences into different groups that can be selected and filtered for specific messages (Baym & Boyd, 2012; Litt, 2012), so social media users may take advantage of the available technical features to consider their online audience and share news selectively. In this way, news sharing on social media can be understood as an active self-presentation behavior and an interpersonal communication between users and their audiences beyond diffusion of information. Despite having many technical features, social media platforms also have functional limitations in achieving fine differentiation and segmentation of audience groups (Litt, 2012). For example, those posting can limit temporal, spatial, and social boundaries and flatten various audience groups into a single group (Baym & Boyd, 2012). Context collapse occurs in situations when the contexts of distinct audience groups (e.g., friends or acquaintances) merge or disappear (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Social media users have their own audience, so degrees of context collapse for each users' audience can differ (Beam et al., 2018; Vitak, 2012). The audience may come from (more) diverse contexts; thus context collapse may be great(er). The audience may be based on similar contexts, and thus have little context collapse.

Understanding online news sharing from a relational perspective indicates that context collapse provides opportunities for active self-presentation. For instance, Davis and Jurgenson (2014) found that social media users may utilize audience contexts for social utility. Because social media create context collapse, users can present their opinions to a wide range of audiences and broaden their online influence (i.e., context collusion). Indeed, research indicates that social media users share news more when context collapse increases (Beam et al., 2018; Vitak, 2012). Social media users can take advantage of context collapse to reach a heterogeneous group of people and access diverse ranges of information and viewpoints that may develop their bridging social capital (Ellison et al., 2007). These studies suggest good news for democracy in that context collapse can contribute to the diversity of ideas and the prevalence of bridging social capital.

However, news sharing on social media may not always take advantage of the diversity of audience that context collapse provides. Because an audience consists of mixed contexts, each of them may have different expectations that are difficult to predict and satisfy. Sharing information with a broad audience may involve revealing private information to an inappropriate audience or

discomforting one subset of the audience (e.g., by revealing personal details to one's boss or political opinions to opponents). Thus, context collapse implies that news sharing may generate negative consequences such as "privacy breakdown" or "unpleasant feedback" (i.e., context collision, Davis & Jurgenson, 2014), failing to serve news sharers' self-presentation motivation. As a result, individuals may minimize their social risk by not sharing news when they perceive a great context collapse of their audience. Considering the conflicting arguments in previous research, this study investigates whether context collapse is related to news sharing positively or negatively; more formally:

> RQ1: How is social media users' news sharing related to the degree of audience context collapse?

Audience Similarity in Online News Sharing

Despite significant attention to context collapse, there are two limitations in past research. First, previous research focuses only on types of relationships that existed long before the Internet or social media: socially given, fixed, and explicit categories of classmates, families, and coworkers, most of whom are not deliberately chosen (Beam et al., 2018; Frampton & Child, 2013; Vitak, 2012). However, social media users may have online relationships with individuals linked purely by social media interactions, such as posting messages, exchanging "likes," reposting others' content, or just "following" one another.

Second, the focus on categories such as classmates, family, and coworkers ignores the fact that in online news sharing, users may be more concerned about—whether their audience exhibits values, socioeconomic status, personalities, or interests *similar* to their own—than the nature of a given relationship. A major reason why context collapse of the audience may present difficulties in communication involves the challenge in gauging diverse audience characteristics such as their values, socioeconomic status, personalities, or interests. Serving their self-presentation motivation, users want to maintain good self-images and relationships with their audience, and such specific audience characteristics may provide more useful information and play a larger role in news sharing than the relational contexts that past research has addressed (i.e., classmates, families, and coworkers, Beam et al., 2018; Frampton & Child, 2013; Vitak, 2012).

To address the gaps in past research, this article considers the possibility that *similarity* between users' values, socioeconomic status, personalities, or interests and their audience's plays a greater role in online news sharing. The spiral of silence theory suggests that individuals monitor the opinions of the media environment and only speak out when they think their

opinion corresponds with the dominant opinion in the environment (Noelle-Neumann, 1991). When social media users perceive their opinion as dissimilar from the prevailing opinions of their audience, they may engage in self-censorship and remain silent about the focal issue (Hoffman & Lutz, 2017; Liu et al., 2017). Corresponding with the spiral of silence research, research on news sharing suggests that social media users consider the interests and tastes of their audience to share the news that matches their audience as a way of strategic self-presentation (Ihm & Kim, 2018; Stephen & Lehmann, 2009). Prior studies have also found that social media users were more likely to interact with others who have similar interests (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), or the same ethnicity, age, and geographical locations (Mazur & Richards, 2011), because they feel comfortable and safe in such interactions. If users communicate with audiences whose characteristics differ from their own, they face a high risk of discomforting the audience and ruining their self-image and relationships. To fulfill their self-presentation motivation, they may prevent such risks by self-censoring and sharing news with audiences with homophily. Therefore, we hypothesize:

> H1: Social media users are more likely to share news, when similarity with their audience increases.

Based on the homophily tendency, we expect that the strategies social media users employ for their self-presentation motivation are far more sophisticated than simply considering their audience's contexts, such as classmates, family, or coworkers discussed in prior research. Such contexts may not offer as much information as similarity between users' specific characteristics with the audience's (e.g., values, socioeconomic status, personalities, and interests) when users decide to share news on social media. Further, the extent to which users gauge audience similarity may differ depending on how much they consider audience contexts discussed in previous studies. For instance, if users carefully maintain multiple social media accounts to segment the different audience contexts of work colleagues and intimate friends, they may consider the similarity between their opinions more carefully—to prevent any social risk or feel safer, which could prompt them to exercise less vigilance when considering such similarities. Therefore, we investigate how users may consider audience similarity differently while assessing audience context collapse:

> RQ2: How do the effects of audience context collapse and audience similarity interact with each other on news-sharing behaviors on social media?

Types of Similarity in Varied Social Media Environments

While previous studies have focused on the role of audience similarity in social media interactions (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Mazur & Richards, 2011), they have rarely differentiated between types of audience similarity. However, the type of similarity that news sharers care about may have different social impacts. For instance, communicating only with individuals of similar socioeconomic status—or who share one's musical taste—may have different implications for democracy and social cohesion. Therefore, this study classifies audience similarity into two categories, *social similarity* and *personal similarity*, and examines how individuals may take account of each type of audience similarity differently.

Opinion sharing across political views and the problems of the spiral of silence on social issues in social media are important issues in a democracy. Prior research has addressed the similarity between social media users and the audience across these categories in social media interactions. For instance, previous studies found that users' perceived congruence of political opinion with the majority of their social media audience increased their opinion sharing and disclosure (Hampton et al., 2014; Stoycheff, 2016; Wang et al., 2017). Other studies have included different social classes of the audience as an indicator of network heterogeneity, finding that it plays an important role in users' expressive behaviors in both off-line and online environments (Barnidge et al., 2018; Scheufele et al., 2006). Drawing from such previous research on audience similarity, the current study defines *social similarity* as similarity of political views and/or socioeconomic status.

Individuals may form relationships with people who have similar political dispositions or socioeconomic status, because this type of similarity eases communication and suggests shared values (McPherson et al., 2001). Such relationships do not necessarily involve personal feelings of attachment or attraction. Sharing news only with audiences with social similarity may deepen social disintegration among individuals from different political opinions and socioeconomic statuses. Within socially similar groups, the diffusion of disinformation or fake news may create more serious problems because such news may fuel social conflicts and hatred between people who hold different class and political stances and impede productive public discourse. In this way, the tendency to share news within such groups may eventually hinder democracy.

In comparison to focusing on social similarity in previous research (Barnidge et al., 2018; Hampton et al., 2014; Scheufele et al., 2006; Stoycheff, 2016; Wang et al., 2017), few studies have compared how other types of similarities are related to sharing behaviors on social media differently. For instance, social media users may share news only with those who have the same interest in that subject or share surprising news with those

who have similar personalities (e.g., openness) and thus may respond similarly. These news-sharing behaviors are unlikely to lead to serious social division or social problems as much as sharing news only within socially similar groups.

However, such news-sharing behaviors may have other social impacts and implications. Previous research suggests that more users log on to social media to converse with those who share similar interests and personalities for relational and entertainment purposes than to discuss politics (Anderson & Rainie, 2018). Further, individuals with similarities of interests and personalities are likely to be emotionally attracted to and develop personal relationships with each other (Han et al., 2014). In other words, news sharing among those with similar interests and personalities may be common on many social media networks and may compose essential parts of online relationships and personal lives. Therefore, we focus on similarity of personalities and interests and distinguish it from social similarity as *personal similarity*.

Based on the distinction between social and personal similarity, we now proceed to consider what types of similarity may play a greater role in news sharing, depending on the media environment. Previous research suggests that different social media environments have their own cultural and social norms and that different platforms' technical features encourage certain types of interactions with certain kinds of audiences, which may differentiate how users (should) conceptualize and take account of their audience (Litt, 2012). For instance, interactions on Facebook are likely to occur among real-life friends and family members, so users are likely to converse about their day-to-day lives (Ellison et al., 2007). LinkedIn users interact on a professional level and may "follow" other professionals (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), so users of the platform are more likely to communicate about careers and job positions than to have everyday conversation. The differences between each social media environment imply that users are likely to imagine their audiences differently, expect different types of interactions with them, and appraise and take account of audience similarity differently. In light of this, we classify social media into two categories based on the degree of symmetry in relationships established in each environment and examine how individuals take account of audience similarity differently in each social media environment (i.e., symmetrical and asymmetrical social media).

On symmetrical social media, individuals build relationships "based on mutual consent from both parties" (C. Kim & Lee, 2016, p. 678). For instance, on Facebook, a user can "friend" only other people who agree to be "friended." As such, users and their friends are likely to share some profile information as well as a sense of context, such as being "family, friends, classmates, coworkers, or members of [the same] religious organizations"

(Beam et al., 2018, p. 2303) before they establish social media relationships on symmetrical social media.

Because many relationships on symmetrical social media are based on prior relationships and users are aware of the audience with whom they have agreed to become online "friends," maintaining their personal relationships may take precedence over other motives on such platforms (C. Kim & Lee, 2016; Waterloo et al., 2018). Their act of sharing news with the audience is a way to share feelings and initiate personal conversations (E. M. Kim & Ihm, 2020). The cultural and social norms of sharing personal emotions and relational communication practices on symmetrical social media (Choi & Lee, 2017; C. Kim & Lee, 2016) may also prompt users to tailor and share news with personalized comments for their audience rather than delivering information unilaterally from the original news source. As such, news sharers on symmetrical social media may avoid discomforting their audience and maintain personal relationships by paying attention to personal similarity. Thus, we hypothesize:

> *H2. Users on symmetrical social media will be more likely to share news, when their audience exhibits greater personal similarity.*

Prior research does not point to a consistent relationship between social similarity and news sharing on symmetrical social media. Users on symmetrical social media may not care about social similarity with their audience as much as personal similarity because their relationships do not tend to be based on political or social attributes (C. Kim & Lee, 2016). Or they may be more likely to share news when social similarity increases because they may feel closer to those who are socially similar to them (E. M. Kim & Ihm, 2020). Because prior research does not point to a consistent prediction, we investigate how social similarity is related to news sharing on symmetrical social media:

> *RQ3: How is social similarity related to news sharing on symmetrical social media?*

On asymmetrical social media, such as on Twitter, one party can establish a relationship "without consent [or reciprocal following] from the other" (C. Kim & Lee, 2016, p. 678). As a result, audience assessment and management are more difficult on asymmetrical social media than on symmetrical social media (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Users are likely to conceptualize their audience in broader or more superficial terms, such as fans or followers (Litt & Hargittai, 2016; E. M. Kim & Ihm, 2020) rather than family members, friends, coworkers, or members of the same organizations.

As such, users on asymmetrical social media may focus on presenting their values or opinions actively and enhancing their online influence more than maintaining personal relationships (E. M. Kim & Ihm, 2020). Spreading

news may be an effective strategy for this purpose. Indeed, users on asymmetrical social media generally have a lower relational motivation than users on symmetrical social media (Choi & Lee, 2017). The cultural and social norms in asymmetrical social media suggest a broad diffusion of information through posting and reposting practices rather than conversing about personal lives and sharing emotions (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). As such, social similarity to users' audience may play a significant role in their decisions, as they seek to satisfy their fans or followers who share similar values and maintain their online popularity and influence (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Thus, we hypothesize:

> H3: Users on asymmetrical social media will be more likely to share news, when their audience exhibitsgreater social similarity to them.

In comparison to social similarity, users on asymmetrical social media may consider personal similarity in varied ways. Some may increase their news sharing with an audience that has personal similarities with them, because individuals generally focus on and share news more with strong ties including similar others (E. M. Kim & Ihm, 2020). Others may not be much concerned about personal similarity with their audience because they may not expect that their reputation could be damaged when they upload postings that are at odds with the audiences' personalities or interests, since their audience is not based on personal feelings or emotional attachments (C. Kim & Lee, 2016). To answer these mixed assumptions, we further investigate:

> RQ4: How is personal similarity related to news sharing on asymmetrical social media?

Methods

To select the study sample, we used the general panel sample made available from Insight Korea, a commercial research service. A screening question was used to retain only those who had shared news (e.g., daily news articles, online news, news on portal Web sites, news relevant to their interests and life) on social media. This resulted in a sample of 400 individuals between 20 and 49 years old who lived in a large metropolitan area. The sample was also equally represented by males and females in their 20s, 30s, and 40s. The age range of 20–49 was chosen for the study because people in this age group share similar online media use habits (Korea Information Society Development Institute, 2017). Five responses with missing data were excluded from the final analyses (see Table 1 for demographics).

Table 1. Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the participants (*N* = 395).

	Measure	*M*	*SD*
Age	What is your age?	34.32 years old	8.02
Gender	Male: 198		
	Female: 197		
Education	0: Less than undergraduate degree	0.82	0.38
	1: At least an undergraduate degree		
Household income	0: Less than $4,000	0.62	0.49
	1: At least $ 4,000		

Procedure

A preliminary study was conducted in May 2016 with 10 graduate students in a communications department at a university in Korea to improve the survey items and the appropriateness of the news articles, which were chosen based on the public attention they received from a Korean Web news portal during the first two weeks of April 2016. We first asked the participants to choose the social medium they had used most frequently during the last month, among the eight different social media platforms of Korea. The participants were also instructed to report the audience characteristics of the social medium (i.e., audience size and frequency of communication). Participant intention to share a news article with their audience of the most frequently used social medium was also assessed. The survey was designed to allow participants to proceed only after at least five seconds, to make sure they had actually read one news article from the category they chose out of six categories. Finally, the participants described the context collapse of and similarity to their social media audience.

Measures

Type of Social Media

Participants chose the social medium that they had used most frequently during the last month among eight types of social media platforms. Each choice was classified into a dummy variable, based on the technical function of the symmetricity that the medium provides (0: asymmetrical, *n* = 216, 1: symmetrical, *n* = 179, see Appendix B for the classification).

Context Collapse

To measure *context collapse* of the social media audience, this study adapted measures from Vitak (2012). Participants were asked to check every category that applied to their social media audience, including: (1) members of an organization of which they are presently a member, (2) members from an organization to which they used to belong, (3) family, and (4) neighborhood.

The more categories an individual chose, the greater the context collapse of their audience was (min: 0, max: 4).

Audience Similarity

For two types of audience similarity, the participants were asked to indicate to what degree "(M)y [their] audience and I [they] have similar" (1) interests, (2) personality, (3) political disposition, and (4) socioeconomic status, using 5-point Likert scales from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). An exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation produced two types of audience similarity: personal similarity (α = .79) and social similarity (α = .80) (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) = .84, x^2 = 567.97, df = 6, p < .001; see Table 2 for results). By examining items' meanings and coherency in accordance with the theoretical framework, the personal similarity factor was furthered classified into interests and personality; the social similarity factor was categorized into political disposition and socioeconomic status.

Dependent Variable: Intention of News Sharing on Social Media

The participants first chose the news subject they read the most often and found the most interesting from the aforementioned six categories. They indicated how much they wanted to share the news item in the chosen category with the audience in the social medium they used most frequently, on a 5-point scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*) (see Table 3 for descriptive statistics and correlations of variables).

Control Variables

Social media uses and sociodemographic variables can affect online news-sharing behaviors (Ellison et al., 2007; De Zúñiga et al., 2012). For this reason, the study controlled for the following variables: audience size (perceived number of people in the audience expected to read your posts on the selected type of social media), frequency of communication (number of times per month uploading posts on the selected type of social media), gender, age, education, and monthly household income.

Table 2. Factor analysis of audience similarity.

		Factor Loading	
Similarity Type		1	2
Social	Socioeconomic Status	**.91**	.07
	Political Disposition	**.83**	.21
Personal	Interests	.19	**.98**
	Personality	.38	**.72**
Explained Variance (%)		55.48	27.04
Eigenvalues		2.22	1.08

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and correlations of main variables.

		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
(1)	Audience Size	–						
(2)	Frequency of Comm.	.43*	–					
(3)	Context Collapse	.05	.21*	–				
(4)	Personal Audience Similarity	.15*	.21*	.42*	–			
(5)	Social Audience Similarity	.07	.15	.41*	.39*	–		
(6)	Intention to Share News	.09	.26*	.34*	.33*	. 39*	–	
(7)	Social Media Type	.10*	.04	.07	−.03	.05	.04	–
	M	94.69	9.32	1.63	6.64	5.75	2.95	.45
	SD	156.20	11.92	1.61	1.63	1.96	1.92	.50

Note. Social Media Type: 0 = asymmetrical, n = 216; 1 = symmetrical, n = 179.
*p < .05.

Analysis

This study used multiple regression analysis to examine how context collapse, two types of audience similarity, and two types of social media were related to the intention to share online news. Model 1 was a baseline model with all the control variables included. In Model 2, the variable of context collapse was added to examine its effect on news sharing (RQ1). Model 3 included the two types of audience similarity, in addition to variables in Model 2 (H1).

Models 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9 examined the effect of interaction terms between context collapse, audience similarity, and social media type. Models 4 and 5 added the interaction terms of context collapse with personal similarity and social similarity respectively, controlling for the variables in Model 3 (RQ2). Model 6 included the variable of social media type, controlling for the variables in Model 3. Model 7 entered the interaction term between social media type and context collapse, controlling for the variables in Model 6. Models 8 and 9 added the interaction terms of social media type with personal similarity and social similarity respectively, controlling for the variables in Model 6 (H2, H3, RQ3, and RQ4). The final model entered every variable tested in previous models, in addition to the variables in Model 6 and the five interaction terms. The variance inflation factors of all variables were lower than 2.5. Variables were standardized when the effect of their interaction terms was examined. To interpret the three interaction terms referring to social media types, interaction graphs and conducted separate regressions on symmetrical and asymmetrical social media were also provided (see Appendix C and D).

Results

The R^2 differences between the final model and previous models were statistically significant. This final model was hence utilized to report the following findings. RQ1 concerned the association between context collapse

Table 4. The effect of context collapse and audience similarity on news sharing on social media.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	β	(SE)	β	(SE)	β	(SE)	β	(SE)	β	(SE)
Gender	.05	(.12)	.04	(.11)	.03	(.11)	.03	(.11)	.03	(.11)
Age	.15**	(.01)	.13*	(.01)	.13**	(.01)	.13**	(.01)	.13**	(.01)
Education	−.02	(.16)	−.01	(.15)	−.01	(.15)	−.01	(.15)	−.01	(.15)
Income	−.02	(.12)	−.03	(.12)	−.03	(.11)	−.03	(.11)	−.03	(.11)
Audience Size	−.002	(.04)	.01	(.04)	−.005	(.04)	−.01	(.04)	−.005	(.04)
Freq. of Comm.	.14**	(.06)	.18**	(.06)	.17**	(.06)	.17**	(.06)	.17**	(.06)
Context Collapse			.28**	(.04)	.08	(.04)	.09	(.05)	.08	(.05)
Personal Similarity					.06	(.05)	.06	(.05)	.06	(.05)
Social Similarity					.31**	(.04)	.31**	(.04)	.31**	(.04)
Context Collapse *Personal Similarity							−.03	(.37)		
Context Collapse *Social Similarity									−.01	(.02)
AdjR²	.07		.15		.23		.23		.23	
ΔR²	–		.07		.08		.001		.00	
F test in Model	6.62**		11.11**		14.11**		12.70**		12.68**	
F test in ΔR²	–		34.63**		20.68**		.25		.09	

	Model 6		Model 7		Model 8		Model 9		Final	
	β	(SE)	β	(SE)	β	(SE)	β	(SE)	β	(SE)
Gender	.03	(.11)	.03	(.11)	.03	(.11)	.03	(.11)	.03	(.11)
Age	.13**	(.01)	.13**	(.01)	.13**	(.01)	.13**	(.01)	.13**	(.01)
Education	−.01	(.15)	−.01	(.15)	−.01	(.15)	−.01	(.15)	−.01	(.15)
Income	−.03	(.11)	−.03	(.11)	−.03	(.11)	−.03	(.11)	−.03	(.11)
Audience Size	−.01	(.04)	−.003	(.04)	.00	(.04)	−.01	(.04)	−.01	(.04)
Freq. of Comm.	.17**	(.06)	.17**	(.06)	.18**	(.06)	.17**	(.06)	.18**	(.06)
Context Collapse	.08	(.04)	.05	(.05)	.07	(.04)	.07	(.04)	.13	(.18)
Personal Similarity	.06	(.05)	.06	(.05)	.01	(.05)	.07	(.05)	.03	(.06)
Social Similarity	.31**	(.04)	.31**	(.05)	.31**	(.04)	.30**	(.04)	.30**	(.06)
Context Collapse *Personal Similarity									−.24	(.03)
Context Collapse *Social Similarity									.13	(.02)
Social Media Type	.002	(.11)	.03	(.11)	.02	(.10)	.01	(.10)	.01	(.10)
Social Media Type *Context Collapse			.05	(.16)					.07	(.08)
Social Media Type *Personal Similarity					.30**	(.07)			.32*	(.07)
Social Media Type *Social Similarity							−.31**	(.06)	−.32**	(.07)
AdjR²	.23		.23		.25		.25		.26	
ΔR²	.00		.00		.02		.02		.03	
F test in Model	12.67**		11.53**		11.56**		11.70**		11.34**	
F test in ΔR²	.00		.00		3.09**		3.11**		5.18**	

Note. Social Media Type: 0 = asymmetrical; 1 = symmetrical. $N = 395$ for all models.
*p < .05, **p < .01.

and users' news-sharing behaviors on social media. Results from Model 2 found a positive relationship between the degree of context collapse and users' news-sharing behaviors (β = .28, p < .01; see Table 4); the final model indicated that context collapse has no relationship to news-sharing intention when other variables are included. RQ2 investigated the interaction effects

between context collapse and two types of audience similarity. The final model showed no significant interaction effect between the two factors.

H1 predicted a positive relationship between audience similarity and news-sharing behaviors. The final model suggests a significant effect for social similarity ($\beta = .30$, $p < .01$), but not personal similarity. Therefore, H1 was partially supported. H2 and RQ4 examined the relationship between personal similarity and news sharing on symmetrical and asymmetrical social media respectively. The interaction term between personal similarity and social media type in the final model and the interaction graph suggests that users on symmetrical social media are more likely than users on asymmetrical social media to share news when the audience has greater personal similarity to them ($\beta = .32$, $p < .05$). Therefore, H2 was supported.

H3 and RQ3 examined the relationship between social similarity and news sharing on asymmetrical and symmetrical social media respectively. The interaction term between social similarity and social media type in the final model and the interaction graph suggests that users on asymmetrical social media are more likely to share news than users on symmetrical social media when the audience exhibits greater social similarity ($\beta = -.32$, $p < .001$). Thus, H3 was supported.

Discussion

This study interpreted news sharing on social media as a self-presentation behavior from an interpersonal communication perspective and examined how individuals may take account of an audience with diverse contexts and similarity during their online news-sharing process. First, the tests of RQ1, H1, and RQ2 reported that while individuals could share news with audiences with a greater context collapse, they might be more concerned about whether the audience shares their characteristics; the effect of context collapse was eliminated when audience similarity was controlled. This result suggests that we may need to reinterpret the results of previous research, which found a positive relationship between context collapse and news-sharing behaviors (Beam et al., 2018; Vitak, 2012). Despite the potential for context collapse in reaching a wide audience and broadening users' online influence (Beam et al., 2018; Davis & Jurgenson, 2014), users' self-presentation motivation and desire to avoid interpersonal risk may be more pronounced under context collapse, and users may prefer to interact with similar others.

Specifically, prior research interpreted context collapse as a greater number of explicit contexts such as classmates, family, and coworkers (Beam et al., 2018; Frampton & Child, 2013; Vitak, 2012). This study found that news sharers possessed sophisticated strategies to take account of more

detailed audience characteristics (i.e., political dispositions, socioeconomic status, personalities, or interests) that may not be fixed, apparent, nor defined by distinct social categories. This result extends previous research on context collapse by providing a more nuanced analysis of how individuals understand their audience beyond explicit social categories.

The test of H2 and RQ3 revealed that individuals were more likely to share news when they had more personal similarity to the audience on symmetrical social media. The additional separate regression on symmetrical social media also indicated that social similarity was not related to news sharing. Users on symmetrical social media are aware that their direct audience consists of people with whom they agreed to be friends or with whom they generally have prior relationships; hence they often use the media to maintain personal relationships (C. Kim & Lee, 2016; Waterloo et al., 2018). The technical and environmental characteristics of symmetrical social media seem to incentivize users to share news with their audience to share feelings and have intimate conversations with them. Individuals are also emotionally attracted to those who have similar personalities and interests (Han et al., 2014), so news sharers on symmetrical social media may be concerned about their personal similarity to their audience, so that they can fulfill their audience's expectations and appeal to their audience's tastes (Ihm & Kim, 2018).

Results of H3 and RQ4 established that individuals on asymmetrical social media were more likely to share news when their social similarity to their audience increases. The additional separate regression on asymmetrical social media also suggested that personal similarity did not show any relationship to news sharing. Because audience assessment and management are difficult on asymmetrical social media (Marwick & Boyd, 2011), users operate on the assumption that their fans or followers do not have personal feelings for them (Litt & Hargittai, 2016; E. M. Kim & Ihm, 2020). This environment encourages individuals to actively express themselves to and enhance their influence on an audience as broad as the general public (C. Kim & Lee, 2016), rather than to maintain personal relationships. News sharers on asymmetrical social media may not be concerned about personal similarity to their audience because they may not share personal feelings or emotional attachments with their audience, and their main purpose of news sharing is not maintaining personal relationships with the audience. They may instead focus on social similarity to their audience to avoid creating tension with their fans or followers who share similar social values and positions, in order to increase their online influence.

The results from this study imply that different technical features of social media may serve different journalistic functions in society. Most studies suggest that social media have a positive role in developing

democracy because it enhances interactions among users across diverse contexts (Beam et al., 2018; Davis & Jurgenson, 2014). This study extends previous research by classifying different types of social media and differentiating each of their social roles in democracy. The results suggest that symmetrical social media may function to induce personal interactions with personally similar others, while asymmetrical social media encourages a broad diffusion of news among politically and socially similar others. These findings also enrich the spiral of silence theory, which has focused on the similarity of political opinions between users and their audiences. This study identifies the role of *personal* similarity in shaping the social media news sphere and reveals the mechanism of users' strategic self-presentation in news sharing by taking account of both audience similarity and audience diversity.

In contrast to previous results on context collapse (Beam et al., 2018; Vitak, 2012), we found that users in both social media environments are prone to connect with others with greater homophily. While previous research observed the potential of reaching a diverse audience in the context collapse situation (Beam et al., 2018), such tendencies of social media users may reduce opportunities to engage in cross-cutting talks and intensify the spiral of silence. Specifically, news sharing among socially similar others on asymmetrical social media may increase the problems of diffusion of disinformation and fake news because news sharers are likely to believe and actively share what they want to believe. It is noteworthy that interactions on both types of media environments may also generate a positive impact on society. Personal interactions involving news sharing on symmetrical media may develop and strengthen bonding social capital (Ellison et al., 2007), and social interactions involving news sharing on asymmetrical media may mobilize like-minded others for further social engagement (Ihm, 2019).

While many studies have approached online news sharing from an informational perspective (Cappella et al., 2015; Chen & Berger, 2013), this research understood it as a relational behavior and paid attention to users' self-presentation motivation (Baumeister & Hutton, 1987; Goffman, 1959). As an interpersonal communication between news sharers and their audience, news sharing on social media entails opportunities for active self-presentation of news sharers to audiences with diverse contexts as well as risks of dissatisfying the diverse and dissimilar audiences and news sharers' self-presentation motivation. The results from this study suggest that social media users, as human communicators, are adaptive in processing social information. Such users are concerned and careful about not risking their self-images or relationships with their audience. They seem to present themselves in their own ways by distinguishing personal from social similarity in their audiences and evaluating their audience according to this

distinction. Ironically, the perfect calculation of audience characteristics may result in news sharing with perfectly similar others in filter bubbles. Technical and structural differences in social media environments seem to provide additional variance in how news sharers strategically imagine and take account of their audience (Litt, 2012).

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the sample was based in a Korean cultural context. Some subsamples, such as those who used Cyworld and Twitter were also relatively small. Future studies should consider different cultures or more users in each media platform. Second, individuals may care about audience characteristics and contexts such as general receptivity to and connectivity with other audiences, or the level of understanding (Ihm & Kim, 2018; Stephen & Lehmann, 2009). More research on other aspects of audience characteristics may advance our understanding of the content of "imagined audience" (Litt, 2012; Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Although we measured the degree of context collapse as the multiplicity of audience contexts, later work could further develop the concept to examine how the presence or absence of context collapse (i.e., as a binary factor) and the particularity of contexts (e.g., how important the context is to the news sharer) influence news sharers' behaviors on social media. The measure of audience similarity cannot capture the different levels of similarity with different audience contexts embedded in the whole audience. Future research could implement new measures by identifying different levels of similarities in different contexts. Third, the study did not differentiate organization types, when measuring context collapse. More studies should distinguish varied types of organizations to fully assess the context collapse of social media audiences. Finally, the study reported self-reported perceived context collapse and audience similarity in relation to news-sharing behaviors instead of direct observation of such behaviors.

Conclusion

This study examined how context collapse and audience similarity are related to news-sharing behaviors in different social media environments. It makes three contributions to communication and social media research. First, this study interprets online news-sharing behavior from a relational perspective and answers the call for research on the integration of mass and interpersonal communication (Walther & Valkenburg, 2017). In contrast to the informational perspective centering on news content for mass diffusion (Cappella et al., 2015; Chen &

Berger, 2013), this study sheds light on the importance of human communicators in initiating and determining the communication process to enrich online news-sharing scholarships.

Second, this study contributes to social media research by proposing an extended concept of audience similarity and comparing its effect to context collapse. Distinguishing between personal and social similarity extends the spiral of silence theory—which mostly focused on the homophily of political opinions (Hampton et al., 2014; Stoycheff, 2016; Wang et al., 2017)—and captures more nuanced mechanisms and strategies in users' news-sharing behaviors. Third, this study advances the understanding of the relationship between technology and democracy by raising the question of whether social media users are autonomous individuals strategically reaching out to diverse audiences—or reinforcing filter bubbles on social media (Pariser, 2011).

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