Article

The hidden side of news diffusion: Understanding online news sharing as an interpersonal behavior

Jennifer Ihm (iD)
Kwangwoon University, Republic of Korea

Eun-mee Kim
Seoul National University, Republic of Korea

Abstract

Unlike previous approaches to online news sharing behaviors dealing with the dissemination of information to broader audiences, this article interprets that behavior as an act of relational communication. Drawing from surveys of 400 online news users, we examine how they manage their self-presentation and account for their audience's characteristics differently when they engage in online news sharing activities on mobile instant messenger (MIM) and social networking site (SNS). Our findings suggest that individuals who are highly motivated by self-presentation share news online more than others. Individuals also target different audiences, depending on their media environments. Specifically, SNS users are more cautious about their audiences' connections with other users. The implications are that news sharing behaviors are a type of communication used for forming relationships and managing impressions beyond informational purposes, based on active individuals' strategic considerations of their audiences' characteristics.

Keywords

Audience characteristics, mobile instant messenger, online news sharing, self-presentation, social networking site

Corresponding author:
Eun-mee Kim, Seoul National University, 1, Gwanak-ro, Gwanak-gu, 08826, Seoul, Republic of Korea.
Email: eunmee@snu.ac.kr

Many people get prompt access to global news—about everything from protests in the Middle East to the election of a president in another country—through the Internet. Not only is online news consumption a worldwide phenomenon but also the way people obtain their news has been completely transformed. Most notably, individuals are no longer mere news consumers, but many are also "news participators"; they share news stories with others online with the click of a button and contribute to the process of news diffusion and reproduction (Miller et al., 2012).

Many studies have approached online news sharing in the context of the diffusion or transmission of information to a broader audience and examined characteristics of news content, news sharers, and network structures for wide dissemination (Cappella et al., 2015; Kümpel et al., 2015). However, previous research suggests that online news sharing may be a relational communication as much as an informational communication. Social motivations are one of the primary motivations behind online news sharing (Lee and Ma, 2012). Online news sharing provides the common informational background for further interactions, allows individuals to exchange opinions naturally, and strengthens feelings of connection with one's networks (Lee and Ma, 2012). Individuals may also convey information about themselves (i.e. what issues they regard as important) and please their audience by selecting news that matches that audience's interests (Berger and Schwartz, 2011). In this way, the information dissemination behavior transitions into conversational behavior, which better serves active communication and relationship management.

With these considerations in mind, this article attempts to show that online news sharing behavior is an act of relational communication. Next, the article introduces audience characteristics (i.e. fit, receptivity, and connectivity) and media environments (i.e. mobile instant messenger [MIM] and social networking sites [SNSs]) that individuals may account for in the course of their online news sharing. Drawing from surveys of 400 online news users, this article examines how individuals actively manage and communicate their public self-images by accounting for their audience's characteristics when they engage in news sharing activities. Specifically, the article focuses on the differences between media environments and investigates how individuals may control their self-images differently on MIM and SNSs as they account for the different audience characteristics of each media platform.

This study makes three contributions to research on online news sharing. First, it combines communication and journalism scholarship and provides a unique interpretation of online news sharing behavior as an act of relational communication. Second, this study sheds light on the role of individuals as active communicators in online news sharing. Finally, it extends previous research by comparing how different media environments accompany different news sharing behaviors.

Online news sharing as relational communication

Most studies of online news sharing have focused on the informational aspects of news. Specifically, many studies have examined the types of news content more likely to be disseminated online (Kümpel et al., 2015), such as news that arouses anxiety, amusement, and anger or that contains negative, controversial, credible, and interesting content (Berger and Schwartz, 2011; Cappella et al., 2015; Chen and Berger, 2013; Ma et al., 2014). A few other studies have discussed how individuals' opinion leadership and their

number of followers and friends may predict news sharing behaviors (Bakshy et al., 2011; Ma et al., 2014) or what kind of network structures are used for news diffusion (Goyal et al., 2010; Myers et al., 2012). Although these studies dealt with various aspects of the online news sharing behavior, they have mostly interpreted the behavior as a diffusion of information.

In reality, however, news content does not distribute itself. It is individuals who decide whether to send, post, or share any given piece of news. Whenever individuals communicate with others, they possess motivations to present themselves (i.e. self-presentation) that match their own self-image and their audience's expectations (Baumeister, 1982; Berger and Schwartz, 2011; Goffman, 1959). As such, when they share news, they do not only disseminate the informational content of that news; they also convey information about themselves to others selectively (e.g. their identity, thoughts, feelings, and opinions) to maintain their ideal self-images and to please their audiences (Baumeister and Hutton, 1987; Hogg et al., 1995; Turner and Onorato, 1999). Even when opinion leaders actively shared news with their networks after they had accessed it on mass media, they selected which content to share, edited it, and added their own opinions about it (De Fleur, 1987; Katz, 1957). In this light, news sharing, similar to any other communication behavior, is an act intended to maintain selfhood and relationships; it is an act of relational communication just as much as it is an act of information diffusion.

The advent of advanced media venues has provided opportunities for more sophisticated control of self-presentation in news sharing. As social processing theories indicate, without face-to-face, direct interactions in media, individuals can take time to refine and choose what to share and focus more on selective self-presentation (Walther, 1996, 2011) Such asynchrony allows for more selective self-presentation also in the online news sharing context, in which individuals carefully pick and edit news content before sharing (Miller et al., 2012).

Therefore, this study approaches online news sharing behavior as an act of relational communication consisting of presenting oneself to others by taking advantage of the online environments. Previous research suggests that individuals with a higher motivation for self-presentation are more likely to share information with others (Sekhon et al., 2015). Self-presentation is not about simply expressing oneself; it is the extent to which an individual manages and presents his or her desired self-image to others (the communication partners) that is important (Hogg et al., 1995; Turner and Onorato, 1999). As such, those who are more conscious of their presentation to others will be more likely to share news with their networks as a strategy for active impression management and effective relational communication (Kim et al., 2017). Therefore, we hypothesize as follows:

H1. Individuals with a high motivation for self-presentation are more likely to share news online.

Audience characteristics in online news sharing

When individuals share news online, they look for reward, recognition, and responses from their audience (Shirky, 2010). "The presence of the audience" and motivations to match that audience's expectations are the fundamental dynamics of everyday social

interactions affecting individual self-presentation and "performance" (Baumeister and Hutton, 1987; Goffman, 1959). Online news sharing also involves the consideration of who the audiences are and how the news sharer wants to be presented to those audiences. For instance, a previous study has shown that the audience-oriented motives of blogging (e.g. to see how others react to one's postings and maintain personal relationships) are closely—and positively—related to the degree of posting news (Kim et al., 2011).

In other words, individuals take account of the characteristics of their audience and selectively share news. Previous studies have identified the characteristics of content that is prone to be shared—characteristics such as negativity, controversiality, or credibility (Berger and Schwartz, 2011; Cappella et al., 2015; Chen and Berger, 2013; Ma et al., 2014)—but individuals may decide whether to share that content depending on the characteristics of their specific audience. The purpose of this action is to present and maintain their ideal self-images, not in general, but toward their specific audience (Baumeister and Hutton, 1987).

A few studies have focused on the audience characteristics in online news sharing. They have found that individuals share news online more when their audience is a small group of people, psychologically close to them, or has frequent communications with them (i.e. strong ties) in order to maintain the close relationships (Kim et al., 2017; Ma et al., 2014). However, individuals may also take account of more detailed characteristics of their audience. For instance, in a study of word-of-mouth sharing of information about films, Stephen and Lehmann (2009) found that consumers transmitted news more when they perceived their audience as being appropriate to the content or "fit" with it, receptive to it, and having many connections with others. The characteristics of the audience in Stephen and Lehmann's (2009) study may reveal varied contexts of news sharing occurring from the relationships between content, news sharers, and audience networks (Kümpel et al., 2015). Applying the audience characteristics (i.e. fit, receptivity, and connectivity) in the online news sharing context, the present research attempts to reveal the diverse ways in which individuals control and manage "the presence of the audience" in online news sharing.

Fit

Audience *fit* refers to the degree to which the news being offered corresponds closely to and appropriate for the audiences' interests and desires (Stephen and Lehmann, 2009). "Content" has been one of the most important themes in previous studies of news sharing (Kümpel et al., 2015), and many of those studies have indicated that news content which is interesting, relevant, and preferable to audiences is more likely to be shared in online environments (Berger and Schwartz, 2011; Ma et al., 2014). However, these studies have evaluated the content based on the *news sharers' point of view*. What individuals want to read or what they believe to be interesting does not equal what they might want to pass along to their audience (Olmstead et al., 2011).

Because online news sharing is a form of relational communication, individuals also consider whether their audience will regard the content as interesting, relevant, and preferable during online news sharing. They will want to make sure that the content of their news being offered satisfies their audience, in order to accomplish their social

motivations of news sharing, which includes such considerations as maintaining and strengthening their relationships (Baumeister and Hutton, 1987; Stephen and Lehmann, 2009). As such, individuals might tend to be more likely to share online news content that *fits* with their audience's interests. Therefore, we hypothesize,

> *H2*. Individuals are more likely to share news online when they perceive their audience to have a higher fit with the news content which they are offering.

Furthermore, individuals with a higher motivation for self-presentation might be more likely to share news with an audience with a higher *fit* because they have a higher motivation of pleasing their audience (Baumeister and Hutton, 1987). They may also be more willing to present themselves actively when their news sharing behavior can accomplish the purpose of their strategic self-presentation more effectively. Therefore, we hypothesize,

> *H2-1*. When individuals have a high motivation for self-presentation, the association between the intention of their online news sharing and the audience with a perceived higher fit will be higher.

Receptivity

Audience receptivity refers to the degree to which the audience receives and accepts the sharer's content seriously (Stephen and Lehmann, 2009). Stephen and Lehmann's (2009) study suggests that audience receptivity is a positive predictor of individuals' sharing information with an audience because individuals want to express their opinions to others and to influence them effectively. Specifically, in the online environment, mutual recognition and acknowledgment has been found to be a major motive for sharing content (Shirky, 2010). For instance, a study on blogging suggests that one of the major motives for blogging is to see others' reaction to one's postings (Kim et al., 2011); the prospect of others' not showing any response to one's message may incur social risk.

Audience receptivity can assure that what individuals share online is responded to well and not ignored by others. It can also guarantee that what individuals share may develop into further conversations and accomplish the social and relational purposes of online news sharing (Kim et al., 2017). As such, individuals' intention to share news will increase if they think that their purposes will be accomplished more effectively with a receptive audience. Thus, we hypothesize,

> *H3*. Individuals are more likely to share news online when they perceive their audience to have a higher receptivity to news content they are offering.

In addition to these factors, individuals with a higher motivation for self-presentation will be more likely to be conscious of how their shared content is received. Self-presentation involves motivations to maintain their ideal self-images (Baumeister and Hutton, 1987). Individuals with a high level of motivation for self-presentation will be more sensitive to whether or not their news content is well received and acknowledged

by others, which, in turn, enables them to maintain their ideal self-images (Baumeister and Hutton, 1987; Hogg et al., 1995). Therefore, we may also hypothesize,

> *H3-1*. When individuals have a high degree of motivation for self-presentation, the association between their intention of online news sharing and an audience with a perceived higher degree of receptivity will be higher.

Connectivity

As a networked audience, online users are all connected among themselves (Marwick and Boyd, 2011). Thus, these individuals often share information online to spread the information faster to a broader audience. Since news consumption can enhance audiences' knowledge and can influence their behaviors (De Zúñiga et al., 2012), individuals may also want to spread their news to a broader audience in order to increase their influence.

Furthermore, one of the major motivations in any social exchange is the desire to interact effectively with the environment in order to ultimately enhance one's chances for survival. As such, in social exchanges, individuals seek to increase knowledge to improve their own decision-making and enhance their chances for survival (DiFonzo and Bordia, 2007). When individuals share news with others, they may also be hoping to learn whether the facts and assumptions in the news are true, and to acquire other information related to the news from their audience's responses. Sharing news with a greater number of people may contribute to achieving this purpose more effectively and efficiently, so news sharers may look for audience who can spread the news more broadly.

While individuals may account for what kinds of content will be more appropriate for faster and broader diffusion (Berger and Schwartz, 2011; Cappella et al., 2015; Chen and Berger, 2013; Ma et al., 2014), they would also consider *which audience* will spread the news to an even broader audience faster. The more connected the audience, the faster and more broadly the information is able to spread. Therefore, we can hypothesize,

> *H4*. Individuals will be more likely to share news online with an audience having a higher degree of connectivity with others.

In addition, as a self-presentation strategy, individuals might want to present their opinions and values to a broader audience. In these cases, individuals with a high motivation for self-presentation might be more likely to share news online when they perceive their audience to be linked to more people, or to possess a high degree of *connectivity*. In this way, they can assure that they are able to influence and present themselves to a broader audience. Therefore, we hypothesize,

> *H4-1*. When individuals have a high motivation for self-presentation, the association between their intention in online news sharing and an audience with a higher degree of connectivity will be higher.

Targeting audiences in different media environments

The three audience characteristics (i.e. fit, receptivity, and connectivity) have been hypothesized to influence online news sharing behaviors in general. However, the variation in technical features and properties of different media may make a difference in terms of how people imagine and deal with their audience (Norman, 2013; Sundar and Limperos, 2013). For instance, Twitter users may not be able to know their specific audience or manage the audience characteristics discussed above. The technical aspects and contexts of different media environments may also incline individuals to seek different types of gratification or fulfill different needs (Park et al., 2009; Sundar and Limperos, 2013). Therefore, this study examines how individuals account for audience characteristics differently in different media environments. This article specifically focuses on the two of the most prevalent communication media in the contemporary media environments: MIM and SNS.

MIM is one of the most prevalent and popular communication vehicles in the contemporary media environment. Almost 2 billion global users (1.82 billion users) are using MIM as of 2017 (Statista, 2017). In Korea, more than 30 million people use KakaoTalk, 4.45 million use Facebook Messenger, and 0.72 million use WeChat—out of a total of 51 million Koreans (Digital Times, 2016). MIM provides better control over its audience in terms of separating the context and limiting the size of the audience as the user wishes. It allows users to manage multiple chat "rooms" for various groups with different sizes— such as ones for family, colleagues from work or on project teams or, say, among middle school alumni. In this way, the audience characteristics in each chat room can be more homogeneous (Baym and Boyd, 2012), and users can share news that fit with a specific audience's characteristics.

Such audience separation and management is not as easy in SNS (Baym and Boyd, 2012). Researchers have characterized the SNS audience as being an "invisible audience" (Litt, 2012) because of the expansive nature of the audiences and the mixed audience characteristics which are often difficult to assess. On SNS, users have to face "the imagined audience," and act accordingly—by imagining what each posting might evoke for the audience (Baym and Boyd, 2012; Litt, 2012; Marwick and Boyd, 2011). Furthermore, on SNS, users interact with both their personal friends and the general public at the same time. The specific contexts of each of one's friends and acquaintance group get blurred or disappear altogether (i.e. context collapse).

Therefore, how users account for their audiences' characteristics on news sharing media may differ between MIM and SNS. For instance, because it is hard to assess the audience's characteristics, the relevance of those characteristics to the intention to share news may be lower in SNS than in MIM. Users in SNS may share generally interesting and popular content in order to cater to them. In addition, the receptivity of the audience may influence the intention to share news in SNS more than the fit. The context collapse in SNS hinders assessing the fit of the news to various audience groups, but users in SNS may still expect a certain degree of receptivity from the audience because the social motivations and functions are foundational in "social" media (Ellison et al., 2007; Park et al., 2009).

Furthermore, the degree of connectivity of the audience may have a unique value to SNS users. SNS users frequently take advantage of this medium to diffuse news to a

broader audience including all those outside of their networks. MIM users, on the contrary, generally use that medium for conversations within a small and limited audience (Kim et al., 2017) and may target their news for audiences within their internal networks. Therefore, SNS users might be more conscious of the connectivity of their audience than MIM users when spreading their news to external networks. The comparison between the two media environments suggests that audience characteristics might play different roles on SNS and MIM. Thus, we may ask,

> *RQ*. How will the audience characteristics influence the online news sharing behavior on SNS and MIM differently?

Method

Sample

A preliminary study was conducted in May of 2016 in order to examine the validity of the survey we created. This study drew on 10 graduate students in a communication department at a university in the Seoul area. The purpose of the pilot study was to determine the appropriate content of the news articles in the survey and to identify any confusing questions in need of revision. After choosing the news articles and revising confusing phrases according to the participants' comments, the actual study was conducted.

The sample for the actual study was obtained from general panel data available from Insight Korea, a professional research and consulting firm. In May of 2016, 400 individuals who answered the qualifying question of whether or not they had ever shared news (e.g. daily news articles, online news, news on portal websites, news relevant to their interests and life) via both MIM and SNS participated in the online survey. The age range was limited to between 20 and 49 years, because this age group has similar media habits in the online sphere (Korea Information Society Development Institute [KISDI], 2017). In total, 400 people were sampled, equally divided between the genders (i.e. male, female) and three age ranges (i.e. 20s, 30s, and 40s). Only Koreans who live in the Seoul area were chosen for the sample, in order to control for the influence of environmental and social surroundings.

Procedure

We first asked the participants about their uses of and audiences on MIM. The participants were asked to list as many as 10 group chat rooms that they have been active in the last month on the most frequently used MIM. Group chat rooms were operationalized in the survey as "a chat room having at least 3 participants including the self." The participants were asked to give nick names to each group chat room (e.g. colleagues, friends from university, elementary, alumni). Of the 10 group chat rooms, the participants were asked to choose the 2 rooms in which they had the most frequent communication. The participants stated the characteristics of the two rooms (e.g. frequency of communication, size of audience, attachment to the group, and characteristics of the group).

Following the questions about MIM were questions about the participants' uses of and audiences on SNS. The participants were asked to choose two SNS which they used most frequently within the last month and to say what the characteristics of each SNS was.[1]

The questions about the MIM and SNS were followed by questions about the participants' intention to share news articles. First, the participants were asked to choose the subject that they read about most frequently and with the most interest from among six categories (i.e. politics, economics, society, lifestyle, world, and information technology (IT)/science); this was because one's interests in the news subjects may be a basic condition of an influential factor in the intention to share news (Berger and Schwartz, 2011). Two news articles within the chosen subject category were then shown to the participants, one after another. The first article was a highly controversial news article and the other one was one which was not controversial (see Supplementary Appendix for the full procedure of selecting the articles and the full list of articles); this was done to control the effect of the level of controversy surrounding the news content on the news sharing behavior (Chen and Berger, 2013).

When the highly controversial news was shown in the screen, the participants replied about their intention to share it with the two chat rooms and the two SNS having the most frequent communication. The survey was designed to only allow the participants to go to the next page after at least 5 seconds, in order to make sure that the participants had actually read the articles. After the participants answered the questions about the first article, they were given a counterpart having a low level of controversy within the same category and asked about their intention to share that article with the two chat rooms and the two SNS having the most frequent communication.

Measures

Independent variables. The survey participants answered 95-point Likert-type scales about their *motivation of self-presentation* based on the combined measures of Lee (2013) and Govern and Marsch (2001). Lee's measures evaluate two aspects of self-presentation motivation based on Baumeister (1982) and Baumeister and Hutton (1987)—(1) audience-pleasing and (2) self-constructive motivation. Govern and Marsch's (2001) criteria examines an audience's degree of self-awareness or the consciousness of their self-images. For audience characteristics, the participants were asked to rate three attributes of the audience they are sharing news with based on the adapted measures (Stephen and Lehmann, 2009): *fit, receptivity*, and *connectivity*. (See Table 1 for full measures). The participants indicated how much they agree with every independent variable (1: strongly disagree, 5: strongly agree) and their answers have been centered.

Control variables. Media-using habits (De Zúñiga et al., 2012; Ellison et al., 2007) can affect online news sharing behaviors, as can the level of controversy around particular shared content (Berger and Schwartz, 2011; Chen and Berger, 2013). Therefore, this study controlled the following variables: *the number of total registered members* in each medium, *the size of the audience* (i.e. the audience in each chat room in MIM and the actual audience expected to read the posts in SNS), *the frequency of communication* (i.e. number of times per month having a conversation for a while with more than two

Table 1. Measures.

Items		α
Self-presentation motivation	I try to maintain a good self-image to others.	.84
	I try to emphasize my merits to others.	
	I try to present myself to be a favorable person to others.	
	I try to make external and internal self-images congruent.	
	I try to become a better person not only to present myself to others.	
	I try to create a congruent self-image.	
	I care about how I express myself.	
	I am aware of how I am presented to others.	
Fit	This audience group has enough good taste to appreciate this type of news.	MIM:.71; SNS: .74
	This audience group is interested in this type of news.	
Receptivity	This audience group usually listens to news I share.	
Connectivity	This audience group talks to lots of other people.	

MIM: mobile instant messenger; SNS; social networking site.

participants in this chat room in MIM or uploading posts on SNS), and *the participants' perception of the controversiality of news article* (1: not controversial at all, 5: very controversial, mean $[M] = 3.25$, standard deviation $(SD) = 0.90$). Because socio-demographic variables can influence behaviors on media as well (De Zúñiga et al., 2012; Ellison et al., 2007), *gender, age, education*, and *monthly household income* were also controlled in all cases in this study (see Table 2 for demographics).

Intention of online news sharing. The participants first chose the most often read and the most interesting news subject from six categories (i.e. politics, economics, society, lifestyle, world, and IT/science). They indicated how much (1: Not at all, 5: Very much) they would like to share the most highly controversial news item in the chosen category with (1) a chat room with the most frequent communication, (2) a chat room with the second most frequent communication, (3) a social medium with the most frequent communication, and (4) a social medium with the second most frequent communication, respectively. The participants also indicated the degree of their intention to share another news item with a low level of controversy with the aforementioned two chat rooms and two SNS, respectively (see Tables 3 and 4 for descriptive statistics and correlations of variables).

Analysis

The study conducted two multilevel random coefficient models for MIM and SNS. Our data had a hierarchical structure. Level 1, the intra-individual level, consisted of responses about two chat rooms and two SNS from each individual. Level 2, the

Table 2. Demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the participants.

	Measure	M	SD
Age	What is your age?	34.32 years old	8.00
Gender	1: Male; 0: Female	Equally sampled	
Education[a]	0: Less than undergraduate level	0.82	0.38
	1: At least an undergraduate degree		
Household income[b]	0: Less than US$4000	0.61	0.49
	1: At least US$4000		

M: mean; SD: standard deviation.

[a]We first examined the participants' education by categorical variables and its average was 3.82 (3: pursuing an undergraduate degree, 4: completed an undergraduate degree). Because 47% of Koreans have an undergraduate degree (OECD, 2016), we transformed the education variable into a dummy variable differentiating between individuals who hold "less than undergraduate degree" and those who hold "at least an undergraduate degree."

[b]We first examined the participants' household income by categorical variables and its average was 4.74 (4: US$3,000–US$4,000, 5: US$4,000–US$5,000). Because the average household income in Korea is US$4,034.11 (KOSIS, 2016), we transformed the household income variable into a dummy variable differentiating between individuals who earn "less than US$4,000" and those who earn "at least US$4,000."

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and correlations of variables of MIM.

		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1)	No. of registered members in MIM	–							
(2)	No. of audience	.10*	–						
(3)	Frequency of communication	.17*	.21*	–					
(4)	Self-presentation motivation	.12*	.09*	.06*	–				
(5)	Fit	.07*	.00	.05	.37*	–			
(6)	Receptivity	.05	−.01	.00	.31*	.67*	–		
(7)	Connectivity	.07*	.05	.03	.30*	.64*	.59*	–	
(8)	Intention to share news	−.10*	−.03	−.07*	.30*	.36*	.34*	.26*	–
M		122.07	11.48	22.32	3.61	3.51	3.57	3.52	2.98
SD		143.29	14.00	22.10	0.53	0.72	0.85	0.83	1.18

MIM: mobile instant messenger; M: mean; SD: standard deviation.

* $p < .05$

inter-individual level, consisted of responses about each individual. The multilevel modeling addressed this hierarchical structure and examined concurrently the effects of both intra- and inter-individual level factors on the intention of online news sharing. In all cases, this study controlled for intra- (e.g. number of registered members, number of audience, and frequency of communication) and inter-individual level variables (e.g. age, education, and income). Model 1 for both MIM and SNS was a baseline model with all control variables included. Model 2 examined how self-presentation motivation

Table 4. Descriptive statistics and correlations of variables of SNS.

		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1)	No. of registered members in SNS	–							
(2)	No. of audience	.65*	–						
(3)	Frequency of communication	−.24*	−.21*	–					
(4)	Self-presentation motivation	.07*	.08*	−.19*	–				
(5)	Fit	.10*	.11*	−.20*	.34*	–			
(6)	Receptivity	.06*	.07*	−.19*	.29*	.70*	–		
(7)	Connectivity	.11*	.09*	−.21*	.25*	.63*	.66*	–	
(8)	Intention to share news	−.01	.02	−.14*	.28*	.41*	.41*	.36*	–
M		83.99	41.76	2.76	3.61	3.31	3.26	3.25	2.89
SD		140.78	90.27	1.43	0.53	0.73	0.86	0.87	1.19

SNS: social networking site; *M*: mean; *SD*: standard deviation.
* *p* < .05

affects the intention to share news at the inter-individual level (Level 2). Model 3 examined how audience characteristics in different MIM chat rooms and SNSs affect the intention to share news at the intra-individual level (Level 1). The final model examined the influence of the interaction terms between the self-presentation motivation and the three audience characteristics, cross-level.

Results

Inter-individual level (Level 2)

Hypothesis 1 predicted that individuals with a high motivation for self-presentation are more likely to share news on MIM and SNS. The final models suggest that the motivation for self-presentation is a positive predictor of sharing news, both on MIM (b=.46, p<.001) as well as on SNS (b=.36, p<.001) (see Tables 5 and 6 for full results). Therefore, hypothesis 1 was supported for both MIM and SNS.

Intra-individual level (Level 1)

Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 predicted a positive relationship between three audience characteristics and the intention to share news on MIM chat rooms and SNSs. The results of Hypothesis 2 in the final models suggest that the fit between audiences' interests, knowledge or tastes, and news content is a positive predictor of individuals' intention to share news on both MIM (b=.23, p<.001) and SNS (b=.11, p<.01). The results of Hypothesis 3 also suggest that an audience's receptivity is positively related to the intention of news sharing on both MIM (b=.19, p<.01) and SNS (b=.18, p<.001). Thus, Hypothesis 2 and 3 are supported for both MIM and SNS.

Table 5. The impact of self-presentation motivation and audience characteristics on the intention to share news on MIM.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Final model
	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)
Gender	−.04 (.10)	−.06 (.08)	−.04 (.08)	−.05 (.08)
Age	.02** (.01)	.02** (.01)	.01* (.01)	.01* (.01)
Education	−.04 (.13)	−.11 (.12)	−.08 (.11)	−.08 (.11)
Income	.13 (.10)	.12 (.09)	.07 (.08)	.06 (.08)
No. of registered members	−.001* (.00)	−.001** (.00)	−.001*** (.00)	−.001** (.00)
No. of audience	−.004 (.00)	−.005* (.00)	−.003 (.00)	−.003 (.00)
Frequency of communication	−.002 (.00)	.001 (.00)	−.001 (.00)	.001 (.00)
Controversiality of news	.10*** (.03)	.08*** (.03)	.09*** (.03)	.09** (.03)
Self-presentation motivation		.66*** (.08)	.46*** (.08)	.46*** (.08)
Fit			.23*** (.06)	.23*** (.06)
Receptivity			.19*** (.04)	.19*** (.05)
Connectivity			−.001 (.05)	−.002 (.05)
Self-presentation × fit				−.003 (.10)
Self-presentation × receptivity				.05 (.09)
Self-presentation × connectivity				.01 (.09)
n	1516	1516	1516	1516
(Level 2) Inter-individual level variance	.62* (.06)	.51* (.05)	.43* (.05)	.42* (.05)
(Level 1) Intra-individual level variance	.05* (.03)	.05* (.03)	.03* (.03)	.03* (.03)
ICC	.53	.49	.44	.44
Log likelihood	−2105.8277	−2074.7345	−2035.2342	−2034.8174

MIM: mobile instant messenger; SE: standard error; ICC: intra-class correlations.
*$p<.05$; **$p<.01$; ***$p<.001$.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that connectivity will be positively related to the intention to share news on MIM and SNS. The final regression models suggest that an audience's connectivity is positively related to the intention of news sharing only on SNS ($b=.09$, $p<.05$). Thus, Hypothesis 4 is partially supported.

Cross level

Hypotheses 2-1, 3-1, and 4-1 predicted that the interaction terms between self-presentation motivation and three audience characteristics will be positively related to the intention to share news on MIM and SNS. The final models suggest that the interaction term between self-presentation motivation and fit as well as receptivity is not a significant predictor of individuals' intention to share news on either MIM or SNSs. The results of Hypothesis 4-1 suggest that the interaction term between connectivity and self-presentation motivation is positively related to the intention of news sharing only on SNS ($b=.17$, $p<.05$). The Cohen's (1988) f^2 of the interaction term was .15, indicating a medium effect size. Thus,

Table 6. The impact of self-presentation motivation and audience characteristics on the intention to share news on SNS.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Final model
	b (SE)	*b* (SE)	*b* (SE)	*b* (SE)
Gender	.17 (.10)	.15 (.10)	.14 (.09)	.13 (.08)
Age	.03*** (.01)	.03*** (.01)	.02* (.01)	.02* (.01)
Education	−.22 (.13)	−.26* (.13)	−.20 (.12)	−.21 (.12)
Income	.05 (.10)	.03 (.10)	.002 (.09)	.004 (.09)
No. of registered members	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
No of audience	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Frequency of communication	−.07*** (.02)	−.06** (.02)	−.03 (.02)	−.03 (.02)
Controversiality of news	.09*** (.03)	.08*** (.03)	.08*** (.03)	.08*** (.03)
Self-presentation motivation		.52*** (.09)	.36*** (.09)	.36*** (.08)
Fit			.11* (.05)	.11* (.05)
Receptivity			.20*** (.04)	.18*** (.04)
Connectivity			.09* (.04)	.09* (.04)
Self-presentation × fit				−.01 (.10)
Self-Presentation × receptivity				.02 (.08)
Self-Presentation × Connectivity				.17* (.07)
n	1544	1544	1544	1544
(Level 2) Inter-individual level variance	.79* (.07)	.72* (.06)	.58* (.05)	.57* (.05)
(Level 1) Intra-individual level variance	.04* (.01)	.04* (.01)	.03* (.01)	.02* (.01)
ICC	.63	.61	.56	.56
Log likelihood	−1983.6845	−1966.8738	−1932.3201	−1927.5299

SNS: social networking site; SE: standard error; ICC: intra-class correlations.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Hypotheses 2-1 and 3-1 are not supported for both media. Hypothesis 4-1 is partially supported only on SNS.

Discussion

Our study sought to explain online news sharing from the perspective of relational communication, as opposed to informational communication. It also illustrated how individuals, as an active communicator, present their selfhood and account for their audience characteristics differently during online news sharing in different media environments. The result from Hypothesis 1 suggests that individuals who have a high motivation for self-presentation share news more on both MIM and SNS than those having a low motivation. Previous studies have found that individuals share information with others because of motives of self-presentation (Berger and Schwartz, 2011), as well as to gain more acknowledgment and recognition in online environments (Shirky, 2010).

Corresponding with the previous findings, this study shows that online news sharing is more than information diffusion; individuals present their selfhood and manage their self-images, targeting a specific audience on MIM and SNS.

The results from Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 suggest that audience characteristics matter when deciding to engage in online news sharing. The results from Hypotheses 2 and 3 suggest that people share news when they perceive that specific news content fits an audience's interests (Berger and Schwartz, 2011; Ma et al., 2014) and that the audience is responsive to such messages (Stephen and Lehmann, 2009), regardless of the medium. In other words, although news sharing behavior is a voluntary action, it is contingent on the news sharers' perception of who the *audiences* are. These results suggest that consideration of the communication partners seems to be a universal factor in any communication, even in situations where people can only guess what their "imagined audience" might be (Baym and Boyd, 2012; Litt, 2012; Marwick and Boyd, 2011). Even when it was difficult to assess the audience fit and receptivity on SNS (Baym and Boyd, 2012; Litt, 2012), the audience characteristics still affected the intention to share. SNS is a mixed bag of binary characteristics, being similar to both broadcasting and interpersonal media (Marwick and Boyd, 2011), but our result suggests that SNS users may communicate with concerns for a specific audience as opposed to the broader modes of communication.

Answering to the *RQ*, the results from Hypothesis 4 suggest that the influence of audience connectivity differed between MIM and SNS; it only mattered in the case of SNS. Li and Sakamoto (2014) found that merely exposing people to the information about other users' intention behind sharing SNS content stimulates their intentions to share. Because SNS has a visual interface showing the connectivity and interrelated activities of others, SNS users may be more prone to imagining an expansive audience and more conscious of taking advantage of the connected audience (Marwick and Boyd, 2011) for broader news diffusion.

The results of the interaction terms (*H2-1, 3-1*, and *4-1*) also suggest an interesting difference between MIM and SNS. Those with higher motivation for self-presentation did not react to any audience characteristics on MIM. The effect of connectivity was notable only on SNSs. This difference suggests that news sharing in these two media environments serves different self-presentational purposes. Individuals communicate with more established and close relationships on MIM than via SNS (Kim et al., 2017). Given that individuals are more conscious about face-saving when interacting with their "close ties" (Brown and Garland, 1971), MIM users may generally care about whether their shared news fits the audience's interests and is well responded to within their networks regardless of their level of motivation for self-presentation. Corresponding with the results relative to *H4*, the results concerning *H4-1* suggest that SNS users may focus more on the broader spread of their news and the influence on more people even outside of their networks (De Zúñiga et al., 2012) by taking advantage of the connected feature present in the SNS environment (Marwick and Boyd, 2011). These findings also point to the importance of considering the different media environments of online news sharing. The results suggest that individuals use MIM and SNS differently for different gratifications (Park et al., 2009). The different technical features and contexts of MIM and SNS seem to shape users' uses, as well as their needs from each media (Norman, 2013; Sundar

and Limperos, 2013). Because of audience visibility and features for audience separation in MIM, individuals seem to take advantage of the media to cater to different audiences in each chat room by sharing news that fits the audience's interests. MIM users also seem to make sure that their shared news is not ignored in their close interactions. Because of the audience invisibility and context collapse on SNS, individuals who care more about their own self-presentation seem to take advantage of the media for broader audience and influence they offer.

This study leaves a few questions that are worthwhile pursuing in future research. One direction would be to examine more closely the differences among various types of SNS with different levels of audience visibility. As context collapse is a unique situation in SNS (Baym and Boyd, 2012), future research may also examine how various types and degrees of context collapse influence online news sharing differently. The interrelationships among audience size, self-presentational motivation, and features of context collapse remain as an important potential research topic in the future, as well. Comparing how news sharers' own interest in the news differently affects online news sharing from their perception of the audience' interest may also reveal an interesting aspect of online news sharing behaviors. Furthermore, because individuals from different countries or backgrounds may differ in their communication behaviors, replicating this study in multi-country settings may provide a deeper understanding of news-sharing behaviors beyond the individual level.

This study makes three contributions to research on online news sharing. First, it extends previous research by combining communication and journalism scholarship and providing a unique interpretation of online news sharing behavior as an act of relational communication. Extending the previous focus on informational aspects of news and news content (Berger and Schwartz, 2011; Cappella et al., 2015; Chen and Berger, 2013; Ma et al., 2014), this study centers on the sender (sharer)–receiver (audience) relationships. From this perspective, news can be understood as the agent connecting the relationships. As with the role of newspapers in the social construction of nationalism (Anderson, 2006), reading and responding to the same news by itself can connect readers and instill in them a sense of connectedness, regardless of the unique informational value of the specific news content.

Second, this study contributes to media studies by highlighting the role of individuals as active communicators in online news sharing. Every individual in the contemporary media environment plays a critical role in reconstructing and transforming the society through everyday engagement in the online sphere (Shirky, 2008). Individuals have also become more important in the field of contemporary journalism as individuals can do more than traditional journalists in various media. This article sheds light on the role of individuals in reconfiguring the process of diffusion and reproduction of everyday news. They selectively and sophisticatedly share news by their own ways of imagining and responding to their audiences. They may also act as autonomous "filters" in addition to algorithmic filters in SNS (Pariser, 2011).

Finally, this study extends previous research by comparing how different media environments accompany different news sharing behaviors. MIM and SNS are two representative interpersonal media constituting the contemporary communication milieu. This study provides concrete examples of the different uses, benefits, and needs of online news

sharing in these two media environments (Park et al., 2009; Sundar and Limperos, 2013). By distinguishing the two media environments, this article also refines the concepts of audience characteristics and "imagined audience" (Baym and Boyd, 2012; Litt, 2012).

The findings from this study suggest that online news sharing can be understood as a relational communication between news sharers and an audience. Pew Research scholars have noted that "sharing news may be among the most important" development in the contemporary media environment (Olmstead et al., 2011: 10). This article explains that such a change stems from active individual communicators and their communication with their audience. Despite the informational value of news, news is now connecting and creating relationships and "news participators" (Miller et al., 2012) are now communicating to obtain a broader reach as well as to forge better relationships.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary Appendix is available online.

Note

1. Most individuals in Korea keep multiple chat rooms running in their mobile instant messenger (MIM) and their most conversational chat room tends to be only among family members or close friends. In order to capture the reality of having multiple chat rooms in MIM and the variations individuals may experience when sharing news with family versus non-family members, we decided to ask about two chat rooms. In fact, participants' reports supported this decision. Participants mostly shared news with two major chat rooms: about 20% of their conversation consisted of news sharing in their two major chat rooms (first chat room: 20.71%, second chat room: 19.07%), while those with more than two contributed only 14.60% of their conversation with the third most news-shared room. In addition, 25.5% of people named their most news-shared-chat-room as "family." On social networking sites (SNSs), the governmental statistics indicate that many Koreas use multiple SNSs (Korea Information Society Development Institute [KISDI], 2017). For instance, 49% of Facebook users also use Instagram and 84% of Instagram users use Facebook at the same time (App Ape Analytics, 2018). Similarly, the participants in our sample have shared news in the last month in about two SNSs (mean [M] = 1.73, standard deviation [SD] = 1.57), confirming that our choice of two SNSs captured the participants' media-using behaviors better than only asking one SNS.

ORCID iD

Jennifer Ihm 🆔 https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7039-4162

References

Anderson B (2006) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso Books.

App Ape Analytics (2018) *App Ranking in Korea*. Available at: https://analytics.appa.pe/#/app-ranking?type=possession

Bakshy E, Hofman JM, Mason WA, et al. (2011) Everyone's an influencer: quantifying influence on Twitter. *In: 4th ACM international conference on web search and data mining*, Hong Kong, China, 9–12 February, pp.65–74. New York: ACM.

Baumeister RF (1982) Self-esteem, self-presentation, and future interaction: a dilemma of reputation. *Journal of Personality* 50(1): 29–45.

Baumeister RF and Hutton DG (1987) Self-presentation theory: self-construction and audience pleasing. In: Mullen B and Goethals GR (eds) *Theories of Group Behavior*. New York: Springer, pp. 71–87.

Baym NK and Boyd D (2012) Socially mediated publicness: an introduction. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 56(3): 320–329.

Berger J and Schwartz EM (2011) What drives immediate and ongoing word of mouth? *Journal of Marketing Research* 48(5): 869–880.

Brown BR and Garland H (1971) The effects of incompetency, audience acquaintanceship, and anticipated evaluative feedback on face-saving behavior. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 7(5): 490–502.

Cappella JN, Kim HS and Albarracín D (2015) Selection and transmission processes for information in the emerging media environment: psychological motives and message characteristics. *Media Psychology* 18(3): 396–424.

Chen Z and Berger J (2013) When, why, and how controversy causes conversation. *Journal of Consumer Research* 40(3): 580–593.

Cohen J (1988) *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences*. New York: Routledge.

De Fleur ML (1987) The growth and decline of research on the diffusion of the news, 1945-1985. *Communication Research* 14(1): 109–130.

De Zúñiga HG, Jung N and Valenzuela S (2012) Social media use for news and individuals' social capital, civic engagement and political participation. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 17(3): 319–336.

DiFonzo N and Bordia P (2007) *Rumor Psychology: Social and Organizational Approaches*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Digital Times (2016) KataoTalk, mobile messenger monthly active users 95%. Available at: http://www.dt.co.kr/contents.html?article_no=2016102502109931033002 (accessed 14 October).

Ellison NB, Steinfield C and Lampe C (2007) The benefits of Facebook "friends": social capital and college students' use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12(4): 1143–1168.

Goffman E (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday Publishing.

Govern JM and Marsch LA (2001) Development and validation of the situational self-awareness scale. *Consciousness and Cognition* 10(3): 366–378.

Goyal A, Bonchi F and Lakshmanan LVS (2010) Learning influence probabilities in social networks. *In: 3rd ACM international conference on web search and data mining*, New York, 4–6 February, pp. 241–250. New York: ACM.

Hogg MA, Terry DJ and White KM (1995) A tale of two theories: a critical comparison of identity theory with social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 58(4): 255–269.

Katz E (1957) The two-step flow of communication: an up-to-date report on a hypothesis. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 21(1): 61–78.

Kim EM, Ihm J and Park HA (2017) News sharing as relational communication: focusing on self-presentation tendency and characteristics of sharing audiences. *Korean Journal of Broadcasting and Telecommunication Studies* 31(3): 114–151.

Kim EM, Rhee JW and Jang HM (2011) The effects of blog motivations and the perception toward the size of audience on blogging and the intention to continue blogging focusing on bloggers as interactive media users. *Korean Journal of Broadcasting and Telecommunication Studies* 25(6): 162–203.

Korea Information Society Development Institute (KISDI) (2017) KISDI STAT report 18-03: media panel. Available at: http://m.kisdi.re.kr/mobile/repo/stat_view.m?key1=14266&selectPage= (accessed 27 February 2018).

Korean Statistical Information Service (KOSIS) (2016) Household income statistics. Available at: http://kosis.kr/statisticsList/statisticsListIndex.do?menuId=M_01_01&vwcd=MT_ZTITLE &parmTabId=M_01_01#SelectStatsBoxDiv

Kümpel AS, Karnowski V and Keyling T (2015) News sharing in social media: a review of current research on news sharing users, content, and networks. *Social Media + Society* 1(2): 1–14.

Lee C (2013) Self-presentation and WOM: focusing on mediating role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. *Korean Management Review* 42(1): 183–211.

Lee CS and Ma L (2012) News sharing in social media: the effect of gratifications and prior experience. *Computers in Human Behavior* 28(2): 331–339.

Li H and Sakamoto Y (2014) Social impacts in social media: an examination of perceived truthfulness and sharing of information. *Computers in Human Behavior* 41: 278–287.

Litt E (2012) Knock, knock: who's there? The imagined audience. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 56(3): 330–345.

Ma L, Sian Lee C and Goh DHL (2014) Understanding news sharing in social media: an explanation from the diffusion of innovations theory. *Online Information Review* 38(5): 598–615.

Marwick AE and Boyd D (2011) I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society* 13(1): 114–133.

Miller C, Rainie L, Purcell K, et al. (2012) How people get local news and information in different communities. Available at: http://www.pewinternet.org/2012/09/26/how-people-get-local-news-and-information-in-different-communities (accessed 14 October 2012).

Myers SA, Zhu C and Leskovec J (2012) Information diffusion and external influence in networks (CoRR, abs/1206.1331). Available at: http://arxiv.org/abs/1206.1331 (accessed 7 October 2012).

Norman D (2013) *The Design of Everyday Things: Revised and Expanded Edition*. New York: Basic Books.

OECD (2016) *Education at a Glance 2016: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Olmstead K, Mitchell A and Rosenstiel T (2011) Navigating news online: here people go, how they get there and what lures them away. Available at: http://www.journalism.org/2011/05/09/navigating-news-online/ (accessed 14 October)

Pariser E (2011) *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You*. London: Penguin Books.

Park N, Kee KF and Valenzuela S (2009) Being immersed in social networking environment: Facebook groups, uses and gratifications, and social outcomes. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior* 12(6): 729–733.

Sekhon TS, Bickart BA, Trudel R, et al. (2015) Being a likable braggart: how consumers use brand mentions for self-presentation on social media. In: Dimofte C, Haugtvedt C and Yalch R (eds) *Consumer Psychology in a Social Media World*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, pp. 23–39.

Shirky C (2008) *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*. New York: Penguin Books.

Shirky C (2010) *Cognitive Surplus: How Technology Makes Consumers into Collaborators*. New York: Penguin Books.

Statista (2017) Most popular mobile messaging apps worldwide as of January 2017, based on number of monthly active users (in millions). Available at: https://www.statista.com/statistics/258749/most-popular-global-mobile-messenger-apps/ (accessed 10 November 2017).

Stephen AT and Lehmann DR (2009) Why do people transmit word-of-mouth? The effects of recipient and relationship characteristics on transmission behaviors. Working paper, Columbia University, New York, 4 May.

Sundar SS and Limperos AM (2013) Uses and grats 2.0: new gratifications for new media. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 57(4): 504–525.

Turner JC and Onorato RS (1999) Social identity, personality, and the self-concept: a self-categorization perspective. In: Tyler TR, Kramer RM and John OP (eds) *The Psychology of the Social Self*. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 11–46.

Walther JB (1996) Computer-mediated communication. *Communication Research* 23(1): 3–43.

Walther JB (2011) Theories of computer-mediated communication and interpersonal relations. In: Knapp ML and Daly JA (eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Interpersonal Communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, pp. 443–479.

Author biographies

Jennifer Ihm is an assistant professor in School of Communications at Kwangwoon University. She is interested in how information and communication technologies (ICTs) can contribute to more community engagement and how online engagement can extend to offline environment [www.jenniferihm.com].

Eun-mee Kim is a professor of communication, Seoul National University. Her recent research covers the use of digital media and its social and cultural implications.