Anticipatory socialization in the use of social media in public relations: A content analysis of PRSA's *Public Relations Tactics*

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A B S T R A C T

This article examines one issue in how public relations students are socialized in their understanding of the value and power of social media in the practice of public relations. The public relations academic research about social media is explored, as well as the professional claims about the value of social media as a public relations tactic. The researchers conducted a content analysis of 1 year of *Public Relations Tactics* issues. The data are viewed through the theoretical frame of the socialization literature (Jablin, 1987). The results suggest that claims of social media power far outweigh evidence of social media effectiveness as a communication tool. A disconnect exists between what authors of *Public Relations Tactics* pieces view as the potential for social media and the research findings about the effectiveness of social media. The final section of the article discusses the implications for public relations educators, professional associations, and practitioners as they consider social media tactics in public relations strategy.

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In almost every professional publication that you look at today, someone is making a claim about the power of social media communication technologies to improve public relations practice. PRSA had eight Webinars scheduled in February and March 2009 that addressed social media. The IABC also offers its members podcasts and lessons on how to bring social media technology into the communications practice. Indeed, the IABC World Conference in San Francisco in June 2009 told members on the title page of the conference book: "Dare to: Embrace the social media trends." The inherent value of social media and new communication technology appears to be a forgone conclusion.

The question today is not so much a question of "if" but "how" to use social media in public relations. The demand to use social media and new communication technology is also influencing public relations education. More and more schools are adding classes in new technology. Yet, when the actual effectiveness of social media is scrutinized and their use in public relations held up for critique, little evidence exists that social media are effective tools for relationship building between organizations and publics. An inconsistency exists between social media's promise to make the practice of public relations more effective, and the actual evidence supporting the value of social media.

This article will examine how public relations students are being socialized in expectations and understandings of how to use technology in public relations. The first part of the article reviews the socialization literature (Jablin, 1987; Jablin, 2001) that suggests that education and professional publications influence how people perceive their chosen field of work. The second section of the article discusses the role of social media in public relations. The third section of the article provides the details of a content analysis of the topic of social media in the Public Relations Society of America's newspaper, *Public Relations Tactics*. The fourth section discusses the results of the content analysis of the *Public Relations Tactics* and the implications

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for the profession. The fifth section of the article provides conclusions and future directions for public relations educators, public relations practitioners, and members of the profession who write for association publications.

1. Anticipatory socialization: becoming a professional

What does it take to become a professional? Before individuals join professions, they undergo a process of socialization. Similarly, before individuals join specific organizations they also undergo a process of socialization about the skills, aptitudes and behaviors the organization might expect from them as an employee.

1.1. Socialization of individuals into professions

The socialization literature is extensive with over 300 articles published on the topic in communication, psychology, and business journals. Socialization is conceptualized as the process through which individuals identify with and pursue a profession. The part of the literature that is most relevant for this article is the first stage of the socialization process: anticipatory socialization.

Van Maanen (1975) first identified socialization as a key factor to organizational effectiveness. Jablin (1985) later extended the theory of anticipatory socialization. Anticipatory socialization occurs before an individual joins an organization. During the anticipatory socialization phase, people first learn about work in general, how organizations function, what an occupation does in its work, and what types of organizations do that specific type of work.

There are multiple sources of anticipatory socialization information. Jablin (1987) noted that friends, family members, the media, and personal experiences all provide pieces of the career puzzle for new professionals. How effective is this informal socialization? Clair (1996) found that by the time a first year student reaches college, s/he already has an image of what a "real job" entails. This image will guide what profession they pursue, where they will want to work, and how they prepare themselves for a "real job."

The public relations profession both benefits from and is challenged by anticipatory socialization. Bowen (2003) noted that "as a discipline, we are attracting students who know little about the function of public relations, hold preconceptions that are based on stereotypes, and lack knowledge of the intellectual requirements necessary for success in the major's foundation courses" (p. 201). Bowen's research strengthens the argument for improved socialization for public relations students.

1.2. Socializing students into the practice of public relations

There are many ways that students learn about the practice of public relations. For some, they see characters on television or in the movies that depict public relations practitioners. Avery Johnson and Avery (2006) studied how one television show, PoweR Girls, influenced perceptions of the practice for both public relations students and other students. PoweR Girls, a short-lived cable television program, portrayed public relations practitioners as event planners who spent their time alternating between crying and hanging out with celebrities.

Students also learn about the public relations practice through their classes. Public relations students enroll in a standard set of courses including introduction to public relations, public relations writing, public relations management, and/or campaigns classes. This type of socialization provides the academic rationale to the practice. According to the 2006 Professional Bond Report, other fields such as accounting, medicine and law have developed greater professionalism through educational standards. Public relations needs to do the same in establishing educational standards (Turk, 2006, p. 25). The AEJMC accreditation process and PRSA's Certification in Education of Public Relations are important steps in accomplishing this goal, however, a lot of variation exists from school to school in terms of what students learn in their foundational courses.

Another related factor in socialization is student participation in public relations organizations. Many professional organizations actively promote expertise and professional development in public relations. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), and more specialized groups such as Women in Communication (WIC) offer services to college students. Today, there are over 300 chapters of the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) with almost 10,000 students involved. As a point of comparison, there are approximately 22,000 dues-paying PRSA members. PRSSA comprises a significant socialization role in the profession.

The socialization mission of PRSSA is clear. It promotes "understanding of current theories and procedures of the profession; appreciation of the highest ethical ideals and principles; awareness of an appropriate professional attitude; appreciation of associate and eventually accredited membership in PRSA" (www.PRSSA.org/about). Clearly the socialization of young aspiring professionals into public relations takes many forms and also covers many topics. The topic of interest to this study is the discussion of social media as an effective tool in public relations practice. The next section reviews the literature of social media as a public relations tool.

2. Social media as a part of effective public relations

In only a decade, the role of technology in public relations has grown tremendously. Now, few professionals would argue against the use of electronic media in public relations activities. Web sites are an omnipresent communication tool and

e-mail has become the norm of internal and external organizational communication. The newest technology on the scene is social media and there are many claims about its power.

2.1. The claim: social media is the future of public relations

The first articles about new technologies emerged in 1997 and 1998. Johnson (1997) surveyed practitioners about their use of new communication technologies such as the World Wide Web. In 1998, a special issue of *Public Relations Review* published articles by Coombs (1998), Heath (1998), and Kent and Taylor (1998) extolling the two-way interactive capacity of the World Wide Web.

In 2003, the term "Weblog" or "blog" was introduced to the public relations field (Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005). Today, there are many articles in the professional journals explaining how public relations practitioners could/should incorporate blogs and other social media tactics. Social media are online communication tools. Social media tools include interactive social networking sites like MySpace, Facebook and LinkedIn, as well as blogs, podcasts, message boards, online videos and picture albums, and mobile telephone alerts. Another way of thinking about social media is to recognize that they are based on consumer-generated content (Owyang & Toll, 2007). Organizational members and consumers co-create the content. Some have claimed that social media's "effect on brand and corporate reputation can be instantaneous and far-reaching" (Owyang & Toll, 2007, p. 1).

Wright and Hinson have called on public relations practitioners to incorporate social media in their communication and relationship building. Wright and Hinson have noted that "the potential impact of blogs on public relations and corporate communications is phenomenal" (2008, p. 4). Trammell suggested, "with the rise of personal publishing, practitioners need no longer rely on media for transmitting those messages and reaching their public" (2006, p. 402). Indeed, even the Public Relations Education Commission Report noted, "often, new technological forms and channels, such as electronic pitching, Podcasting, and blogging, prevail over traditional news releases and media kits" (Turk, 2006, p. 31). The implied question becomes "how and when are social media effective tools in public relations?"

2.2. The concern: what evidence exists proving the effectiveness of social media?

Given all of the claims about the power of social media made by the profession, what types of evidence can quantitatively support these claims? The answer is none. Very little evidence exists to date. Wright and Hinson (2008) surveyed over 300 public relations professionals asking about employee blogs. Their findings suggest that most organizations (about 85%) have not "commissioned or conducted a research or measurement study" on the impact of employee blogs (p. 15). Diga and Kelleher (2009) also surveyed practitioners. They found "public relations practitioners in this study who were more frequent users of social network sites and social media tools reported greater perceptions of their own structural, expert and prestige power" (p. 440).

Trammell (2006) studied blogs during the 2004 presidential campaign. Trammell claims that her content analysis "provided evidence that rather than relying on personal testimonies wrought with emotion—which may be more effectively done on a television ad—blogs are useful tools in building logical arguments that may become difficult to refute" (p. 405).

Sweetser and Metzgar (2007) studied the use of blogs in crisis. They found that bloggers held more positive perceptions of organizations that used their blogs to respond to a crisis. In another study of blog credibility, Sweetser, Porter, Chung, and Kim (2008) found that blogs are only considered credible sources of information by the people who either read or write them. The "choir" appears to be the only group willing to ascribe credibility to the information on blogs.

In a telephone survey of bloggers by the PEW Internet and American Life Project, Lenhart discovered that most bloggers are writing to express their creativity, document their personal experiences, and stay in touch with their friends (2006). More importantly, most bloggers do not check their facts, or cite the source of information that they republish in their blog. In general, Lenhart found that most bloggers (65%) did not consider themselves journalists and most bloggers (75%) obtained the majority of their news content from other online sources.

In a more recent study of social networking by PEW's Internet and American Life project, only 10–30% of adults 35–55 years old report any social media presence (Lenhart, 2009, pp. 1–2). According to Lenhart, "Overall, *personal use* of social networks seems to be more prevalent than *professional use* of networks, both in the orientation of the networks that adults choose to use as well as the reasons they give for using the applications" (p. 2, emphasis added). Only about 35% of all adults in the U.S. even use social media, and about half of that number are young-adults, 18–25 (p. 5). Perhaps more importantly, young (teens) social media users use the technology solely for entertainment purposes, while only one in four adult users, about 3–8% of the adult population uses social media for networking or professional purposes (p. 6). By far, both adults and teens use social media "to stay in touch with friends," "to make plans with friends," "and to make new friends." Finally, no more than 1–3% of the population has ever used social media for active political purposes like requesting information or joining a political group (p. 11). Indeed, in a study of Israeli public relations professionals, "56 per cent of the practitioners thought that the emergence of the social media (including blogs) has not changed the way their organizations or their clients' organizations communicate" (Avidar, 2009, p. 438).

Kent (2008) authored one of the few articles critical of blogging. Kent warned that many of the professional claims about the importance of social networking technologies like blogs were unsubstantiated and that although blogs might make wonderful research tools, their reach and potential to influence a variety of publics is probably limited. The recent PEW

research seems to bear out his claims. Kent also points out that many research studies like Lenhart's assume that blogs are a type of online diary (biographical log), which they are. However, this definition ignores the many subclasses of blogs like news blogs, and professional blogs written by industry insiders.

Social media are not yet what many public relations professionals want them to be. Lariscy, Avery, Sweetser, and Howes (2009) surveyed journalists and found that social media were rarely selected by journalists as a first choice for gathering news. "Only about 3% of the sample are finding the majority of their information in online sources other than blogs and websites" (p. 315).

There are inconsistencies and misconceptions about social media. In order to examine the claims made about social media and new technology and the influence that such claims might have on professional socialization of students, we conducted an analysis of *Public Relations Tactics* for messages about social media.

3. An analysis of *Public Relations Tactics*

Public Relations Tactics is one of the few public relations publications that is read by students, faculty, and practitioners alike. As such, *Tactics* represents an appropriate source for an analysis of the professional claims made about social media.

3.1. Research questions

This research study seeks to examine three issues in social media: the claims, the evidence, and the concerns raised in the practitioner literature that is socializing current and future public relations professionals. Four research questions drive this study:

RQ1: What types of claims about social media power are published in *Public Relations Tactics*?
RQ2: What types of evidence about social media power are provided in *Public Relations Tactics* articles?
RQ3: What types of suggestions are provided to readers of *Public Relations Tactics* on how to use social media in their professional communication?
RQ4: What are the concerns or questions raised about the use of social media in public relations in the articles examined?

Together, the answers to these research questions provide a picture about the role of social media in public relations practice. More specifically, the answers provide insight into the socialization frameworks that guide PRSSA students and PRSA practitioners as they think about the use of social media in public relations. The next section explains the methodology used to answer these research questions.

3.2. Method

PRSA's *Public Relations Tactics* was selected for analysis because all dues-paying student members of PRSSA receive it. As students learn about the profession from their experiences in PRSSA, *Public Relations Tactics* may be the only professional public relations publication that they read. The very nature of its distribution to professionally oriented undergraduates privileges the publication and makes it a useful sample for studying anticipatory socialization statements about social media in the practice of public relations.

3.3. Sample

The sample for this study consists of 1 year of *Public Relations Tactics*. The Public Relations Society of America publishes *Public Relations Tactics* each month (*N* = 12 issues). Members of PRSA are given free copies of the publication and interested parties can subscribe to *Tactics* for $100 a year or $10 per issue. Its mission is "to provide PR professionals with practical how-to information that will help improve their job performance and advance their careers" (PRSA.org/publications/tactics). According to the PRSA Web site:

> *Public Relations Tactics* is PRSA's award-winning monthly newspaper that publishes news, trends, and how-to-information about the practice of public relations. The lively, four-color tabloid is designed to help PR practitioners improve their job skills and stay competitive. *Tactics* is written by seasoned public relations professionals which means you can count on getting the scoop from people who know how to make public relations work. (PRSA.org/publications/tactics)

Tactics contains articles and columns discussing the profession, an Editor's Corner, PR Blotter (short summaries), Ask The Professor, Diversity Dimensions, profiles, feature stories, career advice, information about PRSA events, and interviews with high profile public relations practitioners. *Public Relations Tactics* also contains advertisements for public relations' related services including media services, jobs, and specialty firms.

The issues selected for analysis appeared in print from April 2008 to March 2009. The research team examined each of the 12 issues of *Public Relations Tactics* to identify stories or columns that addressed social media.

3.4. Coding

The interest of this study is in claims, evidence, suggestions, and concerns raised in *Tactics* about social media as a public relations tactic. The unit of analysis was any story, column, or text box that mentioned social media. These units were

evaluated for four distinct categories: claims, evidence, suggestions, and concerns about social media. A unit of analysis could theoretically include all four of the topics of interest and thus would be counted once for each area. Conversely, a story, column, or text box might only feature one or two of the topics of interest. Each time a story, column, or text box mentioned social media the nature of the discussion (claims, evidence, suggestions, and concerns) was counted.

3.5. Operationalization of variables

RQ1 sought evidence about the claims of social media power. This content category consisted of statements that claimed that social media are the new way of conducting public relations. The claims state that social media (including Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, blogs, Second Life, etc.) are ways that organizations can reach or engage their publics. The claims may also include statements that the media want public relations professionals to use social media or the media prefer social media tactics.

RQ2 sought evidence presented to readers about social media power. This category cites specific evidence of the power of social media in public relations. We coded statements that included facts and statistics but did not include anecdotes of how organizations have used social media in this category.

RQ3 sought to identify the suggestions provided to *Public Relations Tactics*' readers on how to use social media. This category provides concrete steps and lessons learned about the real life implementation of social media. This category also counted anecdotes of how practitioners, media, or organizations have used social media.

RQ4 sought to identify the concerns or questions about the impact of social media in public relations practice. This category includes statements questioning the effectiveness of social media, questions about their general use as a communication and or relationship-building tool, and statements urging practitioners to use caution in implementing social media. This category also included statements about the media's concerns about social media in newsgathering or news dissemination.

Two coders tested the operationalizations of claims, evidence, suggestions, and concerns to ensure the categories were mutually exclusive and exhaustive. The coders examined seven different *Public Relations Tactics* full-length stories (12% of the entire sample) and coded the sentences about social media based on the four different categories. The percentage of agreement ranged from .75 to 1.0 on each of the four operationalizations. Scott's Pi was used to calculate intercoder reliability. The aggregate calculation suggests that the operationalizations of the categories meet the standards of being mutually exclusive and exhaustive with the overall Scott's Pi = .83.

3.6. Results

3.6.1. Descriptives

The sample consisted of 59 articles, text boxes, and columns published in *Public Relations Tactics* that specifically addressed social media topics. The pieces comprising the sample ranged from small text boxes reporting survey results to feature columns and full length, multi-page stories that addressed the use of social media in public relations. Over 95% of the sample consisted of articles specifically focused on the topic of social media. Over 41% of the pieces coded were full-length stories, 27% of the sample consisted of columns written by *Public Relations Tactics* staff, and 30% of the sample appeared in special demarcated text boxes. Text boxes provided supplementary material to the larger story or stood on their own as background information about social media.

A majority of the social media pieces (57%) were written by staff or regular contributors to *Public Relations Tactics*. Guest writers accounted for 30% of the pieces and 12% of the pieces identified no specific author. *Public Relations Tactics* ends many of its shorter pieces of a paragraph or two with the letter T to indicate that this written by a staff member.

Many articles focused on providing background about social media with almost 57% of the articles providing definitions, examples, and contextual information that helped readers understand the differences among social media tools. Several articles contained key word definitions intended to help readers understand social media jargon. The editorial focus on definitions and explanations of social media was especially prevalent in the earlier part of the sample (the first 6 months). Stories that are more recent assume that readers already know the difference among blogging, twittering, and YouTube.

3.6.2. Research questions

RQ1 inquired about the prevalence of claims of social media power published in *Public Relations Tactics*. The results of the content analysis suggest that two-thirds of the articles, 39 of the 59 pieces, made specific claims about the power of social media as a valuable public relations tool. The claims included statements such as "more people use social media than watch popular shows like American Idol" (Zuk, 2009, p. 7), "Twitter can be an important promotional tool for you" (Jaques, 2009, p. 11), "consumers' use of social media will continue to boom" (Nail, 2009, p. 13), "social media affects us where we live, it's incorporated into every aspect of our lives" (Mateas, 2008, p. 4), and "now that I have been actively twittering for several months, I find it hard to understand why more companies and nonprofits don't use this powerful communication tool to monitor public comment about their brand and push their marketing message" (Stewart, 2008, p. 17).

The claims made might be summarized as follows: social media allow you to extend the reach of your message, engage in two-way communication with publics, and listen to what your publics want.

Given the abundant claims about social media power in two-thirds of the *Public Relations Tactics* articles, RQ2 asked about the prevalence of evidence provided by authors to support their claims of social media power. The data suggest that providing

evidence is not a necessity for authors to support their claims about social media power. Only 18 articles or columns (31%) cited any specific evidence about the reach or power of social media. The most typical evidence was for the author to report the results of surveys of journalists who use social media themselves.

Examples of the evidence provided to support social media claims include statements such as online media are important because "nearly half of Americans get their news and information from the Internet" (Berman, 2008, p. 21), "recent studies indicate that ever more journalists are looking to blogs for story leads and quotes" (Hallett, 2008, p. 25), and "Facebook claims to have about 150 million active accounts with 600,000 new opened per day. Large numbers like these suggest that practitioners, agencies, and corporations need to embrace social media" (Zuk, 2009, p. 7). The evidence provided in the stories might be summarized as follows: the public and journalists use social media so public relations practitioners should use these tools as well.

RQ3 asked "What types of suggestions are provided to readers of *Public Relations Tactics* on how to use social media in their professional communication?" Thirty-five of the 59 articles (59%) offered suggestions for using social media. The suggestions usually included tactical advice like "offer them [media] something of value that intersects with your brand" (Brown, 2008, p. 24), "build a relationship with the group administrators . . . they are similar to editors" (Neff, 2008, p. 15), and use twitter for disaster news alerts and customer service (Stewart, 2008, p. 17). The suggestions are always anecdotal and rarely provide any evidence that the tactics are effective. The suggestions often reflect little more than basic understanding about the technology's potential for two-way communication.

RQ4 inquired about concerns or questions about the use of social media in public relations. Only 35% of the articles raised any questions or concerns. The overwhelming majority of articles proceeded from the assumption that social media are an effective tool. Only a few articles attempted to question the assumption that social media are inherently effective. One guest writer argued that social media may provide you with leads for a job but it is face-to-face networking and relationship building that gets you a job (Woloshin, 2009, p. 7). Brown (2008) warned, "the downside is the underestimation of the soft costs and commitment involved in doing it [blogs] right" (p. 24). Another column noted that 33% of Chief Marketing Officers are "not interested at all" in incorporating social networking into their strategies (PR Blotter, Jan. 2009, p. 4).

Based on the research questions and the data gathered in the content analysis, it appears that stories, columns and text boxes in *Tactics* provide far more claims (66%) and suggestions (59%) about social media than evidence (35%) or concerns/critical questions (31%). *The data suggest an almost 2-1 preference for claims and suggestions over providing evidence or raising concerns about social media.* The implications for current and future practitioners are discussed below.

4. Discussion

The anticipatory socialization literature tells us that when students take public relations courses or enroll in a degree program in public relations, they are being socialized into the discipline. The materials that they read, the lectures they hear, the internships and experiential assignments that they complete all contribute to their general understanding of what public relations is and what public relations professionals do. All experiences, good and bad, socialize members into the norms of the field.

4.1. What is Public Relations Tactics telling students?

The findings of this study suggest that there is gap in what the field is saying about the potential of social media and the evidence provided to prove the argument. As pointed out above, most (66%) of the pieces start from the assumption that the value of social media is a given. The abundance of stories (at least two or three in every issue and more than a dozen in several issues) on social media clearly indicates that the value and role of social media is not being questioned. The impression that a student might have after a year of reading such ubiquitous coverage is very likely, "I use social media. I can easily use social media in public relations!"

Without firmly established preferences, and professional experience regarding what works and does not work, young professionals, because of a lack of experience, are likely to believe that the articles they read in professional publications contain facts. Indeed, as noted above, few articles even question the value of social media. The subject is *already not* contested.

4.2. Where is the balance and healthy skepticism?

Perhaps a more important question to ask is why is there so little critique about social networking technologies given all of their risks?[1] There *are* social media skeptics, but the pieces published in *Public Relations Tactics* fail to acknowledge the criticism and give young practitioners a false sense of the value of the technology or the risks involved.

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[1] In only a few minutes, we were able to find thousands of articles raising legitimate concerns about social media. A Google search reveals almost 9000 hits for "risks of blogging." At the top of the list, a 2008, ABC News report. "Lawsuits Against Bloggers Seen Rising" (abc-news.go.com/Technology/Story?id=5406538&page=1). The same search, conducted in *Lexis/Nexis Academic*, going back only six months, in U.S. newspapers and wire posts, reveals almost 300 news articles. Articles describe the risks involved in blogging (and other social media) to international citizens, risks from organizational imposters, risks from anonymous posters, risks associated with the large commitment of resources that social media can swallow (which contradicts many of the claims made in the *Tactics* articles), etc.

The role of any professional news source (including *Public Relations Tactics*) is to seek balance and ensure that the messages that readers receive are not lopsided or deceptive. Our content analysis noted that almost 60% of the social media articles published in *Public Relations Tactics* were written by editors or bylined staff. They are the people we rely on each month for updates on our profession. Yet, they are the ones who most often authored articles with minimal reflection on the potential negative issues concerning social media.

Healthy skepticism is anther word for critical thinking. The report of the commission on public relations education, *The Professional Bond: Public Relations Education in the 21st Century* (www.commpred.org/_uploads/report2-full.pdf) identified "the top-rated competencies sought in hiring entry-level practitioners are writing skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, a good attitude, the ability to communicate publicly, and initiative" (p. 19). Using research to inform public relations practice is also a major theme in the report. Yet, it is unclear if those skills are being fostered with the topic of social media.

4.3. How are we socializing the next generation of practitioners?

Jablin's (1987, 2001) anticipatory socialization research showed us that there are a variety of messages and sources that tell people how to prepare for and behave in organizations. Jablin noted that message characteristics include accuracy, realism, relevancy, specificity, favorability, amount, and interactivity of the message. These message characteristics influence how future members of a profession or organization understand that profession. If certain inaccurate messages are repeated, then future professionals will have a false sense of what their career will entail.

Public Relations Tactics has the potential to reach 10,000 student members of the PRSSA in any given year. As a source of information about the field of public relations, it enjoys the credibility of being the monthly newspaper of a respected professional organization. Yet, it is only telling one side of the social media story. Having grown up using social media like YouTube and MySpace, our students are already predisposed to believe that social media are useful communication tools.

Many college students' use of Facebook and YouTube already exceeds the amount of time spent reading or studying for their classes. Mokhtari, Reichard, and Gardner (2009) found that college students spend an average of 19 hours a week online. Undergraduate student beliefs that public relations is something easy and fun are reinforced when our professional publications tell them that public relations is about tweeting and sending product information through social networking sites. The fact that Twitter is widely promoted as a 140-character (not word) communication tool stands in stark contrast to the lessons of the public relations classroom where we teach them about strategic communication, research, message design, and persuasion.

When the only profession-linked newspaper that students read has headlines that scream "Come On In: Social Media is Great!," "Friends, Family and Facebook," "Tweet and Low: Making the Most of 140 Characters," "Get Yourself a Tweet New Job," "In the Driver's Tweet: Making the Most of 140 Characters," "Twitter Tips," "Working in Social Media," "Playing Ball with Bloggers: One More Reason Why You Need a Blogger Relations Program," "Why Your Company Needs to Twitter," and our favorite, "Social Media Technologies Changing Perceptions of Human Reality," it is time to question how our profession in general is socializing our students about using social media.

5. Conclusion

Young professionals prepare for entry into their field through education and extracurricular experiences. One of the biggest socializing forces in any profession is likely to be the publications that provide advice and guidance to future members. PRSSA's 10,000 members are given a copy of *Public Relations Tactics* each month, proving that this publication is indeed providing anticipatory socialization information to the next generation of practitioners.

Some may argue that the role of anticipatory socialization through professional publications is small, suggesting, "My students don't even read *Tactics*." Although this might be true, professional socialization still takes place. Barring exposure to professional articles and content, students will glean their ideas about the profession from the mass media and personal experiences.

Professional associations exist to serve their members through information, advocacy, and networking opportunities. Professional associations would be remiss if their professional publications did not focus on the most up-to-date information and trends. Yet, there needs to be balance. Public relations practitioners and students should learn about all of the great potential of social media. But, at the same time, young professionals should also learn about the limitations of social media so that they can make strategic choices in tactics. The fact that there is so little evidence about social media's effectiveness beyond anecdotes and self-report studies, leads us to believe that *Public Relations Tactics* should also publish articles that problematize social media and ask questions including: "how can you build a relationship in 140 characters or less?" "What demographics are likely to be effectively reached via social media?" "What traditional media might be *as useful* or *more useful*, and when should you use them?" "What happens to the publics that are not online?"

The findings of this study suggest that we need more diverse voices contributing to the socialization of the next generation of practitioners. Our intention is not to embarrass or insult the professional staff of *Public Relations Tactics.* They provide an invaluable service to the field of public relations. Instead, we hope that we have raised the issue that periodicals such as *Public Relations Tactics* play an important role in socializing future members of our profession. We believe that this small study is a reminder about the collaborative relationship that practitioners and academics need to develop. Both groups have

valuable insight into the practice. *Public Relations Tactics* should invite scholars with data about social media to participate in a dialogue or forum sharing their results. At a minimum, authors in professional publications should be required to provide sources (scholarly, professional, quantitative, etc.), rather than just anecdotal support for their claims about the practice of public relations. Finally, the PRSA should consider sponsoring additional research about social media (and other relevant topics) to provide answers to specific questions in the field. The IABC supported the Excellence Study and the field has benefited in many ways from this academic-professional collaboration. Sponsored/applied research would expand our understanding of professional issues and provide practitioner readers with concrete data upon which to base their strategic communication decisions.

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