

The Structuration of Identification on Organizational Members' Social Media

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### **Abstract**

Scott, Corman, and Cheney's (1998) structural model of identification is applied to test structures that may lead to sharing organizational membership on social media and increased organizational identification. We propose and test how antecedents (e.g., social media use, organizational prestige) relate to acts of identification on social media and promote organizational identification. United States working adults ( $N = 303$ ) responded to an online survey about hypothesized motivational structures, and disclosures of organizational affiliation, organizational identification. Results show three specific structures significantly predict one's willingness to share her or his organizational affiliation across social media: personae overlap, social media use, and organizational prestige. Commitment and turnover intentions were, surprisingly, not direct predictors of organizational affiliation disclosure. Implications for individuals, organizations, and both organizational and computer-mediated theory are presented.

*Keywords:* online identification, social networking sites, commitment, structuration, identity management

### The Structuration of Identification on Organizational Members' Social Media

What drives someone to indicate her or his organizational affiliation on social media?

*Social media* are online venues which allow users to “opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others” (Carr & Hayes, 2015, p. 50). Initially, Facebook, a popular social medium, required all users to display their institutional affiliation (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2007). As social media have become pervasive, users' network affiliations also broadened and requirements generally dropped. Now, users can indicate affiliation with many organizations beyond academic institutions. Most social network sites (SNSs), and social media more broadly, no longer mandate users identify or display any particular organizational affiliation: Users can identify multiple affiliations (e.g., educational, religious, volunteer organization, employer, hobbyist group) or omit organizational affiliations entirely.

A seemingly trivial issue, whether an employee identifies her or his employer on social media has significant implications for employees, employers, and industries (Zide, Elman, & Shahani-Denning, 2014). Individuals acknowledging their organizational affiliation online may be publicly viewed as members of the organization and serve as brand advocates, whether their online presence is sanctioned by the institution or not. External and internal stakeholders link online employee behavior to impressions of the holistic organization, affecting customers (Ivens & Schaarschmidt, 2015), applicants, and employees (Melián-González & Bulchand-Gidumal, 2016; Shoss, Maurer, & Rupprecht, 2013).

Just as one might bring up their workplace in a conversation, wear a company logo on clothing, or socialize with others who work at a given company, they might also signal affiliation

with a company on social media. Conversely, individuals who choose not to share workplace affiliations may be ambivalent, unattached, or even in a process of disengagement or anticipatory exit (Davis & Myers, 2012; Withers, Corley, & Hillman, 2012). Thus, employee disclosures of their workplace on social media may serve as cues about the role of the organization in their identity.

Revealing information about one's work, like presenting information about one's personal life, evokes tensions. Gibbs, Rozaidi, and Eisenberg (2013) contend that those who use social media for work feel competing needs to manage their own and their company's visibility, engagement, and control of potentially private or proprietary information. Social media users find motivation to reveal or conceal online "information about themselves or the organization and may have good reasons for doing so" (Gibbs et al., 2013, p. 114). Given these dynamics, understanding the forces that drive or dissuade employees from formally acknowledging their employers in their online profiles demands scholarly attention.

This study explores the communicative motivations for displaying one's organizational affiliation on social media as a form of identity management. We apply the structurational model of identification (Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998), which posits acts of identification (e.g., sharing on social media) and identity (i.e., experiences of organizational identification) mutually affect one another. The structurational model of identification, partnered with structural equation modeling (SEM), allows for "structure and process to be conceptualized simultaneously and in conjunction with one another" (Scott et al., 1998, p. 301). This model emphasizes how regionalization of identity claims across locales, like social media profiles, represents the process and outcome of identities being articulated through acts of identification. This structurational model helps explain how individuals' social media self-presentation in expressing organizational

identities and feelings of organizational identification are related to key antecedents. A survey of 303 social media users across the United States was used to test hypotheses regarding about several structures research suggests affect users' likelihoods of signaling their organizational affiliation on social media. Below we present hypotheses, test a structural equation model of these relationships, and present implications at individual, organizational, and theoretical levels.

### **Social Media Identity Management**

Self-presentation to diverse audiences is an inherent component of social media use (Carr & Hayes, 2015; Hogan, 2010). Social media allow for identity trials and explorations as individuals strategically display specific facets of themselves (e.g., Whitty, Doodson, Creese, & Hodges, 2014). There are many online venues where individuals can enact their identities. Often identity claims are linked to the specific social medium one uses to present themselves (Rains & Brunner, 2015). Still the diverse segments of one's social media audience constrain individuals to present parts of their identities deemed consistent or unobjectionable across the disparate social categories to which they belong (cf., Hogan, 2010). Regardless of users' self-presentational intent, there are various means by which users attempt to manage their identity within social media, including limiting network connections (Sibona, 2014), censoring or redacting disclosures (Christofides, Muise, & Desmarais, 2009; Hayes, Smock, & Carr, 2015), obfuscating their identities (Duffy, Pruchniewska, & Scolere, 2017), and separating personal and professional persona (Fieseler, Meckel, & Ranzini, 2015).

The challenge of identity management is further complicated when considering the convergence of relational contexts within social media (Lee, Kramer, & Guo, 2019). Geographic, communicative, and self-presentational boundaries affect professional and personal self-presentation (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015). Organizational members navigate the collapse of

professional and personal contacts within SNSs (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) through various strategies, including limiting audiences and controlling content (Hogan, 2010; Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard, & Berg, 2013). As a corollary, individuals may increase their articulation of organizational membership when that affiliation is central to their sense of self. For example, van Zoonen and colleagues (2018) found ambassadorship—posting on behalf of the organization—is positively related to organizational identification on Facebook (though not on LinkedIn).

*Structures*, or the rules and resources which actors call upon when taking action shape how individuals engage in situated activities (i.e., agency), which includes sharing information on social media (Scott et al., 1998). Put simply, structures are “the habits or routines” social actors call upon to produce their actions in a given context (Giddens, 1984, p. 19). Social media users often navigate articulation of both personal and workplace identities as well as managing the expectations of coworkers and other social ties (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015), all to strategically manage how they are portrayed and situated within a particular context. The convergence of relational contexts occurring in social media spaces prompts us to explore how individuals manage these pressures to balance and guide personal- and professional-presentations online. Specifically, we test which identity structures prompt public sharing of organizational affiliation and affect organizational identification.

### **Organizational Identification, Identity, and Identification Acts Online**

Organizational identification is more nuanced and specific than general social identification. Organizational identification is a personal identification with group-level affiliations, wherein the individual categorizes herself or himself relative to the organization or workgroup (Ashforth, 2016). This categorization, with respect to the organization, is assimilated into a functional self-concept. *Organizational identification* refers to, “the perception of oneness

with or belongingness to an organization, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization(s) to which he or she is a member” (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 104).

Importantly, organizational identification and public sharing of one’s organizational affiliation are conceptually distinct. The former focuses on one’s feelings regarding the organization, while the latter on an expression of the self (i.e., identity and identification, respectively; Scott et al., 1998). Organizational identification has also been associated with self-presentation, as individuals who more strongly identify with a specific social identity are more likely to present cues tied to that categorization (Carr, Vitak, & McLaughlin, 2013).

Scott et al. (1998) present an organizational identification framework based on structuration theory. This model proposes identification with an organization is a complex process of production and reproduction of person in-relation-to organization identity (Scott et al., 1998). That is, *identity* is “a resource for interacting with others in social settings like groups and organizations” (p. 302); whereas, *identification* is the act of (re)producing identity. The structurational model of identification considers the structures of identity as foci which guide decision, choice, and action. Identities are manifest in activities or acts of identification which reciprocally prompt feelings of identification (see also Stephens & Dailey, 2012).

Identity is based on cognitively structured relationships (i.e., How do I see myself in relation to the organization?); whereas, identification is enacted (i.e., How can I communicate the relationship and to what end?). Identities are structures which serve as the medium and outcome of communication: Identification is the process of (re)creating identities through talk, posts, and other actions (Stephens & Dailey, 2012; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002). As Scott et al. (1998) summarize, “This dynamic [identification] process involves manifest behaviors in explicitly or implicitly social settings that illustrate one’s linkage to some “target” (usually, a social

collective)” (p. 306). For example, identity comes from personal feelings about the self in relation to many potential groups, like one’s workplace. Identification, then, ought to include acts of publicly sharing about one’s identity on social media (e.g. “Craig works at Cerner.”).

Social media serve as venues to produce and reproduce organizational identities. Gossett and Kilker (2006) note that extra-institutional discussion fora (e.g., radioshacksucks.com) allow individuals to voice their beliefs about their workplace (see also, Shoss et al., 2013). Sharing information about one’s organization online demonstrates a duality of identity (manifest in text) and situated activity (e.g., sharing about oneself on social media) with regard to the attachment process (Scott et al., 1998). Perceived structures inform how one wants or ought to perform and present the self (identification). In short, what one believes about themselves in relation to a target (and audience) enables and constrains how people present themselves (Giddens, 1984; Scott & Stephens, 2009), even online.

This study considers a variety of structures which may inform one’s willingness to identify their workplace on social media. We derive these structures from existing research on online identification and the structurational view of identification. We proffer any actor is simultaneously calling on multiple and overlapping structures to determine social action in any situation and sharing one’s identification reifies feelings of organizational identification (Giddens, 1984). The following sections review the relevant structures which we predict will affect public sharing about one’s workplace and feelings of organizational identification.

***Personae overlap.*** The first structure that may affect the identification process is a person’s preferred strategic self-presentational goals (i.e., personae). Drawing from Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical metaphor, scholars have shown perceived audience affects self-presentation (e.g., Vitak, Blasiola, Patil, & Litt, 2015). Indeed, Scott et al.’s (1998)



structural model of identification posits identity is regionalized across audiences: “The front and back characteristics of a region begin to account for the ability of members to draw on the same identity during the expression of identification or disidentification with any one target” (p. 315). Thus, separating or regionalizing one’s audiences likely affects how one expresses identification across audiences.

Preferences for network separation or integration have been associated with willingness to share information about ones’ organization (van Zoonen & Banghart, 2018). In addition, this willingness to differentiate identities online drives willingness to interact with colleagues on social media (van Prooijen, Ranzini, & Bartels, 2018). In line with Goffman’s (1959) work, Fieseler et al. (2014; see also Johnson & Ranzini, 2018) label this behavior *personae overlap*. An individual self-presenting within a strictly work context may have no problems identifying an organizational affiliation—and may often do so through verbal and nonverbal channels—such as introducing oneself as a member of the company, wearing a name tag, or branded apparel—given its appropriateness within that context. However, the same individual may not want to emphasize that organizational affiliation in other contexts (e.g., in a bowling group) to avoid invoking expectations or values of the holistic organization to which the individual may not subscribe or which are irrelevant in the other social context. In this way, individuals may simply not identify their organizational affiliations in social media to avoid giving-off cues about their organizational selves outside of the salient organizational context. This communicative choice drives the first hypothesis:

*H1: Preference for personal-professional identity integration (i.e. personae overlap) is positively related to (a) sharing one’s organizational affiliation on social media and (b) organizational identification.*

***Social media use.*** Another potential source of variance in sharing one's organization on social media is *social media use*, or how intensely an individual uses social media channels. How much someone uses a particular social medium and how much that use is integrated into habitual behaviors have been identified as important correlates of actual social media behaviors, including number of network connections (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007), privacy management behaviors (Vitak et al., 2015), number of profile elements shared (Lampe et al., 2007), and even social capital derived from the channel (Sias & Duncan, in press; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008). Further, social media engagement with coworkers has been linked to higher job satisfaction (Robertson & Kee, 2017), and interaction with one's organization's Facebook page increased identification (Sias, 2017; Sias & Duncan, in press). Thus, organizational research suggests social media use relates to organizational outcomes. To compliment these findings, research demonstrates a connection between social media use and disclosure of additional information in one's profile (Bronstein, 2014; Lampe et al., 2007). As such, heavier users of social media should be more likely to complete information in their profile, like one's organizational affiliation. Since the structurational model of identification (Scott et al., 1998) predicts that acts of identification-sharing mutually affect feelings of identification, we predict:

*H2: Social media use is positively related to (a) sharing one's organizational affiliation on social media and (b) organizational identification.*

***Organizational Commitment.*** Organizational commitment refers to an individual's investment in an organization, characterized by: (1) strong acceptance of and belief in the organization's goals, (2) willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization, and (3) a desire to maintain membership in the organization (Riketta, 2005). Derived in part from job

characteristics and work experiences, and their congruency with an individual's own characteristics (Steers, 1977), organizational commitment has been recognized as a powerful force in influencing how an individual perceives, interacts, and acts on behalf of the organization. Recently, Walden and Kingley-Westerman (2018) found that strong organizational commitment can prompt employees to take steps to support the organization, such as advocating on its behalf or providing positive word-of-mouth (see also, van Zoonen et al., 2018). Therefore, we hypothesize:

*H3: Organizational commitment is positively related to (a) sharing one's organizational affiliation on social media and (b) organizational identification.*

**Turnover intention.** An individual's intentions to maintain membership in an organization (Chatman, 1991) may influence whether she/he publicly articulates organizational affiliation in social media. Such a relationship is suggested by analogic processes offline. Organizational members may not want to publicly articulate an organization they intend to soon exit as a means of psychological or social distancing. Considering board of director members Withers et al. (2012) posited that, when facing an organizational crisis, members engage multiple response strategies, particularly based on whether the crisis was perceived to be caused by internal or external factors. When faced with internal crises, board members were theorized to employ several strategies to repair their identities and self-view, including disengaging from the organization. Similar disengagement strategies have been noted when managers begin to consider organizational exit or job transitions (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000; Wang & Pratt, 2008). Within the present work, this organizational disengagement and disentanglement tied to considering organizational exit may manifest as a decreased desire to publicly identify and articulate one's organizational affiliation. This guides our next hypothesis:

*H4: Turnover intentions are negatively related to (a) sharing one's organizational affiliation on social media and (b) organizational identification.*

**Organizational Prestige.** People are often concerned with public perceptions of those to whom they are tied (Jones & Volpe, 2011). Evidence suggests that one's willingness to share publicly is directly related to the type of work and perceived external prestige of the organization (Smidts, Pryun, & van Riel, 2001). Smidts et al. contend that "employees eagerly identify with organizations that they believe are positively evaluated by outsiders" (p. 1058). Social identities are sensitive to the distinctiveness and prestige of identification targets (Jones & Volpe, 2011). In public social media profiles, it stands to reason when an employee feels their workplace is perceived positively by society, they will self-present by associating with the company. Thus, we predict:

*H5: Perceived organizational prestige is positively related to (a) sharing one's organizational affiliation on social media and (b) organizational identification.*

### **Relative Influence**

The hypothesized relationships (see Figure 1) suggest multiple identity structures influence one's propensity to indicate organizational affiliation on social media. Though the antecedents we report above were prompted by research, the relative influence of each on one's willingness to disclose their workplace online has yet to be explored. Given the several antecedents proposed and explored (see Figure 1), it is of interest to consider the relative influence of these forces. Particularly should several of these antecedents contribute to one's behaviors in social media and feelings of organizational identification. It is important to consider their respective contributions on the outcomes of structural identification. Thus, we pose an exploratory question:

*RQ1: Which factor(s) is/are the strongest predictor(s) of sharing one's organizational affiliation on social media?*

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

## Method

### Respondents

Respondents were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) as part of a larger project. Participants were at least 18 years of age, lived in the United States, were employed full-time (i.e., 31+ hours per week in a job other than MTurk), and had been employed at the same organization for at least six months. MTurk is an effective data-collection tool for survey research of general human phenomena (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011), such as the focus of the present work. MTurkers represent a more diverse and generalizable population than typical college student convenience samples (Sheehan, 2018), which was particularly important for this study given the need to examine individuals in established careers.

Respondents' ( $N = 303$ ) ages ranged from 20 to 72 ( $M = 34.76$ ,  $SD = 9.02$ ; U.S. median age: 38.2), and males ( $n_{\text{male}} = 185$ , 61.10%) were slightly overrepresented,  $\chi^2(1) = 14.33$ ,  $p < .001$ . All fifty states were represented in respondents' residency. Respondents reported employment in various North American Industry Classification System industries, with the four most frequently reported including information technology ( $n = 77$ , 25%); retail ( $n = 38$ , 13%); finance, insurance, and real estate services ( $n = 32$ , 11%); and manufacturing ( $n = 32$ , 11%). For completing the online survey, respondents were compensated US\$2.00.

**Survey process.** After screening questions, respondents were directed to an informed consent and complete measures about social media use and whether they shared organizational affiliations across social media (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, and Instagram). Relevant survey scales were presented in a random order. To ensure quality data, we included (a)

a CAPTCHA item, (b) directed response questions (e.g., “Sometimes people do not pay attention, select I am to show you are.”), and (c) open-ended questions about the workplace (reported elsewhere). Participants who missed more than half of attention checks, provided nonsense responses to open-ended questions, sped through the survey (i.e., < 6 minutes), or took the survey a second time were removed ( $n = 39$ ).

## Measures

### Study variables.

**Sharing organizational affiliation.** We chose to explore how participants share organizational affiliations across platforms rather than emphasizing a specific social medium at a particular point in time (Rains & Brunner, 2015). Respondents were asked to identify the social media platforms on which they identified their organizational affiliation in their user profile, using the five frequently used platforms with profiles at the time the survey (Smith & Anderson, 2018) was conducted: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, and Instagram. Affirmative responses were then summed to create a latent construct of sharing organizational affiliation on social media, Kuder-Richardson (KR-20) = .57 (range: 0-5). Respondents shared their employer on an average of 1.08 ( $SD = 1.16$ , median = 1) social media. Distribution of the index item were skewed slightly positively (1.23,  $SE = .14$ ) and slightly leptokurtic (1.46,  $SE = .28$ ), indicating respondents did not share their organizational affiliation uniformly, with 37.8% ( $n = 115$ ) of respondents not sharing their organizational affiliation on any social medium. The most common social media on which organizational affiliation was identified were Facebook ( $n = 102$ , 33.6%), Twitter ( $n = 54$ , 17.8%), and LinkedIn ( $n = 20$ , 6.6%).

**Personae overlap.** Fieseler et al. (2014) used a single item to measure personae overlap. To increase validity in our data, we created a *personae overlap* scale based on Fieseler et al.

(2014). Though the scale initially included six-items, four items capturing overlap had high loadings on the latent construct ( $r^2 > 0.43$ ): “My personal and professional social networks are basically the same people,” “The profiles I maintain online are the same for work as they are for my personal life,” “I like to keep my professional and personal social media networks separate online,” and “I don't post different content for my friends and family than I do for my coworkers,” All 7-point Likert-type items were coded such that high values signal greater overlap. The scale was reliable,  $\alpha = .84$ .

***Social media use.*** This study attempts to divorce general social media usage from specific platform use. To this end, we adopted Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright, and Johnson's (2013) scale of social media use integration. The scale measures how social media use is integrated into the daily routines of users. This scale was designed to measure different forms of media use. We used 7-items focused on general social media usage, including: “I feel disconnected when I have not logged on to social media” and “I enjoy checking my social media accounts.” Two items were excluded for duplicating other scale items based on the modification indices. The scale was reliable,  $\alpha = .91$ .

***Commitment.*** *Organizational commitment* was measured using 3-items from Rusbult and Farrell's (1983) commitment scale. We excluded the item: “How likely is it that you will quit this job in the near future,” since we also measured turnover intentions. Scale items include matched questions and anchors on a 7-point differential. A sample item is: “How attached are you to your current job.” The scale was highly reliable,  $\alpha = .95$ .

***Turnover intention.*** Chatman's (1991) 4-item scale was used to measure *turnover intentions*. Respondents rated their agreement, on a 7-point scale, to statements including: “I would prefer a more ideal job than the one I now work in.” and “I have thought seriously about

changing organizations since beginning to work here.” These sample items were allowed to covary based on the modification indices. The scale was reliable,  $\alpha = .93$ .

***Prestige.*** Organizational prestige was measured using Mael and Ashforth’s (1992) scale. The four positively-worded items formed a reliable scale without error covariances. A sample item is: “People in my community think highly of my organization.” The scale was reliable,  $\alpha = .89$ .

***Organizational identification.*** *Organizational identification* was measured using a Mael and Ashforth’s (1992) 6-item scale. These sample items were allowed to covary given their similar wording: “When someone criticizes my organization it feels like a personal insult” and “If a story in the media criticized my organization, I would feel embarrassed.” Responses were on a 7-point agreement scale. The scale was reliable,  $\alpha = .93$ . Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations of key study variables.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

## Results

### Measurement Model

The R package lavaan 0.6-5 (Rosseel, 2012) was used to compute a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) measurement model and the hypothesized structural equation model (SEM). Prior to conducting the structural model, we also modified individual latent constructs as detailed in the Measures section. We also tested all variables for issues with multicollinearity/singularity using the criteria outlined by Tabachnick and Fidell (2019). Since no issues were present, we proceeded with analysis.

The measurement model, including the error covariances specified in the methods section, yielded an acceptable fit (Brown, 2006; Hu & Bentler, 1999):  $\chi^2 (471) = 915.11, p <$



.001,  $\chi^2/df = 1.94$ , RMSEA = .056, 90% CI[.050, .061], SRMR = .06, CFI = 0.94. Thus, we proceeded to test the SEM, results are presented in Figure 2.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

### Structural Equation Model

To test H1 through H5, we used SEM with ML estimation (Kline, 2015). The specified model had an acceptable fit with no modifications needed, because the relationship are saturated the model fit matches the measure model:  $\chi^2(471) = 915.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.94$ , RMSEA = .056, 90% CI[.050, .061], SRMR = .06, CFI = 0.94. The error covariance between sharing online and organizational identification was specified in line with the structural model of identification and this covariance was significant:  $B = 0.03$ ,  $\beta = 0.16$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p = .045$ .

The structural relationships enable hypothesis testing. Hypothesis 1 predicted *personae overlap* would positively relate to (a) sharing one's workplace on social media and (b) organizational identification. H1a and H1b were supported:  $B_{Share} = 0.02$ ,  $\beta_{Share} = 0.16$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ ,  $p = .034$ ;  $B_{OID} = 0.10$ ,  $\beta_{OID} = 0.13$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p = .005$ . Preferences for personae overlap were positively associated with sharing one's organizational affiliation on social media profiles and organizational identification.

Hypothesis 2 predicted *social media use* would positively relate to (a) sharing affiliations on social media and (b) organizational identification, and was also supported:  $B_{Share} = 0.03$ ,  $\beta_{Share} = 0.20$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ ,  $p = .010$ ;  $B_{OID} = 0.24$ ,  $\beta_{OID} = 0.20$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p < .001$ . Social media use was positively related to both sharing organizational affiliation on social media and higher organizational identification.

The third hypothesis predicted *commitment* would positively relate to (a) sharing on social media and (b) organizational identification, and was not supported,  $B_{Share} = -0.01$ ,  $\beta_{Share} = -$

0.12,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p = .797$ ;  $B_{OID} = 0.39$ ,  $\beta_{OID} = 0.45$ ,  $SE = 0.27$ ,  $p = .158$ . Hypothesis four predicted *turnover intention* would negatively relate to (a) sharing and (b) organizational identification, but was also not supported:  $B_{Share} = -0.00$ ,  $\beta_{Share} = -0.04$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p = .937$ ;  $B_{OID} = -0.02$ ,  $\beta_{OID} = -0.02$ ,  $SE = .31$ ,  $p = .956$ . In this structural model, commitment and turnover intentions were unrelated to the outcomes of structural identification.

Hypothesis five predicted higher *prestige* would be associated with higher levels of (a) sharing organizational affiliation online and (b) organizational identification, and was supported:  $B_{Share} = 0.04$ ,  $\beta_{Share} = 0.23$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p = .039$ ;  $B_{OID} = 0.27$ ,  $\beta_{OID} = 0.20$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $p = .004$ . Thus, both sharing one's organizational affiliation and organizational identification were positively predicted by preferences for personae overlap (H1), social media use (H2), and organizational prestige (H5); however, in the structural framework, these outcomes were unrelated to commitment (H3) or turnover intentions (H4). In all, these antecedents explained 12.5% ( $r^2 = 0.125$ ) of the variance in sharing one's affiliation on social media and 52.8% ( $r^2 = 0.528$ ) of the variance in organizational identification.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

To conserve space, we report alternative model testing in the online Appendix. The results suggest the hypothesized and reported model fits better than alternatives. Thus, the model specified here yields a parsimonious and theoretically appropriate explanation of sharing one's organizational affiliation online.

### **Research Question**

Finally, the research question asked which factor was the strongest predictor of an individual's sharing network affiliation on social media. The SEM revealed three predictors—personae overlap, social media use, and organizational prestige—significantly predicted sharing

organizational affiliation on social media platforms. Fisher- $z$  test were then conducted (Lee & Preacher, 2013) to contrast the relative effect sizes. Results indicated social media use was a significantly larger predictor of sharing one's organizational affiliation than personae overlap,  $z_{\text{personae overlap} \bullet \text{social media use}} = -5.24, p < .001$ ; and that organizational prestige was a significantly larger predictor of sharing one's organizational affiliation than social media use,  $z_{\text{social media use} \bullet \text{prestige}} = 6.068, p < .01$ . Taken together, and in response to the RQ, this suggests that organizational prestige is the strongest influence on publicly affiliating with one's organization on social media.

### Discussion

The causes and consequences of sharing one's workplace information online are underexplored. Following past research, this study explores the "activity-identification link" of the structural model of identification tapping the behavior enacted by social media users (Scott & Stephens, 2009, p. 388). This study shows that sharing a workplace affiliation online and organizational identification are mutually related and are driven by preferences for network integration (i.e., personae overlap), social media use, and organizational prestige. Considering how much people discuss organizational life online (e.g., 36.5% of Tweets are work-related; van Zoonen, Verhoeven, & Vliegenhart, 2016), it is somewhat surprising online workplace affiliations are related to some, but not all, hypothesized variables. However, contrasting the meaningful structural predictors of online disclosures of workplace, against more trivial predictors, provides insight as to *why* people disclosure their organizational memberships online. Further, these findings forward the contention that a structural view of identification is an activity-driven process (Scott et al., 1998). Specifically, these findings reveal how identity is (re)created through online disclosures. Below, we discuss implication of this work on the

complex processes of online organizational identification for individuals, organizations, and theory.

### **Individual Implications**

Identification enables and constrains one's identity. Identification is both the process of claiming attachment to an organization and the product of increasing ones attachment through communication (Scott et al., 1998). Analogically, the persistence of online claims enables and constrains future choice and action. In line with research on commitment and consistency (Cialdini, 1993), public commitments shape individual's actions to be identity-consistent in the future. The mutually influential relationship between declaring an identification by posting on social media and feeling identified with an organization are predicted by the same set of antecedents and covary meaningfully. Sharing one's workplace affiliation online is a claim both about the self and the social environment in which one shares about their organization.

The present findings show that preferences for network personae overlap, social media use, and organizational prestige are all significant predictors of online disclosures of workplace and increased organizational identification. As Scott et al. (1998) contend, "identities not only help define who we are, but also provide us with the necessary resources we need to interact with others" (p. 303). The duality of identity and identification is highlighted by the importance these predictors which signal reflexive self-monitoring (e.g., preferences for network audiences on media, perceived prestige of one's organization), a hallmark of structuration. Expressing one's identity constitutes a duality whereby one's sense of identification with the organization, media use habits, and perceptions of the social environment aid the (re)production of a sense of self, the organization, and the social context. This occurs in the situated online environment, though these

results likely translate across contexts; for example, these cognitive structures might be used to predict the likelihood one would mention their work in any given conversation.

In line with recent research (Fieseler et al., 2015; van Zoonen & Banghart, 2018), one's desire to allow personae overlap was directly related to sharing one's organizational affiliation on social media and organizational identification. This makes sense because as one becomes more identified with a workplace, this facets of their identity across disparate audiences. Although van Zoonen and Bartels (2018) found preferences for overlap had a platform-dependent relationship, our data show an aggregated cross-platform relationship. Despite context collapses of platforms emphasizing both personal and professional contexts (Vitak et al., 2015), organizational identification and acts of sharing this identity are tied to clear cognitive (i.e., personae overlap and perceived prestige) and behavioral (i.e., social media use) antecedents. That organizational prestige was the strongest predictor of sharing organizational affiliation across social media suggests individuals may even use such displays to publicly construct their identities, seeking to enhance their image by tethering it to affiliation with an organization perceived as desirable or positive by nonmembers (see Smidts, et al., 2001). In the continual (re)construction of identity online, individuals find ways to manage colliding personal and professional contexts on social media (e.g., What do I do with this friend-request from my co-worker or boss?).

### **Organizational Implications**

Commitment and turnover intentions, key organizational outcomes, had a non-significant relationship with online workplace disclosures and organizational identification when modeled with other predictors and in light of error covariances in the SEM. It does not appear people use social media to signal strong commitment or intentions to leave the organization, as we

hypothesized. Further, past evidence suggests that commitment may be unrelated to social media use at work (Gonzalez, Leidner, Riemenschneider, & Koch, 2013). Still, we believe future research ought to further explore how public displays relate to signals of stay/leave behavior (see also Lane et al., 2016). Future research may also benefit from focusing on how network composition, rather than preferences for separation of identities, affects networked identity disclosures.

Strong organizational identification can result in many positive outcomes for both the individual and the organization, including reduced turnover intention, greater satisfaction with the organization and one's work (Riketta, 2005), and more positive attitudes (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) and behaviors (Albert et al., 2000) toward and on behalf of the organization. Thus, the process and product of identification are important to organizations. Perhaps the act of publicly sharing one's workplace affiliation can lead to small, but meaningful, changes in other organizational outcomes. Indeed, other behaviors like job performance, positive organizational behaviors, or even counterproductive work behaviors may well be related to acts of identification. We contend organizations and scholars may benefit from taking interest in what employees (don't) share online.

This work reveals some antecedents of the tension between sharing and withholding workplace-related information online (Gibbs et al., 2013). Proclamations of organizational membership online also have implications for the membership negotiation processes that constitute organizing (Scott & Myers, 2010). Social media users are creating boundaries and (implicitly) negotiating organizational membership through these mundane communicative acts. To our surprise, online disclosures of workplace were unrelated to commitment or turnover. Thus, online workplace disclosure seems more personal, driven by media use and preferences,

and social (tied to perceptions of prestige) than based on organizational structures (i.e., how committed the employee is and intent to leave).

Online identity portrayals are linked to organizational identification and the two share the same antecedents. This reinforces a structurational view of identification. Though commitment and identification are highly related (Scott et al., 1998), the duality of identification acts (process and product) represent an abstract identity process. In Scott et al.'s (1998) words, this activity-identity link is why "identities (structures) are both constraining and enabling" (p. 310). These findings reveal the utility of the structurational model of identification and reiterate the importance of identity in the ongoing, updating process of decision, choice, and action in online environments (i.e., sensemaking, Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005).

### **Theoretical Implications**

Finally, in addition to extending Scott et al.'s (1998) structurational model to online identification processes, these findings add to existing computer-mediated communication theory. Findings that acknowledging one's organizational affiliation online is driven by several antecedents, supports and extend warranting theory by tying offline and online attributes (Walther & Parks, 2002). Warranting theory is concerned with the strength of connection between an online claim and offline attributes. These results suggest sharing organizational affiliations online may serve as an effective warrant—and results of the research question suggest prestige is the strongest warrant. Warrants are the self-claim cues that suggest a claimant possesses the characteristics espoused online in the offline context as well. Just as a Facebook relational status can warrant the nature of one's offline romantic relationship (Lane et al., 2016) and profile features can warrant one's relational availability (Gibbs, Ellison, & Lai, 2011), formally acknowledging one's organizational membership is a high warrant cue to the

characteristics that make up organizational membership. Situated online activity, like identifying one's organization, relationship, or any other social categorization (e.g. "Boomer Sooner" to signal identification with the University of Oklahoma) is meaningfully rooted in cognitive structures positioning the self, relative to the target. In collapsed contexts that link corporeal self and network, identity claims are warrants.

In line with recent evidence demonstrating that interacting with one's company's Facebook increases both organizational identification and social capital (Sias, 2017; Sias & Duncan, in press), this study demonstrates that acts of identification online relate to important organizational outcomes. Preferences for network overlap helps drive the choices individuals make to disclose workplaces, affects organizational identification, and, likely affects willingness to interact with online pages managed by the organization (see also Bartels et al., 2019). This identity-network interaction connection is ripe for additional theorization about intra and extra role behaviors on and offline. For instance, do those who interact with their workplace online more actively recruit friends and family to the workplace? Theory would do well to incorporate networks preferences and activity in predicting traditional performance outcomes. Certainly, interaction with team leaders and members online ought to affect leader-member relations.

Ironically, recent evidence demonstrates those who blur personal and professional boundaries on social media are more liked by coworkers, relative to those who segment (Batenburg & Bartels, 2017). Thus, it may be less surprising that preferences for personae overlap has a positive relationship with organizational affiliation disclosures. The more embedded one is in workplace relationships (likely on and offline) the more they are likely to engage in identification acts (i.e., tie signs) and identify with the organization. This is in line with past evidence about tie signs in romantic relationships (Lane et al. 2016) and organizational



identification in email signatures as a signal of one's professionalism (Carr & Stefaniak, 2012). As Ashforth (2016) explains, identification may be likened to courtship and love with an organization. Future research might consider how other identities (e.g., religious, social) relate to more stable personal identifications, or how other cues (e.g., photographic, posted content, reviews) may serve as similar cues to one's professional identity.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

This paper is not without its limitations. First, this model cannot test the causal relationship between the exogenous and endogenous variables (Kline, 2015). However, by grounding our hypotheses in theory, we add to the scholarly understanding of both structural identification and online acts of identification. Further, given the alternative models tested (see Appendix), we have some added confidence that the relationships are appropriately specified. Still, future research would benefit from a longitudinal approach, like that of Stephens and Dailey (2012), to understanding the complex identity-identification phenomenon online.

Second, we strategically chose to examine social media use broadly (i.e., not delineating between Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn). This choice reveals broad use patterns and conceals site-specific uses. As we note in the introduction, social media share common features: opportunities to selectively self-present, interact with diverse audiences, and give and gain insights from user-generated content through interaction with others (Carr & Hayes, 2015); but do differ in specific layouts, functionality, and user bases. Indeed, past research has differentiated identification across platforms (e.g. van Zoonen & Bartels, 2018). At the same time, this choice allows this study to focus on sharing organizational affiliations online in general. Future studies may benefit from investigating identification processes as a function of medium or as a generalized process.

Perhaps this generalization explains the way our predicted relationships manifest in the data. We relied on research based on specific platforms, but tested relationships across platforms. We consider this a strength; but specification of this generalist or platform-driven assumptions may matter.

Next, this study chose structures based on existing literature and used the structural model of identification to guide hypothesis development. Though the correlations between organizational identification and both commitment and turnover are quite high, these relationships are not significant in light of the antecedents identified by existing literatures and the covariances between identification and identity (see Riketta [2005] and the Appendix). This adds confidence that our model captures the potential antecedents of online disclosure and organizational identification well, with the caveat that when considered in concert commitment and turnover are less valuable than other predictors of the identity-structuration process. Instead, our results show prestige is the strongest predictor of online disclosure. Further, given the findings that preferences for network segmentation or personae overlap affect identity process, future research connecting social network composition (i.e., whole network analysis) and identification processes is warranted (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002).

Finally, research on identification often contend varied sources, targets, or nestings of identification matter (e.g., Bartels et al., 2019; Scott et al., 1998; van Zoonen et al., 2018). Though this paper empirically examines the dualistic internal and external identity, it does not fulfill the entire call of the structural view of identity. Specifically, this study focuses on a single source of identity (organization) while ignoring other potentially important identities: familial, personal, religious, occupation, team, etc. Future research would benefit from extending these findings across the “multiple identities of which individuals and collectives are composed”

(Kuhn & Nelson, 2002, p. 8). Bartels et al. (2019) note that workgroup identification may supersede broader organizational identification. Future research ought to investigate varied levels of identification, including whether noting one's affiliation is an artifact of identifying with the superordinate industries (retail), companies (Target corporation), or the individual's specific work location or workgroup.

### **Conclusion**

Social media increasingly give users opportunities to affiliate, not just with other users but also with groups and organizations. The present work identified three structures significantly predicting an employee's likelihood of identifying her/his employer across social media channels which also promoted increased organizational identification: personae overlap, social media use, and organizational prestige. Sharing one's affiliation with organizations and workplaces via social media is still underexplored, but shares similar predictors and covaries with traditional measures of organizational identification. In turn, this structured identification, both in terms of feeling identified and in acts of sharing one's organizational affiliation, has immediate and significant consequences for both organizations and organizational members. Some employers may feel threatened or perceive an employee is disengaged and about to leave if not formally acknowledging the organizational affiliation on social media; whereas, other employers may actively dissuade employees from affiliating online lest a personal statement be taken as an organizationally-sanctioned claim. This evidence suggests employees who do not list their employer are not doing so because of a lack of commitment or exit intentions. These results suggest individuals share workplaces online as attempts to strategically manage their own online identities, particularly amid environments that collapse previously-disparate social groups.

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Table 1. Descriptives and bivariate correlations of study variables.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Share Organizational Affiliation on Social Media	1.07	1.15	-						
2. Organizational Identification	4.24	1.57	.25‡	-					
3. Personae Overlap	4.02	1.58	.16†	.22‡	-				
4. Social Media Use	4.51	1.35	.27‡	.31‡	.12*	-			
5. Organizational Commitment	4.59	1.67	.14*	.56‡	.16†	.14*	-		
6. Turnover Intention	3.69	1.79	-.09	-.58‡	-.21‡	-.11	-.83‡	-	
8. Organizational Prestige	4.69	1.28	.26‡	.51‡	.16†	.16†	.61‡	-.60‡	-

Notes:  $N = 304$ , \* $p < .05$ , † $p < .01$ , ‡ $p < .001$ , all variables on 7-point scales except sharing organizational affiliation (a count variable).

Figure 1: Hypothesized Relationships

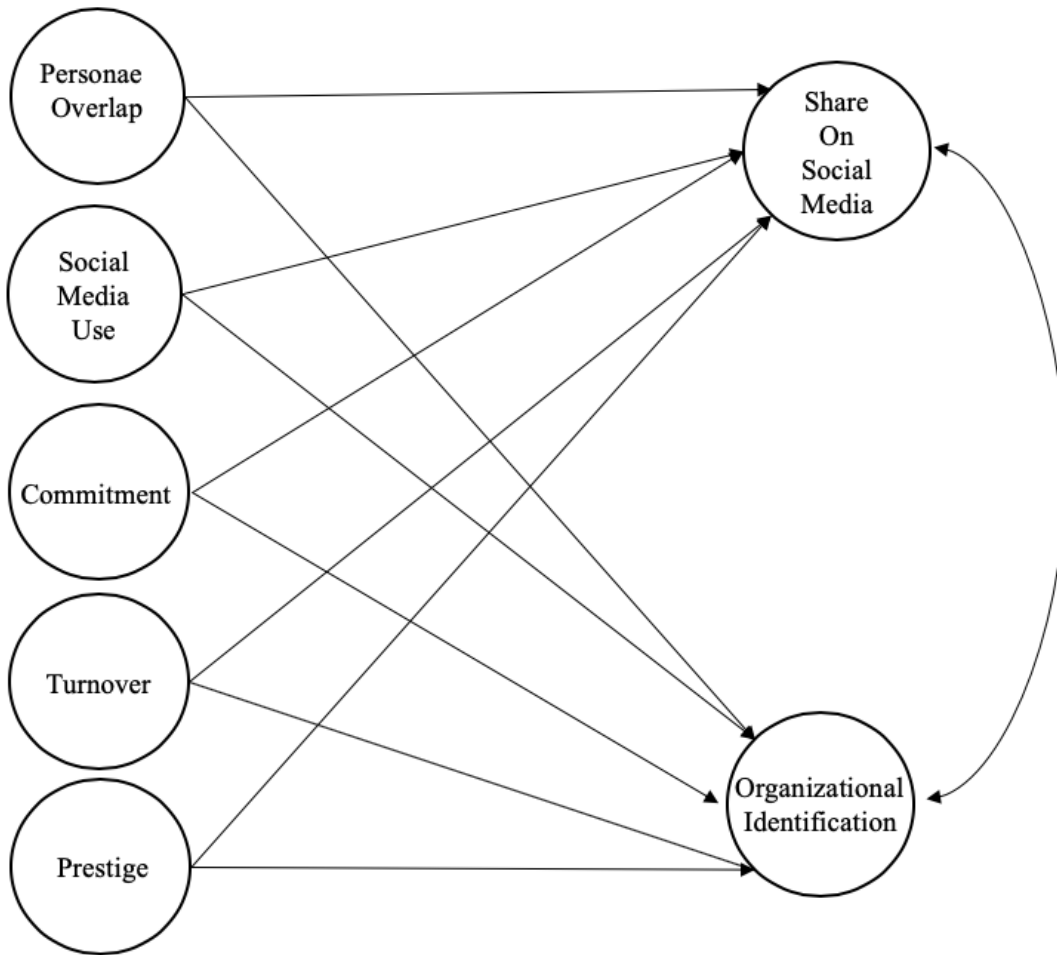
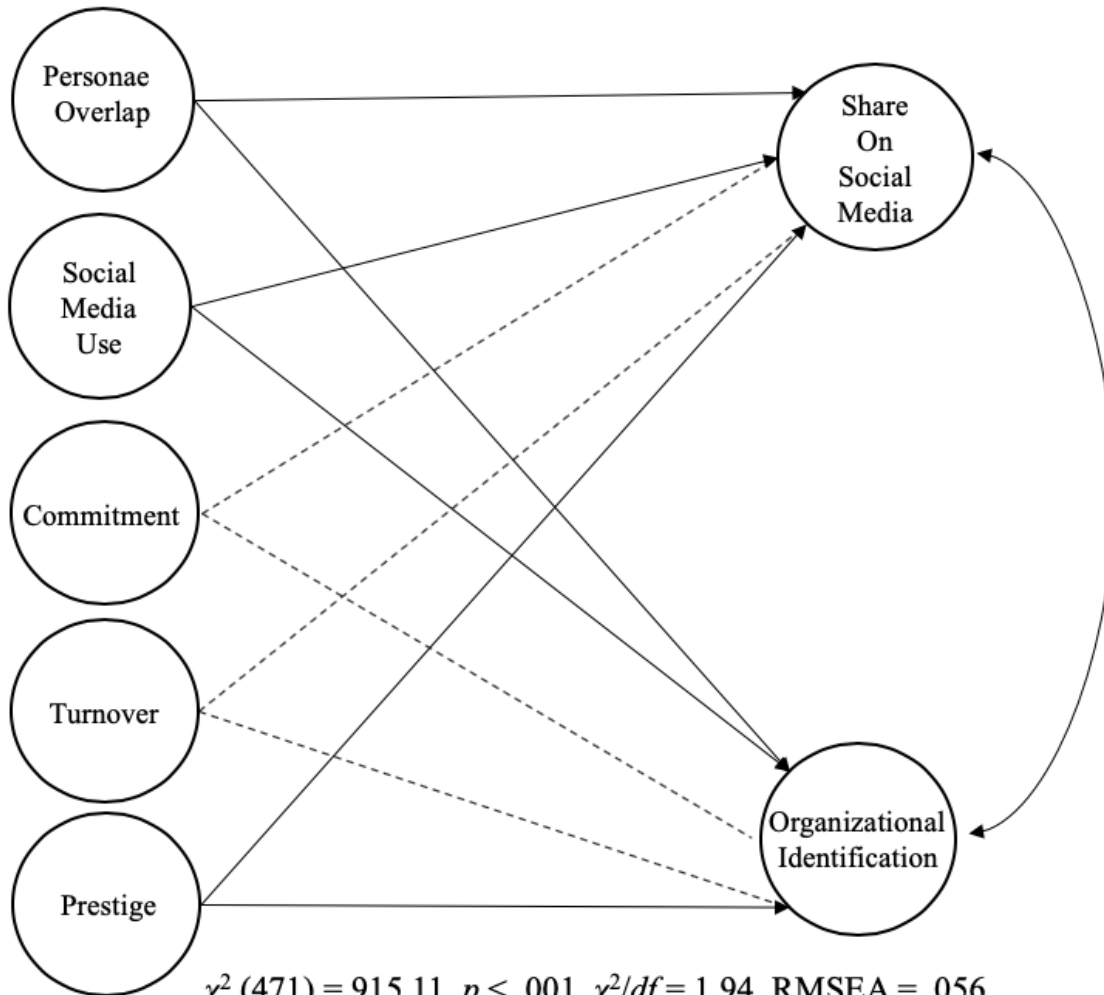


Figure 2: Structural Equation Model



$\chi^2 (471) = 915.11, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 1.94, RMSEA = .056,$   
 $90\% CI [.050, .061], SRMR = .06, CFI = 0.94,$   
 $AIC: 27,944, BIC: 27,993$