THE UNPROFESSIONAL SIDES OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL NETWORKING:
HOW CURRENT STANDARDS FALL SHORT

INTRODUCTION

Facebook. Twitter. Google Chat. Above the Law. We are the information-sharing generation. Social media and social networking are constant and ubiquitous.¹ The legal community has certainly not escaped this phenomenon. The Judicial Conference of the United States has characterized the “explosion in social media [and] social networking” as “[t]he latest chapter in the evolution of online activities.”² A 2010 ABA survey revealed that fifty-six percent of attorneys belong to at least one online social network.³ However, the practice of law seems at odds with this information-sharing revolution. Lawyers are ethically obligated to guard and to filter the information provided to them. They are bound by duties of confidence and discretion. As a matter of decorum, a lawyer is expected to be thoughtful, reserved, and circumspect—

anything but information-impulsive. Given these tensions, the legal community faces a unique challenge to understand the relationship between professionalism and social networking.

Though the issue has received some attention in bar journals and practice institutes, the legal scholarship has yet to consider in depth the professional implications of social media and networking. The professionalism aspects of the challenge—which are separate and distinct from its ethical aspects—have been largely overlooked. The legal community would be well served by a dialogue on this topic that addresses how our norms of professionalism have changed, or have failed to change, in light of social media and networking. This Essay hopes to begin and to advance that conversation.

In the Essay, I argue that the trend among young lawyers to share and share alike on the Internet requires the profession to revisit its standards of professionalism in light of the social media phenomenon. In so doing, it should consider not only how to regulate social networking

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4 Others have discussed the ethics of social networking. See, e.g., Steven C. Bennett, Ethics of Lawyer Social Networking, 73 ALB. L. REV. 113 (2009); Angela O’Brien, Comment, Are Attorneys and Judges One, Tweet, Blog or Friend Request Away from Facing A Disciplinary Committee?, 11 LOY. J. PUB. INT. L. 511 (2010). The focus of this Essay is professionalism and I discuss the rules of ethics only to the extent that they bear on our standards of professionalism and shed light on how those standards might adapt to social media and networking.

and media but also how to reshape professional norms. The Essay contains three Parts. Part I discusses the distinction between professionalism and ethics and explains how social media relates specifically to professionalism. Part II defines the professionalism-related problems with social media. It provides a concrete framework for thinking about the professionalism pitfalls of these online technologies, explaining four types of unprofessional conduct that arise from social media and networking. The framework illustrates how existing rules, standards, and analogies that could be said to apply are inadequate to regulate social media use, as it affects professionalism specifically. Part III argues that more regulation is needed because the current rules and norms fall short, with sweeping implications for the social and economic health of the legal community. It then suggests a more unified approach to regulating social media use through the implementation of a Model Rule of Professional Conduct and argues that, in addition to rule-making, it is also important to establish professional norms regarding social media and networking.

I. THE INTERSECTION OF PROFESSIONALISM AND SOCIAL MEDIA

‘Professionalism,’ as distinct from ethics, is usually couched in terms of civility—issues of etiquette, demeanor, and conduct. Many of the recent conversations about professionalism have focused on the so-called decline in lawyerly civility, as it has been a topic of much concern by the bar and bench. Much of the literature on professionalism discusses four types of such incivility: overzealousness, discovery abuse, threats and insults, and bad faith litigation.

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6 Though I sometimes refer only to “social media” or “social networking” in the remainder of this Essay, for ease of reference, I generally use the terms interchangeably.

7 In general, there is much written “about the collapsing image of the legal profession.” James A. George, The “Rambo” Problem: Is Mandatory CLE The Way Back to Atticus?, 62 LA. L. REV. 467, 483-84 (2002) (citing examples, other scholarship, and ABA studies); see also Joseph J. Ortego & Lindsay Maleson, Under Attack: Professionalism in the Practice of Law, NIXON PEABODY (Mar. 20, 2003),
However, “[a]lthough fairness and good manners are certainly part of professionalism, the notion of professionalism is a much broader concept.” This Part first explains why other types of putatively unprofessional conduct, such as social networking, have been overlooked, steering the professionalism conversation in a different direction.

A) Professionalism and Ethics: Is Professional Optional?

What does it mean to be professional? Dean Roscoe Pound of Harvard once characterized a “profession” as “pursuing a learned art as a common calling in the spirit of public service.” Professionalism—the conduct that characterizes a professional—“refers to a related set of values, ideas, and attitudes shared by a group of professionals that distinguishes the group from other professionals as well as lay persons.” In the legal field, one scholar described “[l]egal professionalism as a subject of inquiry focuse[d] on the inculcation of lawyering norms and values, as well as the shaping of lawyer behavior.” Our collective understanding of lawyerly professionalism includes certain general features, such as competency, etiquette, altruism, and “respect for the justice system and its participants.”

http://www.nixonpeabody.com/publications_detail3.asp?ID=303#ref15 (discussing examples of incivility). Bills gives as examples of unprofessional or uncivil behavior “foul and profane language, . . . dilatory or ‘Rambo’ tactics, name calling, and other belligerent behavior.” Bronson D. Bills, To Be or Not To Be: Civility and the Young Lawyer, 5 Conn. Pub. Int. L. J. 31, 32 (2005). He notes “[o]ther uncivil conduct includes sarcastic or terse questions by counsel or the judge; head shaking and pained facial expressions during opposing counsel’s arguments; hardball, slash and burn tactics; and sarcastic, vituperative, scurrilous, or other disparaging remarks.” Id. at n.4.

8 George, supra note 7, at 472 (quoting Frank X. Neuner, Jr. Professionalism: Charting a Different Course for the New Millennium, 73 Tul. L. Rev. 2041, 2043 (1999)).
11 Mark Neal Aaronson, Be Just to One Another: Preliminary Thoughts on Civility, Moral Character, and Professionalism, 8 St. Thomas L. Rev. 113, 116 (1995).
are for the benefit of the public and clients, to gain and maintain their trust. Comporting ourselves professionally also benefits the profession at large, as it fosters respect and trust among colleagues and sustains commitment to self-regulation and continuing legal education.

These are all lofty ideals, but they are ephemeral. As the President of the Louisiana State Bar Association once noted, “[t]he basic problem is in the use of the term ‘professionalism’[;] . . . no standard definition is available.” This is a common criticism leveled against the concept of professionalism. The elusive quality of professionalism stands in contrast to our ethical obligations, which are codified in rules of professional conduct and fleshed out by disciplinary and advisory opinions by local bars, courts, and the American Bar Association (“ABA”). If legal ethics is the black and white of law governing lawyers, professionalism is the grey. The ephemeral quality of professionalism makes it more difficult to sustain attention on the various types of conduct that might be unprofessional as distinct from unethical.

The aspirational quality of professionalism compounds this problem. As compared to the rules of ethics, professionalism, as it is often described, seems like an ethical ‘bonus’—do the best you can. As one leading commentator on professionalism discussed the difference between professionalism and ethics, “rules of ethics tell us what we must do and professionalism teaches us what we should do . . . . [P]rofessionalism can be described as living by the ‘Golden Rule.’” Views from the bench reinforce the aspirational quality of professionalism. For example, Justice

13 See Montgomery, supra, at 330.
14 See id. (noting self-regulation as one defining features of the profession, “that is organized in such a way as to assure the public and the courts that its members are competent, to not violate the client’s trust and transcend their own self interest”).
15 George, supra note 7, at 472-73.
16 See, e.g., Wendel, supra note 12, at 560.
17 George, supra note 7, at 472.
Benham of the Georgia Supreme Court has stated that “ethics is that which is required and professionalism is that which is expected.”\(^{18}\) In similar spirit, the preamble to the civility code for the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals caveats that its “standards shall not be used as a basis for litigation or for sanctions or penalties.”\(^{19}\) Rather, they “serve as a valuable teaching and discussion guide.”\(^{20}\) Indeed, of those jurisdictions that have adopted professionalism codes apart from their ethical codes, many have made them largely aspirational in nature.\(^{21}\)

Given these qualities, the formal risks of noncompliance are basically nonexistent, barring truly egregious conduct that also rises to the level of an ethical breach. As Aaronson recognizes,

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\text{[c]ompliance with the new civility codes . . . is likely to be fairly problematic. The facial incentives to conform are especially weak—much weaker, for example, than those regarding conventional legal ethics or the disciplinary ambit of Rule 11 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. Unlike these now standard measures for regulating attorney behavior, civility codes are not necessarily intended to be formally enforced.}^{22}
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Consequently, the motivation to revise the definition of unprofessionalism, and consider what other types of attorney conduct might fall under its heading, is relatively low.

\(^{19}\) Aaronson, \textit{supra} note 11, at 115.
\(^{20}\) \textit{Id.}
\(^{21}\) \textit{See} Revson v. Cinque & Cinque, 70 F. Supp. 2d 415, 434, 435 (S.D.N.Y. 1999) (noting that “[a] number of ‘civility’ codes have been adopted [which] are aspirational in nature”). Though some might question “what’s in a name,” others may find it illustrative that the D.C. Bar’s promulgated code is entitled \textit{Voluntary Standards of Civility in Professional Conduct}, see http://www.dcbar.org/for_lawyers/ethics/legal_ethics/voluntary_standards_for_civility/index.cfm (last visited May 21, 2011); the Florida Bar has published \textit{Ideals and Goals of Professionalism}, see http://www.floridabar.org/tfb/TFBProfess.nsf/5d2a29f983dc81ef85256709006a486a/deafda73c03233e985256b2f006ecd5e?OpenDocument (last visited May 21, 2011); and Georgia’s civility code is called \textit{A lawyer’s Creed and Aspirational Statement on Professionalism}, see http://www.gabar.org/related_organizations/chief_justices_commission_on_professionalism/lawyers_creed (last visited May 21, 2011).
\(^{22}\) Aaronson, \textit{supra} note 11, at 113.
Similarly, there is little incentive to teach and learn professionalism as a subject apart from ethics and, as a result, professionalism is underemphasized in law school curricula.\(^\text{23}\) A recent survey of law school courses on professionalism suggests that many focus on ethical issues; few exclusively treat the softer notions of conduct, decorum, and etiquette.\(^\text{24}\) Deborah Rhode has noted that the move in most states to adopt the multistate professional responsibility exam has prompted law schools to concentrate on objective rules and multiple choice testing.\(^\text{25}\) “[I]n many institutions,” she writes, “professional responsibility has found its identity as a course in statutory analysis of ABA codes.”\(^\text{26}\) Thus, young lawyers, in law school and in preparing for the bar examination, learn their ethical obligations as mostly tied to concrete rules. These ethical obligations deal with, among others, the duties to maintain client confidences and to be candid with the court, and to avoid conflicts of interest and the comingling of funds.\(^\text{27}\) However, these rules do not account for a broad swath of conduct that likely fits within the rubric of professionalism but, because of the disincentives discussed above, is neglected.

For all of these reasons, the professionalism implications of a major new trend in attorney conduct—social media use and networking—have been slow to percolate through the legal field. Though there has been some attention dedicated to the ethical concerns associated with social media, there has been no discussion of related conduct that might not rise to the level of ethical


\(^\text{24}\) See generally ABA Standing Comm. on Professionalism, Report on a Survey of Law School Professionalism Programs (2006) [hereinafter ABA Survey] (detailing the various professionalism courses at surveyed law schools). Of the forty-one schools surveyed, ninety-three percent of schools’ mandatory ethics course covered more than just the basic rules including, “philosophical foundation of our legal system”; “natural law”; and “faith based values.” Id. at 69-70.


\(^\text{26}\) Id.

\(^\text{27}\) Model Rules of Prof’l Conduct RR. 1.6, 3.3, 1.8-.11, 1.5 (2010).
breach but is, nonetheless, unprofessional.28 But the story is not all bad. Professionalism is a capacious concept and, as such, flexible enough to expand to address conduct that escapes the strictures of the ethical rules. The balance of this Essay demonstrates how social media and networking, a new and rapidly evolving type of attorney conduct, falls squarely within professionalism’s bailiwick. To that end, the next Section provides a brief overview of social media and social networking and places it in the context of professionalism.

B) The Unprofessional Side of Social Media

As noted earlier, the types of unprofessionalism most frequently addressed are those related to litigation, such as the mistreatment or disrespect of opposing counsel or the court. Though certainly troubling, the number of attorneys who behave in this fashion is probably low. In contrast, there is now one type of conduct that over half the profession engages in, which has the potential to be unprofessional in several respects: social media and social networking.

1. Social Media Primer

Social media, also sometimes referred to as “Web 2.0,” is “the second generation of web design and software development, which places heavy emphasis on communication, collaboration, and sharing among Internet users.”29 “Social networks,” which are one form of social media “are Internet-based meeting places where users with similar interests and backgrounds can communicate with each other.”30 Users create profile pages with personal information and make connections with other users, which allow the sharing of the profile information as well as the ability to comment or “post” on the information on another person’s

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28 See supra note 5.
29 United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island Social Media Policy/Guidelines, quoted in JUDICIAL CONFERENCE, RESOURCE PACKET, supra note 2, at 27.
As Ted Ullyot, General Counsel of Facebook phrased it, social networking is all about “sharing” and “connecting.”

Facebook is probably the best known example of social networking, and it is the leading social networking site. Facebook users make connections called “friends” with whom they share photos, videos, messages, weblinks, and news stories. Users can post comments on the content of their friends’ postings (or uploads) and can also express a preference, or “like” (denoted with a “thumbs up” symbol), certain postings, organizations, or stories. MySpace is another social networking site that also allows users to create profiles and add content. LinkedIn is a social networking site dedicated to developing professional connections. Users form a list of contacts, and any one user’s contacts can form connections with the user’s other connections, and so on and so forth. Lastly, Google Mail’s (“Gmail”) chat feature (“Gchat”), which is used to chat with friends and co-workers throughout the workday, is also a means of social networking.

Blogging, a type of social media, is popular in the legal community. One commentator described a blog as “an entry of commentary, description of an event or events, web link, graphics, or video posted on a website.” Law blogs tend to comment on legal news and scholarly developments, or other relevant events in the legal world. Similar to social network sites, readers can leave comments in response to blogged posts. Of particular interest to this Essay is the social media site, Above the Law, which is part “legal tabloid” and part blog. Most in the legal profession understand it to be the repository of legal gossip, ranging from risqué

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31 Theodore W. Ullyot, General Counsel of Facebook, offered this characterization during a panel discussion at the Third Circuit Judicial Conference, on May 5, 2011.
32 Id.
34 Id.
stories about associates, summer associates, partners, and law firms, to pay scales and the latest Supreme Court clerk hires. As will be seen, some attorneys have these too. Twitter is also in the blog family. Twitter allows subscribers to “micro-blog” short, 140-character messages called “tweets” that are blasted out to all of the users’ “followers.” Interestingly, most Twitter activities occur during prime business hours of 11 a.m. and 3 p.m.

Finally, YouTube is a social media site that supports video sharing. Users upload videos that can be searched and shared. There are many YouTube clips created by law students, mocking or joking about some aspect of their legal education.

Social media is ubiquitous. Facebook has over 600 million users. It is also time-consuming. The average Facebook user spends seven hours a month on that site. Zelizer provides some other interesting statistics: “three out of four Americans use social media; (2) two thirds of the global Internet population visit social networks; and (3) visiting social media sites is now the fourth most popular online activity—ahead of personal email.” Attorneys are no exception. According to a 2009 survey by Leader Networks,

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35 I note that there is a wide variety of legal blogs that discuss substantive legal developments. As those do not appear to implicate professionalism in the same way that an attorney’s personal blog or Above the Law does, I do not discuss them.
36 Zelizer, supra note 33, at 53.
37 Id.
38 JUDICIAL CONFERENCE, RESOURCE PACKET, supra note 2, at 12.
41 Id.
42 Zelizer, supra note 33, at 53-54.
approximately three-quarters of attorneys reported that they are members of a social network such as MySpace, Facebook, or LinkedIn. Over a third of attorneys surveyed read and comment on articles, blogs, and other online content. Of those engaged in these online social networking activities, three-quarters do so on at least a weekly basis.\footnote{O’Brien, supra note 4, at n.2}

In 2011, one imagines that these numbers have only increased given Facebook’s tremendous growth.\footnote{Facebook’s Growth Exceeds Expectations—WSJ, REUTERS, May 1, 2011, http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/05/02/facebook-wsj-idUSN0117780720110502 (noting that as of May 2011 Facebook was on track for a $100 billion valuation when it goes public in 2012).}

2. Social Networking at Work

Though social media use and networking smacks of personal playtime, most do not draw the line at work. Some have observed that

[m]ost employees don’t think they are doing anything wrong when they access social media websites at work. Rather, they consider it a use of their break time or simply a quick way to update a friend or significant other about real life commitments without the need to pick up the phone.\footnote{Zelizer, supra note 33, at 54.}

As evidence of that sentiment, “15% of all social media updates in the workplace come from employer-provided Blackberries or similar mobile devices.”\footnote{Id. at 53.}

There is some anecdotal evidence of employees speaking inappropriately about their jobs. One article, entitled Twitter Gets You Fired in 140 Characters or Less described a tweet by a Cisco new hire: “Cisco just offered me a job! Now I have to weigh the utility of a fatty paycheck against the daily commute to San Jose and hating the work.” The tweet prompted a response tweet from one of the company’s channel partner advocates, remarking, “Who is the hiring manager. I’m sure they would love to know that you will hate the work. We here at Cisco...
are versed in the web.”\textsuperscript{47} The author of that article wryly concluded, “thanks to Twitter further eroding the wall between your big mouth and a moment required to download some good sense, the Internet is now empowered to get you fired faster than ever.”\textsuperscript{48} In another news story, a stadium operator for the Philadelphia Eagles was so upset that the team let a player sign with another team that he posted on his Facebook page: “Dan is [expletive] devastated about Dawkins signing with Denver . . . Dam[n] Eagles R Retar[d]ed!!”\textsuperscript{49} He was fired. Lawyers have also been known to cross the line. Take the Florida lawyer, for instance, who was sanctioned by the State Supreme Court for calling a judge before whom he had appeared an “evil, unfair witch” in his personal blog.\textsuperscript{50}

The penchant to share and connect is driven by the youngest generation of lawyers’ reduced notions of privacy, particularly on the web. As one commentator notes, “some lawyers (just like people) are willing to share the most amazingly intimate details of their lives on Facebook and other social media.”\textsuperscript{51} The propensity to ‘let loose’ online is reinforced by the sense of anonymity that comes with online sharing and the misperception that one’s online conduct is above reproach. It is “[d]ue to perceived anonymity, [that] an employee may engage in conduct online that the employee might refrain from in person, without understanding that

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Id.}
online communications may be traced to a particular user.”52 Not only does this sense of anonymity or distance encourage indiscretion, it has also created a “breeding ground for rudeness” in social media.53 In sum, because these sites allow for the frequent and voluminous sharing of information with a user’s wide audience, social media both instigates inappropriate comments and serves as a conduit of these comments that might not otherwise have been made at all.54 Thus, social media, though useful and entertaining in many ways, poses real dangers to professionalism in the legal field.

Section I.A suggested that the legal profession should devote more energy toward determining how social media and networking fits within the professionalism milieu. This Section made the case for that prescription by explaining how social networking has become a significant part of young lawyers’ personal and professional lives. Taken together, one senses the gaping hole in professionalism standards that has left young lawyers to pursue their social networking endeavors at work just as they would at home. The next Part argues that the best approach to addressing this issue is to depart from the traditional standards of professionalism—those applied to the typical bad-mannered-litigator case—and develop new standards of professionalism that apply specifically to the social media context. I offer a four-part framework for thinking about what these standards should be.

52 JUDICIAL CONFERENCE, RESOURCE PACKET, supra note 2, at 6; see also Cari Pixler & Lori A. Higuera, Social Media: Ethical Challenges Create Need for Law Firm Policies, 47-Apr. ARIZ. ATT’Y 35, 36 (2011) (noting that, “[b]ecause of the impersonal nature of social media, people are more willing to share intimate life details about themselves with others online, to a greater extent than they would share in a face-to-face encounter”).
54 One author has described the “hallmarks of social networking” as “permanence, searchability, replicability, and unintended audiences.” Vinson, supra note 5, at 369.
II. DEFINING THE PROBLEM: A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING HOW AND WHEN SOCIAL MEDIA IS UNPROFESSIONAL

As mentioned above, the social media and network phenomena are fueled by individuals’ desire to share and connect. This Part suggests that there are four ways in which attorney sharing and connecting via social media implicates their professionalism. Though I refer to the “firm” I also include within the term, or sometimes refer separately to, judicial “chambers,” as one major focus of my Essay is young attorneys—associates and law clerks. In each area, I demonstrate how there is a considerable range of social media/networking conduct that is left unaddressed by existing rules of ethics or traditional thinking on professionalism but which should be circumscribed by more targeted standards of professionalism. Specifically, I provide examples of putatively unprofessional social media use, discuss analogies to existing rules, norms, or real-world examples, and highlight the gap between them.

A) Intrafirm Professionalism (The Duty of Loyalty Online)

The first area of professionalism implicated by attorney social media use deals with the standard of decorum that attorneys owe to their law firms and law clerks to their judicial chambers. Social networking and media use has introduced a variety of ways in which young lawyers can violate those organizations’ trust—that is, the trust that lawyers will not air their proprietary information or ‘dirty laundry.’ Here, when speaking about the type of respect one owes to an organization (firm or chambers) there are few close analogues in the ethical rules and professional codes. Thus, the gap between our current thinking on professionalism and lawyerly conduct seems widest in this area, and so I address it first.

Law firms and judges have certain types of information that, though perhaps not confidential per se, is information that they expect to be kept in-house. Of course, the amount of information a law firm considers private will vary depending on the culture of the firm, but a few
examples might include pay scale and bonus data, embarrassing interoffice e-mails, or interoffice memoranda discussing firm policy. Private firm information that is blogged about on *Above the Law* is perhaps the most troubling example. That site posts information about associate bonuses\(^55\) and salaries.\(^56\) Though sharers of this information would argue that these posts increase transparency and improve the free market of young associate labor, that is not a satisfying response to a professionalism complaint; at most, it suggests a need to weigh the good of social networking against the bad when fine-tuning the appropriate standard. Aside from financial information, *Above the Law* also exposes law firms’ snafus. The site has an entire thread dedicated to “Email Scandals,”\(^57\) and each summer there are inevitably a few posts about summer associates’ inappropriate (and sometimes humiliating) behavior.\(^58\) The potential for reputational harm to the firm from such sharing is obvious.

There is less sharing on *Above the Law* about inner-chambers workings. The difference might be normative. Canon 3 of the Judicial Employee Code instructs law clerks to “adhere to appropriate standards in performing the duties of office,”\(^59\) which arguably includes discretion. There is also an informal taboo against speaking about chambers-related issues. Breaking this taboo has met with some criticism, especially when revealing information about the Supreme


\(^{59}\) JUDICIAL CONFERENCE, RESOURCE PACKET, *supra* note 2, at 15.
Court’s inner sanctum.\(^{60}\) It is unclear, though, whether the taboo/norm has been extended to social media sharing. A more cynical view is that the difference is self-preservative and does not come from normative notions of discretion, at least where anonymous sharing or commenting occurs (on a blog like *Above the Law*). With only three or four law clerks per chamber, a post with any modicum of detail is likely to identify that clerk. The identity of a law firm associate-poster might be harder to peg. Whatever the reason may be, this type of improper sharing seems more pervasive at the law firm.

However, beyond an individual firm’s office policies, it is not clear that the broader legal community has considered the implications of sharing “personal” firm information on social media and networking sites. Yet basic principles of agency law suggest that sharing of this nature is unprofessional. The law firm and the lawyer, as employer and employee, have a principal-agent relationship. In agency law, an agent owes its principal a duty of loyalty. According to the *Restatement*, that duty requires “an agent . . . to act loyally for the principal’s benefit in all matters connected with the agency relationship.”\(^{61}\) Similarly, the tentative draft of the new *Restatement on Employment Law* includes a section entitled “Employee Duty of Loyalty.” The “core obligation” is that “[e]mployees owe a duty of loyalty to their employer in matters related to the employment relationship.”\(^{62}\) The duty of loyalty includes admonitions


\(^{61}\) *Restatement (Third) of Agency* § 8.01 (2006).

against use of the principal’s property and communication of confidential information for the agent’s own purposes. With respect to the first obligation, the Restatement explains that:

>[t]he rule is . . . a corollary of a principal’s right, as an owner of property, to exclude usage by others. An agent is subject to this duty whether or not the agent uses property of the principal to compete with the principal or causes harm to the principal through the use.

The Restatement defines “confidential information” to include a broad range of private information. To illustrate the concept, it states that:

>many employees and other agents are given access by the principal to information that the principal would not wish to be revealed or used, except as the principal directs. Such information may pertain to the principal’s business plans, personnel, nonpublic financial results, and operational practices, among a range of possibilities.

As such, agency law has obvious applicability to this area of social media use and networking. Private law firm data, gossip, policy, or strategy is arguably the firm’s property and sharing the information outside the firm could cause economic or reputational harm to it. The firm has given its attorneys “access” to this information. If the firm does not wish for it to be shared to wide, public audiences via social media and networking sites, then the duty of loyalty seems to prohibit such sharing. Though the duty of loyalty has yet to be applied in this way, it certainly could be. Some participants in the Restatement project have decried the duty as “ill-defined.” Professor Gordon Smith, however, has noted the benefits to an undelimited duty of loyalty because, as such, it remains unconstrained to account for new types of disloyal conduct. To his point, the duty of loyalty could apply to attorneys’ sharing of firm information through

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63 Restatement, § 8.05.
64 Id. cmt. b.
65 Id. cmt. c.
66 Smith, supra note 62.
67 Id.
social media. Arguably, social media behavior that is fairly said to be disloyal should also be considered unprofessional, though it currently is not.

**B) Extrafirm Professionalism**

Facebook allows users to post where and for whom they work at the top of their profile pages. Depending on one’s privacy settings, this allows other users who view a person’s Facebook page to immediately learn of his or her employer. The simultaneous sharing of this information together with the montage of photos, comments, and “likes” on the profile reflects on a lawyer’s firm or judge. Because of this feature, not only does that lawyer’s “direct” postings—those about work—implicate professionalism but also does his or her “indirect” postings—personal postings that somehow suggest the lawyer’s competence, maturity, or discretion. I examine each of these facets of extrafirm professionalism in turn.

1. **Direct Postings: “Case and Client” Posts and “Venting” Posts**

Direct postings are those about work. While posting about confidential client matters is an obvious breach of a lawyer’s ethical duty of confidentiality, less clear is whether posting innuendo about clients or cases on Facebook, in conjunction with one’s employment information, is unprofessional.

There are two types of direct postings: those about matters (“case and client posts”) and those about how much you like your job (“vent posts”). The media and scholarship have documented recent examples of both. In one case, a Minnesota prosecutor made negative comments about Somalis on her Facebook page in connection with one of her cases.68 One

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Texas judge, Judge Criss, reported that she saw a post from a lawyer who complained about having to handle a motion in front of her. That Judge further commented that she “has seen lawyers on the verge of crossing, if not entirely crossing, ethical lines when they complain about clients and opposing counsel.” With respect to venting about one’s job on Facebook, it is more common than one would expect. As one observer wrote, “attorneys, like other professionals, vent about work and clients through social media.”

Though most rules committees have said nothing concrete about social media, there is solid ground for expanding professionalism rules and standards to encompass both of these types of direct, work-related posts. The ABA has recently considered ethical questions in connection with lawyer websites. A social networking site, like Facebook, is similar to the ABA’s characterization of a “website” insofar as social networking, like websites, may also “provide biographical information about lawyers, including educational background, experience, area of practice, and contact information . . . . A website also may add information about the law firm, such as its history, experience, and areas of practice . . . .” The ABA points out that Rule 7.1, which governs any “communication about a lawyer or the lawyer’s services,” as well as Rules

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69 Judge Criss, of the 212th District Court in Galveston, Texas, was known for her judicial blog, As the Island Floats.
71 Id.
72 Pixler & Higuera, supra note 52, at 37.
74 Id.
75 “A lawyer shall not make a false or misleading communication about the lawyer or the lawyer’s services. A communication is false or misleading if it contains a material misrepresentation of fact or law, or omits a fact necessary to make the statement considered as a whole not materially misleading.”
5.1\textsuperscript{76} and 5.3,\textsuperscript{77} which obligate managerial lawyers to make efforts to ensure the firm has measures in place that give “reasonable assurance” that firm lawyers comply with the rules, all apply to websites.

Arguably, Facebook posts—of both the client and case and vent varieties—fall within the broad heading of a “communication about a lawyer or the lawyer’s services.” However, applying the Model Rules to these types of social networking behaviors is unlikely. Rule 7.1 technically applies only to “false or misleading communication[s] about the lawyer or the lawyer’s services,” which is too narrow to capture the social media conduct discussed here. Rule 8.4(d), which prohibits attorneys from “engag[ing] in conduct that is prejudicial to the administration of justice,” might apply, though many would no doubt argue that such a vague proscription could not be fairly applied to direct, extrafirm social networking conduct.

Current professionalism norms might not cover this conduct either. Commenting to a friend in person that you are working on a motion to dismiss is probably not unprofessional, even though that friend knows that you work for Smith & Jones law firm.\textsuperscript{78} But posting such message on Facebook or on an away message is different: direct postings shared in the social media world pose much greater reputational risks than would the same sharing imparted offline. A typical Facebook user has between 500 and 1500 friends. The viral capability of any one

\textsuperscript{76} Rule 5.1(a) provides: “A partner in a law firm, and a lawyer who individually or together with other lawyers possesses comparable managerial authority in a law firm, shall make reasonable efforts to ensure that the firm has in effect measures giving reasonable assurance that all lawyers in the firm conform to the Rules of Professional Conduct.”

\textsuperscript{77} Rule 5.3 extends the obligation to “nonlawyer assistants.”

\textsuperscript{78} Professor Orin Kerr has suggested that many of the ethical questions that arise with social media use and social networking can be resolved by reference to offline analogies, that is, asking ourselves whether the action would be unethical if done in person. Professor Orin Kerr, Remarks at the Third Circuit Judicial Conference, Panel on Ethics in the Digital Age (May 5, 2011). While I agree with Professor Kerr that this is a helpful test, I think more guidance is necessary with respect to what is professional.
comment magnifies the risk of speculation (i.e., “she’s probably working on the Johnson case”), negative or incorrect inferences about one’s work (i.e., “she seems not to be working on the Johnson case very hard” or “the Johnson case must be really tough”), or one’s competence (i.e., “she must be distracted from the Johnson case because she is also on Facebook”). Herein lies the gap between existing ethical rules and vague professional norms in this area.

2. Indirect Postings: “Reputational” Posts

It is well understood that a lawyer is expected to conform his or her behavior to the rules of professional conduct at all times, not just while at work. Translated to the language of social media, this means that a lawyer should be mindful of his or her “indirect posts.”

Indirect posts consist of shared information or preferences that suggest something negative about a lawyer’s reputation or integrity and, consequently, that person’s professionalism. Many young associates and law clerks do not realize that their social networking conduct, particularly on Facebook, where real names and not “screen names” are used, creates an e-image of themselves for which they should also be professionally responsible.

Imagine a litigant’s reaction to viewing a profile of a law clerk, which proudly lists him as “Law Clerk to US District Judge John Smith at the United States District Court for Eastern Carolina.” Below that biographical information is a picture of the clerk disheveled and disoriented, with alcoholic drinks in hand. What impression does that give, whether true or not, of that clerk, his work, and the judge for whom he works? That hypothetical is not at all far-fetched. Facebook gives lawyers the ability to list the court and judge or the name of a law firm in their profiles. And members of the bench and bar do look at profiles: Judge Susan Criss
mentions that she once saw on Facebook a lawyer’s postings “detailing her week of drinking, going out and partying.”

It is difficult to find a good ethical rule or professionalism norm analogy to extract any guidance from in this area of social networking. The Canon for Judicial Employees touches on it indirectly. Canon 4 states: “In engaging in outside activities, a judicial employee should avoid the risk of conflict with official duties, should avoid the appearance of impropriety, and should comply with the disclosure requirements.” The Judicial Conference has applied this Canon directly to social media and suggests that the “posting of inappropriate photos or videos,” which could detract from the dignity of the court, is an example of conduct falling under Canon 4. It is unclear how widespread law clerks’ knowledge of these Canons is and to what extent they are given firm instruction. It is clear, however, that such a norm has not gained much traction among law clerks and the same conduct of young associates is apparently not regulated, absent specific law firm policies and monitoring.

In terms of extrafirm social networking, the profession would be wise to differentiate its expectations for lawyerly conduct between on- and off-line and hold social media conduct to a higher standard of professionalism. The next two parts of the framework deal with interpersonal professional relationships, those between the lawyer and client and those between same-level associates.

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80 JUDICIAL CONFERENCE, RESOURCE PACKET, supra note 2, at 15.
81 Id. at 16.
C) Lawyer-client Professionalism

The third component of the framework touches on the professional relationship between an attorney and the client. Many of the professionalism concerns here have been covered above in connection with intrafirm and extrafirm social media use. Even so, it is worth carving out this third area to underscore that there are important norms of professionalism that govern the working relationship between lawyer and client that are different from the ethical obligations that flow from that relationship.

Sharing a post on Facebook that a lawyer is “working on a motion to dismiss for ABC case” or even a more general “staying late to finish this brief on new case” not only invites improper conjecture and reputational harm (a breach of extrafirm professionalism) but also, if brought to the client’s attention, undermines the respect and trust the client has for his attorney. The same goes for any nonanonymous blog posts or tweets.

There are material disclosure concerns as well. In civil or criminal matters where corporations are parties, implying or divulging any details about a suit, legal proceeding, or transaction from which information could be gleaned, presents risk of speculation about the financial health of that corporation. Indeed, many hedge funds are known for using this “mosaic” approach of piecing together tidbits of information to paint a picture of material activities that can affect securities pricing. For example, sharing on Facebook that one is

82 In terms of the lawyer-client relationship, others have already touched upon the concerns related to inadvertently forming an attorney-client relationship or giving advice. As these issues address ethical violations rather than professionalism, I shall not address them here. See David Hricik, Communication & the Internet: Facebook, E-mail & Beyond, Dec. 2009, available at http://ssrn.com/abstract=1557033.

83 Perhaps one of the more interesting revelations that has come from the Galleon proceedings is the sophisticated strategies that hedge funds employ to attempt to gain knowledge advantages over public markets. In his defense, Raj Rajaratnam consistently referred to this mosaic approach as the basis of his ability to act before information became public and markets moved.
traveling to Minnesota for work, could lead other users to piece together the existence of a deal with one of the few major Minnesota-based corporations on one end, particularly if that lawyer is known to work in a mergers and acquisitions practice group. Or, if that lawyer is known to work in a white-collar group, and a local CEO is under suspicion for securities violations, one could surmise that a federal investigation has moved to the next level. Because a Facebook post is shared with so wide an audience, if that company is public, there is real possibility that it could cause movement in the market. An employee at an investment bank would surely be punished for such disclosure. To the extent that a lawyer’s cavalier social networking has the same effect, it too is, at a minimum, unprofessional.

D) Interlawyer Professionalism (Incivility Online)

Just as attorneys owe a duty of discretion to their law firms or chambers and clients, attorneys also owe a similar duty of tactfulness to one another. Saying that we are obligated to be respectful to opposing counsel, clients, and witnesses is, of course, nothing new. Indeed, the notion of interlawyer unprofessionalism is probably closest to the classical conception of lawyerly unprofessionalism—incivility. However, civility norms, heretofore focused on opposing or neutral parties in the litigation process, leave us with little guidance on interlawyer social media norms.

Examples of incivility in the traditional sense are easy to find in the literature and case law. Some deal with insults. In Nachbaur v. American Transit Insurance Co., for instance, a lawyer was sanctioned for sending a letter to the court insulting opposing counsel.84 Other lawyers have been “criticized” by local review boards for writing demeaning letters to opposing counsel, using adjectives such as “fool, idiot, punk, boy, honey, sweetheart, sweetie pie and baby cakes.”85 “[R]acist,” “insulting,” and “degrading” remarks86 are readily labeled unprofessional. Explosive behavior both in and out of court also grabs attention. An example occurred in the Saldana v. Kmart Corp. case before the Third Circuit.87 There, attorney Lee Rohn used the “f” word four times in two telephone conversations with other attorneys and in two asides to attorneys during depositions.88 Related are the vituperative attacks during depositions, which are similarly well documented. In Carroll v. Jaques, attorney Jaques (being deposed as a defendant in the case) “verbally abused counsel for Plaintiff with profanity,” responding that “only an ass would ask those questions.”89 Another famous example is the attorney for Paramount in Paramount Communications, Inc. v. QVC Network, Inc., who attacked opposing counsel during a deposition, lambasting his skill as a lawyer.90 Surely, all would agree such uncivil conduct is unprofessional.

86 Id.
87 Saldana v. Kmart Corp., 260 F.3d 228 (3d Cir. 2001).
88 Id. at 237.
90 The Delaware Supreme Court barred the attorney from appearing before it again. For a copy of the abrasive colloquy, see, George, supra note 7, at 478. See also Jean M. Cary, Rambo Depositions: Controlling and Ethical Cancer In Civil Litigation, 25 Hofstra L. Rev. 561 (1996).
However, the above conceptualization of interlawyer incivility is too narrow in the social media age, as it fails to imagine what incivility looks like online. In the era of social media, incivility increasingly happens on the Internet and comes in different forms. In general, Americans have sensed “[a] growing proliferation of incivility on the Internet.”91 Studies report that mentions of “online incivility” grew sixty-three percent from 2008 to 2009, with social media contributing to this trend.92 In 2010, fifty-one percent of Americans considered blogs the most uncivil, followed by other social networking sites (43%) and Twitter (35%).93 Though these figures reflect broad trends in American popular culture, they suggest that there is real risk that attorneys engage in social media and networking behaviors that the legal profession should view as unprofessional.

The tendency among uninhibited and impulsive lawyers to share stories, pictures, or comments on Facebook, Gchat, or Above the Law risks the embarrassment and ire of one’s co-workers. These harms from uncivil social media use do not directly disrupt the litigation process, but rather the relationships with one’s fellow associates and clerks, and the tenor of the office environment more generally. Such incidence of interlawyer incivility, which arises purely from social media use or networking does not, therefore, fit the incivility typecast described above, which is focused on the litigation process and opposing or neutral parties.

Because unsocial media conduct falls outside the traditional incivility mold, it is unclear whether it would (or could fairly) be punished. Usually, in responding to incidents of incivility, courts and disciplinary committees seem to punish behavior that directly disrupts the litigation process because, though labeled “unprofessional” or “uncivil,” we also feel comfortable labeling

91 SHANDWICK, supra note 53, at 1.
92 Id. at 4.
93 Id.
as “unethical.” With respect to the examples cited above, the attorney in \textit{Nachbaur} was disbarred and the attorney in \textit{Jaques} sanctioned for bad faith litigation. The insulting letter-writers were admonished. Interestingly, in Rohn’s case, because the conduct “did not occur in the presence of the Court and there [was] no evidence that it affected either the affairs of the Court or the ‘orderly and expeditious disposition’ of any cases,” it believed that her “use of language, while certainly not pretty, did not rise to the level necessary to trigger sanctions, at least under the Court’s inherent powers.”\textsuperscript{94}

In fact, it is unclear whether codes of civility or professionalism even cover social media and networking incivility. These codes also focus on litigation and the treatment of other players in the legal process. To the extent they address interlawyer incivility, they endeavor to stymie basic rudeness. The Virginia Bar Association Creed, for example, tells lawyers to “[e]xercise courtesy and civility in all communications and avoid rudeness and other acts of disrespect in all meetings, including depositions and negotiations.”\textsuperscript{95} The Delaware Code advises, “[a] lawyer should represent a client with vigor, dedication and commitment. Such representation, however, does not justify conduct that unnecessarily delays matters, or is abusive, rude or disrespectful.”\textsuperscript{96} The D.C. Bar’s general principles on civility reiterate their applicability to incidents affecting the

\textsuperscript{94} Saldana v. Kmart Corp., 260 F.3d 228, 237-38 (3d Cir. 2001); \textit{compare Jaques}, 926 F. Supp. 1282 (relying on its inherent power, the court sanctioned an attorney who insulted and cursed at opposing counsel).

\textsuperscript{95} \textit{VA. BAR ASS’N, VA. BAR. ASS’N CREED} ¶ 4 (“as to opposing parties and their counsel and other colleagues in the practice of law”), available at http://216.230.13.18/aboutus.htm#creed. That Code also addresses obligations to “the Courts and other tribunals” and “to clients and the public.”

“legal process.”\textsuperscript{97} The Seventh Circuit’s Code, which admonishes its attorneys to “treat all other counsel, parties, and witnesses in a civil and courteous manner, not only in court, but also in all other written and oral communications,” is one of the more general statements that this author has seen and would, arguably, capture social media activity. Then again, without explicit reference to social media, it remains unclear whether that jurisdiction could fairly hold accountable its attorneys for their social media use under its Code.\textsuperscript{98} In short, what is perhaps the most broadly addressed aspect of lawyerly professionalism—civility—offers very little instruction on what is civil in the social media space.

Overall, the examples and analogies above confirm that our traditional thinking on professionalism provides inadequate guidance. The framework demonstrates why it is important to regain our grasp on professionalism and develop clear standards of conduct as they relate to social media that are separate, and probably more expansive, than the existing ethical rules. With a tangible framework in mind, the conversation might avoid some of the qualities that have heretofore shackled professionalism from advancing beyond the hortatory. Moreover, with the problem already defined, the legal community might dedicate more energy to designing a solution. The next Part is a start in that direction.

\textsuperscript{97} \textsc{d}c \textsc{bar}, \textsc{v}oluntary \textsc{s}tandards for \textsc{c}ivility (general principles), available at http://www.dcbar.org/for_lawyers/ethics/legal_ethics/voluntary_standards_for_civility/general.cfm.

\textsuperscript{98} \textsc{standards for prof’l conduct within the seventh fed. judicial circuit} (lawyer’s duties to other counsel), available at http://www.ca7.uscourts.gov/rules/rules.htm#standards. The same point applies to portions of the Delaware Code, which advises attorneys that “[p]rofessional civility is conduct that shows respect not only for the courts and colleagues, but also for all people encountered in practice.” \textsc{principles of professionalism for del. lawyers, supra}, note 96, ¶ 4.
III. Expanding Standards: Rule-making & Norm-setting

Resolving the professionalism questions set out above requires some movement away from the aspirational and elusive qualities of professionalism discussed in Part I. A model rule, together with a normative reorientation, could accomplish this shift. This Part first answers why social media should be regulated by a separate rule. It then considers what a Model Rule on social media use and networking might look like. Part III ends on a pedagogical note, and suggests that teaching the appropriate social media and networking norms in law school should be a key component to any approach to the problem.

A) Why More Regulation?

Some might be skeptical that more regulation is needed and believe that the current rules and standards are enough, or that even if they are not, more regulation is undesirable for some other reason. As the Essay has argued throughout, much social media use and networking conduct falls between the cracks of ethical rules and other professional codes and creeds. To the extent the current rules apply, they do not apply with any specificity; thus, guidance is lacking regarding behavior that is not obviously unethical but which is probably unprofessional. For the continued skeptics, however, I offer the following two-fold response.

1. The Tradeoff Between Social Networking and Social Capital

Perhaps the best insight into the potential harm from unprofessional social media use is gained from the civil society literature on social capital. Robert Putnam, one of the seminal thinkers on social capital theory, explains that “social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from

99 Some have proposed more training and education, in law firms and law schools, as the solution to the legal and ethical problems posed by social networking, as opposed to more centralized regulation by the ABA. See Vinson, supra note 5, at 405.
them.”

In general, social capital is built up through individuals’ interactions with one another, through which relationships develop. Trust is the byproduct of these relationships. Putnam identifies the “positive consequences of social capital,” and the norms that it engenders, as “mutual support, cooperation, trust, [and] institutional effectiveness.”

Social capital theories have been used to understand community cohesiveness as well as civic participation and engagement. In his empirical research, Putnam found greater levels of social capital to be correlated with more active, engaged, and civic-minded citizens. However, social capital theory applies with equal force to organizations, such as law firms. It suggests that healthy relationships between law firm associates indicates norms of trust and reciprocity between them, which, in turn, affects the level of social capital in the firm “community.”

On this understanding, improper social networking behavior could deplete social capital in a few ways. For one, it could damage trust between associates. The fear that one’s comments or mistakes will be shared online could very well stiffen interlawyer relationships, weakening the workplace bonds between associates. Moreover, as attorneys spend more of their downtime at work turned inward and online, to the social networking world, they spend less energy outward,

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100 ROBERT D. PUTNAM, BOWLING ALONE 19 (2000).
103 PUTNAM, supra note 100, at 22.
106 See SOCIAL CAPITAL OF ORGANIZATIONS (Shaul M. Gabbay, Roger Th. A. J. Leenders eds., 2001).
107 Kay & Hagain, supra note 102, at 483.
strengthening their personal relationships with other associates. Facebook time has replaced “water cooler” time.

This is problematic because a firm’s social capital is valuable to it. A solid supply of social capital is key to a productive law firm culture. If unprofessional social media use reduces social capital, the firm’s working environment could become less efficient. As Putnam writes, “[t]rustworthiness lubricates social life.” Applying that idea to the law firm setting, Kay and Hagan have found that “[i]n the practice of law, trust serves as a social lubricant in the work relations of firm lawyers.” Trust, after all, is the fabric of reciprocity, which establishes norms of mutual expectation and obligation in any community. At a firm, reciprocity can be specific, between individual attorneys, or generalized, between one attorney and the unknown other, encountered in the office sometime “down the road.” Related, are the concepts of thick and thin trust: that is, “trust embedded in personal relations that are strong, frequent, and nested,” as compared to “trust in the ‘generalized other.’” Arguably, if the associate-to-associate bonds of

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108 Putnam was concerned about the Internet’s deleterious effect on social capital. See Robert N. Bellah et al., Introduction to *Habits of the Heart*, in THE CIVIL SOCIETY READER 328, 335 (Virginia A. Hodgkinson & Michael W. Foley eds., 2003) (noting that “Putnam also worries that the Internet, the electronic town meeting, and other much ballyhooed new technological devices are probably civically vacuous, because they do not sustain civic engagement”).

109 See PUTNAM, supra note 100, at 85.

110 The relationship between productivity and social capital is most consistent with Pierre Bourdieu’s and James Coleman’s theories of social capital, which view social capital on par with financial and human capital, and vital to productivity as “instrumental in the flow of goods and services to individuals and groups.” Edwards & Foley, supra note 104, at 8-9.

111 PUTNAM, supra note 100, at 21.

112 Kay & Hagan, supra note 102, at 509.

113 PUTNAM, supra note 100, at 134 (describing the concept of generalized reciprocity as “[t]he touchstone of social capital” and the principle that “I’ll do this for you now, without expecting anything immediately in return and perhaps without even knowing you, confident that down the road you or someone else will return the favor”).

114 *Id.* at 136.
thick trust are strong, then the firm community will also follow principles of generalized reciprocity or thin trust.\textsuperscript{115}

Both types of bonds are important for maximizing firm productivity, though generalized reciprocity is perhaps the most valuable. A society characterized by generalized reciprocity is “more efficient than a distrustful society” because “social networks and norms of reciprocity facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit.”\textsuperscript{116} Generalized reciprocity could also boost the firm’s competitive advantage. In Putnam’s view, communities that follow principles of generalized reciprocity have “measurable economic advantages” over those that do not, due to the concomitant reduction in the “transaction costs” of life and business. Thus, a combination of thick and thin trust, which flows horizontally and vertically in the firm hierarchy, will keep the firm humming.

Social capital is also important for a happy law firm culture. In the law firm setting, “[t]rust builds personal commitment to the organization, and this in turn produces longer term loyalty.”\textsuperscript{117} It is also “an anchor for the cultural solidarity of the firm.”\textsuperscript{118} Trust, as a feature of social capital, is thus critical to a law firm’s high morale and attorney retention. Research suggests that social capital might be particularly important for associate happiness and work satisfaction. As Kay and Hagan have hypothesized, “[t]he underlying foundation and durability of trust within firms may be particularly important in the career development of junior associates.”\textsuperscript{119} More empirical research would be needed to bear this out, but it is reasonable to

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\textsuperscript{115} See Kay & Hagan, supra note 102, at 497 (finding a .47 correlation between trust that exists between attorneys and trust that the attorney has in the organization overall).
\textsuperscript{116} PUTNAM, supra note 100, at 21.
\textsuperscript{117} Kay & Hagan, supra note 102, at 485 (citations omitted).
\textsuperscript{118} Id. at 509.
\textsuperscript{119} Id. at 485.
\end{flushleft}
conjecture that a firm with a culture of trust and reciprocity is also one that is eager to mentor young attorneys and otherwise invest in their success.

Beyond the firm, social-capital-depleting behavior between lawyers could ripple out to the public in general, diminishing its trust in the administration of justice. Just as bad manners disrupt the justice system—and so we punish or frown upon them—so too does improper social media use. In fact, the risks that social networking conduct poses to the justice system and the legal community at large exceed those posed by litigation-related incivility. Offline incivility—attorneys’ rancorous conduct—is both a “public relations headache for the legal profession,” and also threatens to “undermine public trust in the administration of justice.” 120 The same is true of unprofessional social media use, but the risks are magnified. Sharing negative or embarrassing comments about one’s co-workers on the Internet makes the profession look petty and impulsive, just as temper tantrums and hurling insults do. Yet social media sharing, unlike explosive or insulting behavior, “can never truly be erased or deleted.”121 “The ability to preserve and replicate an Internet message or image for many years exacerbates the potential risks”122 of a deteriorating public image and an erosion of public trust that follows.

2. Economic Incentives To Regulate

There are also strong economic reasons why the legal community, and law firms especially, should devote their attention to developing concrete guidance on social media use. The legal economy has undergone a “sea change” in the last several years, marked by a decline

121 JUDICIAL CONFERENCE, RESOURCE PACKET, supra note 2, at 5-6.
122 “The ability to preserve and replicate an Internet message or image for many years exacerbates the potential risks.” Id. at 5.
in demand for legal services and resulting layoffs.\textsuperscript{123} A 2011 report on the future of the legal profession by the New York State Bar Association stated that “[s]ince 2009 . . . the demand for legal services has been stagnant or has decreased. Many large law firms laid off attorneys, the average size of associate classes has decreased, and fewer associates have been promoted to the status of equity partner.”\textsuperscript{124} The year 2010 marked the second consecutive year of declining headcount, at a 1.1\% decline; an improvement over 2009’s reported 4\% decline, but nonetheless the biggest two-year decline in the history of the \textit{National Law Journal} survey that reported this data.\textsuperscript{125}

Admittedly, these economic trends are the product of a recession and will probably neutralize over the next few hiring cycles. Even so, there were lasting impacts from the recession that seem here to stay. Firms have come under pressure to trim excess and clients are unlikely to accept as normal the same level of hours billed to their accounts.\textsuperscript{126} To the extent that improper social media and networking use decreases a lawyer’s productivity and dredges law firm resources, law firms will remain concerned about the issue.\textsuperscript{127} Associates should be equally keen to ensure their online activity is professional, not only to avoid layoff in the near term but also to demonstrate their long-term value-added to the firm.

\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Id.} at 16.  
\textsuperscript{126} \textit{See NYSBA Report, supra} note 123, at 15, 18-19.  
\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Cf.} Piazolla, \textit{supra} note 120, at 1209 (noting that “efficiency is perhaps the most common rationale for civility” and the conclusions in the Seventh Circuit’s final report on civility that incivility can increase litigation costs and waste judicial resources).
**B) The ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct**

A good starting place for regulation is the Model Rules of Professional Conduct. A rule that is specific to social media and addresses the types of behavior outlined above could go far in filling the vacuum of guidance in these areas. It is important for the ABA to take the lead in rule-making. Though the organization has addressed law firm websites and e-mail through advisory opinions, it has not yet addressed social media.\(^{128}\) Others have expressed a similar hope for ABA guidance. Ross Fishman, CEO of Fishman Marketing, commented that “[t]he old rules should cover new media tools like Facebook and blogs, but it would be helpful if the ABA clarified this point directly.”\(^{129}\) Without a model rule to spur action, many state bars have similarly been slow to provide clarification on social media and networking issues, and merely tell their attorneys that the “regular rules still apply.”\(^{130}\) For example, when the new edition of the New York Rules of Professional Conduct went into effect on April 1, 2009, they did not mention social networking or any of its related problems.\(^{131}\) It is unclear whether social media will be included in newer versions of other states’ ethical codes without some impetus from the ABA.

\(^{128}\) See ABA Standing Comm. on Ethics and Prof’l Responsibility, Formal Op. 10-457 (2010) (lawyer websites); ABA Standing Comm. on Ethics and Prof’l Responsibility, Formal Op. 06-442 (2006) (use of metadata found in e-mail and other electronically sent data). Others have noticed this lag. Arizona attorneys Carrie Pixler and Lori A. Higuera note that “[s]imilar to how ethics committee guidance on e-mail and the Internet lagged behind the development of electronic communication, new guidelines for social media tools are barely evolving alongside attorneys’ expanding use of social media.” Pixler & Higuera, supra note 52, at 35.


\(^{130}\) Pixler & Higuera, supra note 52, at 35 (noting that, for Arizona attorneys, “given the absence of ethics guidance defining the boundaries of . . . social media, lawyers should assume that all communications in which their status as a lawyer is apparent are subject to the ethical rules”); Robertson, supra note 51, at 21 (noting that “[f]ew states do have specific rules”).

An ABA rule is preferable to leaving regulation to individual firms and judges who could otherwise reprimand or fire wayward employees. A Model Rule that is specific to social media use, but still broadly worded, will gain content as it is applied. These applications will generate fodder for advisory opinions, which local jurisdictions can then use to guide their own applications of analogous rules.¹³² Thus, a Model Rule and the local rules it inspires will not only set uniform expectations but also will clarify these expectations both now and over time as social media and networks evolve. The effect is a profession-wide perspective shift toward viewing certain social media uses as unprofessional. By contrast, a micro, firm-level approach would create uneven standards across the profession (as policies would no doubt differ by firm culture), creating confusion for associates who move laterally and a weaker sense of what is unprofessional about social media use.

In fashioning a model rule, there are some general points to bear in mind. First, the rule must be a compromise between the “old” and “new” generation of lawyers. Given the degree to which these sites have permeated popular culture, an outright ban of them would be untenable and perceived as draconian. The drafters must consider that today’s new lawyers have grown up with different expectations of privacy, and as a result have different reactions to how information is communicated online; [the ABA and] state bars will need to take this generational shift in thinking into account when considering whether new rules are necessary to cover the brave new world of social media.¹³³

Another blogger cautions against implementation of social media polices by older generation lawyers “who have never used social media” “and writ[ing] absurd policies that would be

¹³² Cf. Christina Parajon, Comment, Discovery Audits: Model Rule 3.8(d) and the Prosecutor’s Duty to Disclose, 119 YALE L.J. 1339 (2010) (discussing how guidance on the scope and expectation of a Model Rule is gained through increased application of the Rule and accompanying evaluations/advisory opinions by the relevant regulatory body).
¹³³ Tom Mighell, Avoiding a Grievance in 140 Characters or Less: Ethical Issues in Social Media and Online Activities, 52 ADVOC. (TEXAS) 8, 8 (2010).
impossible to enforce in any event.”134 It also bears emphasis that Facebook and Gchat are one of the main ways that people now stay in touch with friends and loved ones. Firms that expect employees to work lengthy hours should also allow for the appropriate work-life balance by accommodating attorneys who need to keep in touch while at the office. A feasible rule, therefore, should reflect a balance of these interests.

Interest balancing is not only realistic but will also account for the upsides to social media use and networking, which the ABA should not chill. For one, through social media participation, many lawyers have become more active in the legal community and their communities more generally. Jayne Navarre, a marketing expert who works with attorney websites, explains that employees like social media because “[i]t gives them a voice, one that used to be only available via a one-on-one conversation.”135 Further, as their names suggest, the sites are, in fact, often good for professional development. “[A]ttorneys can build potential networks they could never hope to do in person through cocktail parties and receptions.”136 Finally, properly consulted, social media is a good educational tool. Taking Twitter as an example,

[i]t’s a way that, if you are the first to know about a legal development, the passage of legislation or a decision in a case and you post a Tweet about it, then your followers will say, ‘Hey, [she] is the first to know about this case. Let me call her and see if she knows how our company should react to this new legislation.’137

The profession already uses social media and networking sites for productive ends. As just a few examples, the Tennessee Supreme Court uses Twitter to give updates on opinions and

135 Strother, supra note 129, at 37.
136 Stashenko, supra note 131.
137 Id.
other time sensitive issues. That state’s bar association uses Facebook to communicate with its lawyers.\footnote{Robertson, supra note 51, at 16.} The Illinois Supreme Court also has a Twitter feed.\footnote{IL Supreme Court, http://twitter.com/#!/illinoiscourts (last visited May 22, 2011).} As for blogging from the bench and bar, the New York State Bar Association Journal has a blog\footnote{N.Y. STATE BAR ASS’N J., http://nysbar.com/blogs/barjournal (last visited May 24, 2011).} and apparently, even Justice Kennedy of the Supreme Court looks to law blogs for the latest legal scholarship.\footnote{Kevin O’Keefe, Supreme Court Justice Kennedy Kicks Off Discussion on Influence of Law Blogs, REAL LAWYERS HAVE BLOGS (Sept. 6, 2010), http://kevin.lexblog.com.}

1. A Survey of Existing Approaches

With these points in mind, we can gain purchase on the idea of a new model rule from various corners of the legal and professional communities. To begin, the approaches that law firms have taken, or have been advised to take, are instructive. My sense is that, while most experts and firm managers believe that firms should have a policy in place, many firms still lack one. However, those that do exist (and are findable) address some of the professionalism concerns identified above.

The managerial and marketing community has voiced an urgency to develop policies.\footnote{But see Adrian Dayton, Open Letter to Law Firms: Control the Message, MARKETING STRATEGY & L. (Apr. 14, 2009), http://adriandayton.com/2009/04/control (urging law firms not to try to control attorneys’ use of social media).} One professional writes,

If your law firm does not yet have a social-media policy, shame on your law firm. Law firms, like any other business, are accountable for the conduct of their employees. And employees are using social media. Ignoring this reality will not reduce your firm’s exposure to risk. The only way to manage exposure is to tackle it head on. And the best way to tackle social media is to educate employees about the firm’s expectations with a well-drafted policy.\footnote{Molly DiBianca, Social-Media Policies for Law Firms, ABA LAW PRAC. TODAY (Oct. 2010), http://apps.americanbar.org/lpm/lpt/articles/ftr10101.shtml.}

Mayer Brown has likewise impressed that...
[o]rganizations need to get on top of this trend now, rather than waiting for circumstances to force the issue. As with all new technologies, communications via Web 2.0 systems like social networking sites will be used by your organization, will be recognized by the courts, will be subject to regulation and will be sought in discovery. The best strategy for any organization is to proactively adapt to this evolution and invest in the proverbial “ounce of prevention.”144

There are only a few publicly available firm policies or statements suggesting what the policy might be. Hogan Lovells acknowledges that “[c]ertain social media activities of employees create risks that may be unforeseen by the employee,” including discussion of the company if perceived to have the company’s imprimatur, complaining about one’s job, and inappropriate statements about other employees.145 One blogger, who does not identify her firm, reports that it has a policy that “concentrates . . . on making sure we comply with ethics standards for our jurisdictions when using these mediums.”146 She describes a few highlights of her firm’s policy as follows:

1. The Internet is not anonymous, nor does it forget.
2. There is no clear line between your work life & your personal life in these mediums. Always be honest & respectful in both capacities.
3. Avoid hazardous materials—defamatory, harassing or indecent statements.147

In general, therefore, although firms might not have a solid understanding of how to regulate social media use, they do sense the risks involved.148

146 Melanie Green, Comment to Does Your Firm Have A Social Media Policy?, LAWYERIST.COM (June 2, 2009 4:08 PM), http://lawyerist.com/does-your-firm-have-a-social-media-policy.
147 Id.
We can also gain insight from the judicial community. Judges have scrutinized the propriety of their own use of social media, blogs in particular, and have converged around the following principles: do not comment on pending matters or express opinions on issues that could lead to recusal; do not mix personal and professional; adhere to the ethical canons; and be mindful of security and safety issues.\footnote{Heather Singer, Bench Blogging, CASE IN POINT (Nat’l Judicial Coll., Reno, Nev.), Spring/Summer 2007, at 3, 5-7, http://www.judges.org/pdf/cip_summer07.pdf (quoting various judges).} A recent panel on Ethics in the Digital Age at the Third Circuit Judicial Conference provoked some discussion in the blogosphere about if and how law clerks should use social media and social networks. One blogger had some comical advice, to which there is considerable truth. This person, a self-described judicial hopeful, said that he plans to tell his future law clerks the following:

I feel a little sorry for you. I came up just when e-mail and the Internet became established, we didn’t have these social media tools, and unless someone saved your e-mail they would not be able to track you down the rest of your life. But this is an important moment in your transition from student to professional. It will certainly not be the last time you have to subordinate what you want to do online to what an employer—or CLIENT—would want to see. And you also need to think of it like this. If YOU are doing something online, to litigants before the court, it’s like—I—am doing it.\footnote{Law Clerks and Facebook, supra note 134, posting at May 4, 2009 9:59 AM.}

The Judicial Conference has also provided some useful social-media-specific hypotheticals. Under Canon 3 of the Code for Judicial Employees, which governs confidentiality, the Conference notes that a “status update” that “hints at the outcome of a pending case” or “commenting on a blog to the same effect” would run amiss of that Canon.\footnote{JUDICIAL CONFERENCE, RESOURCE PACKET, supra note 2, at 15.} Under Canon 1, “A judicial employee should uphold the integrity and independence of the judiciary and of the judicial employee’s office.”\footnote{Id.} Here, the Conference suggests that posting
messages or comments that are unfavorable or negative about a law firm or counsel’s competence could suggest special access or favoritism.\textsuperscript{153}

The District of Rhode Island has issued a policy specific to that court, which offers employees some “broad guidelines” to follow. One such guideline advises employees to use common sense and to “[t]hink before you post,” keeping in mind that nothing is really private.\textsuperscript{154} The policy proposes a “simple rule: if you are not speaking to someone directly or over a secure landline, you must assume that anything you say or write is available for public consumption.”\textsuperscript{155} Court personnel are also reminded to speak for themselves, not the institution. Specifically, it notes that listing your employment underscores you are a representative of the Court and, therefore, you should not “bring embarrassment upon yourself and/or the Court” with pictures and posts.\textsuperscript{156} The general message of the Rhode Island policy is to behave appropriately and with dignity, which means not speaking about internal processes (including those of a nonconfidential nature) and refraining from political or partisan activity that questions the court’s independence.\textsuperscript{157}

Finally, there is value in considering how other sectors have handled employees’ use of social media and networking.\textsuperscript{158} Of particular note is the media industry, where confidentiality has a similarly strong influence on the rules of ethics and norms of professionalism. The \textit{Wall

\textsuperscript{153} Id. at 16. This would also run afoul of Canon 2, “A judicial employee should avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety in all activities.” \textit{Id. at 15.}

\textsuperscript{154} Id. at 28.

\textsuperscript{155} Id. at 29.

\textsuperscript{156} Id.

\textsuperscript{157} Id. at 29-30.

Street Journal recently gave its staff social networking rules. These include prohibitions on disparaging the work of colleagues or competitors, aggressive self-promotion, and “[a]ll postings on Dow Jones sites that may be controversial or that deal with sensitive subjects” before clearing the post. It urges that “[c]ommon sense should prevail, but if you are in doubt about the appropriateness of a Tweet or posting, discuss it with your editor before sending.” In a similar vein, Reuters’s 2010 social media policy proscribes their journalists from breaking news on Twitter.

These approaches, considered together with the four aspects of the professionalism problem identified in Part III, provide a solid basis for outlining the contours of a model rule.

2. An Outline of a Rule

Based on the foregoing, there are four specific types of social media use or social networking conduct that should be addressed in any model rule: (1) status updates or away messages; (2) posting links or comments, sending articles, and sending event invitations; (3) publishing stories or ideas; and (4) sharing identifying information.

a. Status Updates and Away Messages

Facebook allows users to continuously update their “status,” a feature used to tell friends what the user is doing at any given time. Similarly, people post “away messages” on their Gchat boxes for the same purpose. Because these constant updates have the potential to share matters being worked on, cases under consideration, or a co-worker’s latest morning gaffe, the rule

160 Id.
should address their use. Attorney-users should be warned that sharing work information—regardless whether confidences are exposed—is unprofessional. Innuendo about co-workers is similarly so, even if the brief message would only be considered mildly embarrassing.

b. Links, Comments, Articles, Invites

Here, the danger to professionalism is that a lawyer’s endorsement of events, organizations, or viewpoints could be attributed to the law firm or judge. A firm associate should be careful not to suggest endorsement or communication with an adverse party or ruling. One can imagine a scenario in which a lawyer blogs a positive post about a recent opinion, much to the dismay of a firm client, who was adversely affected by the ruling.

Federal judicial law clerks are not supposed to participate in partisan political activities. Accordingly, it seems inappropriate for a law clerk to post on Facebook both his position with a court and specific judge and his political party affiliation or position on the political spectrum (i.e., “liberal” or “conservative”). Likewise, endorsing candidates on Facebook or sending and posting invitations to partisan political fundraisers casts doubt on a chamber’s political independence.

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162 Though beyond the scope of this Essay, I note that others have pointed out that it is questionable whether employers subject to the Railway Labor Act could discipline employees for union-related organizing activities if there is evidence that the employer harbors antiunion sentiment. See Chris Hollinger & China R. Ross, Airline and Railroad Labor and Employment Law: A Comprehensive Analysis, 2010 ALI-ABA 79. For a recent case in which the National Labor Relations Board filed a complaint alleging that a nonprofit unlawfully discharged employees after criticizing working conditions on Facebook, see Complaint Issued Against New York Nonprofit for Unlawfully Discharging Employees Following Facebook Posts, NAT’L LAB. REL. Bd. (May 18, 2011), http://nlrb.gov/news/complaint-issued-against-new-york-nonprofit-unlawfully-discharging-employees-following-facebook.

163 Under Canon 5 of the Employee Code, “A judicial employee should refrain from inappropriate political activity.” JUDICIAL CONFERENCE, RESOURCE PACKET, supra note 2, at 15.
c. Posting Stories and Responsive Comments

The concern with publication-type social media use and networking is the divulgence of proprietary information, particularly that which is nonconfidential but sensitive, and shared on the basis of firm-attorney trust. Additionally, lawyers should be admonished not to vent about work or air the firm’s problems. Gossip blogging should also be frowned upon.\(^{164}\)

d. Identifying Information

The extent to which a lawyer may share the firm name, court, and judge for whom he or she works should be addressed. How much detail an attorney may share about his or her employer will likely be a function of how far the rule restricts the above forms of sharing and connecting.\(^{165}\)

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\(^{164}\) This part of the rule would have to be modified for government employees such as law clerks, who have First Amendment protections of their speech. The Supreme Court has developed a two-part test to assess public employee speech rights under the First Amendment. See Connick v. Myers, 461 U.S. 138 (1983); Pickering v. Bd. of Ed., 391 U.S. 563 (1968). Under that test, an employee must first show that the speech involves a matter of “public concern.” Then, the Court balances the employee’s speech rights and the government employer’s interest in efficiency. See David L. Hudson, Jr., 9th Circuit: College Has Right to Keep ‘Political Neutrality,’ FIRSTAMENDMENTCENTER.ORG (Apr. 25, 2005), http://www.firstamendmentcenter.com/news.aspx?id=15168 (describing the test). Subject to a Pickering-Conick analysis, therefore, a judge or other government employer could probably not punish derogatory speech or nonwork related speech.

\(^{165}\) It is worth noting with respect to Facebook that the site offers a range of privacy settings that allow a user to conceal information or data so that only that user, his or her friends, or friends of friends can see it. Some find it challenging to understanding the privacy settings, and perhaps for that reason, their efficacy has been a subject of some skepticism. See, e.g., Facebook Privacy: A Bewildering Tangle of Options, N.Y. TIMES, May 12, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2010/05/12/business/facebook-privacy.html. That said, Facebook has recently improved some of its privacy settings. As of May 2010, users can choose to make some information private, such as hometown, residence, favorites, and friend lists. Vinson, supra note 5, at 368. Even so, as one author notes, users should not take privacy for granted. These controls are not automatic and still reveal personal information by default. By default, privacy settings allow everyone to find a user in a search. Further, as the features and applications of Facebook continue to grow, so does the amount of information available about its users.
In sum, the ABA’s drafting, circulation, and implementation of a rule that targets the unprofessional ways in which lawyers use social media would serve an important gap-filling function and halt the consequences of unprofessional social networking, outlined above. Over time, the application of a model rule to specific scenarios and subsequent publication of advisory opinions would further solidify the lawyer’s duty to use social media and networks professionally. In addition to the rule-based approach, it is also important for the legal community to focus on norm-shifting. Where social media and networking is concerned, that process should begin in law school.

C) Teaching Social Media Norms

Professionalism standards are not comprised of rules alone. Social networking norms are also an important part of them. Generally speaking, “[g]roups use norms to set a standard of ordinary or expected behavior.” 166 As one scholar wrote, “social organization and, in particular, community norms, are almost always more important influences on individual conduct than formal rules.”167

For young lawyers, uninhibited social networking is currently ‘the norm.’ The newest wave of attorneys to hit the legal market is the first to have gone through college with Facebook.168 Gmail and Gchat were also launched during these lawyers’ college years. Young

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167 Id. at 803.
lawyers are therefore accustomed to the “casual, personal use”\textsuperscript{169} of social media and networking and, at least according to one ethics professor, are “initially . . . unaware of the consequences of using social-networking sites and the responsibilities of a lawyer.”\textsuperscript{170} The casual attitude toward social networking is left to thrive in law school, where there is often a lack of emphasis on professionalism in general.\textsuperscript{171}

1. Pedagogy

Law schools could reverse the nonchalant attitude toward social media by incorporating social media issues into their professionalism curricula. One component of a norm-shifting strategy should, therefore, be pedagogical. That recommendation begs the question of how to teach professional norms of social networking.

Law schools have varied approaches to teaching legal ethics and professionalism, including clinical programs, mentor programs, lectures and seminars, and coursework.\textsuperscript{172} As one important scholar on the pedagogy of ethics and professionalism notes, nearly all professional responsibility training has two objectives: one, “to increase students’ understanding of ethical problems and of regulatory responses, including relevant codes, doctrine, and committee decisions”; and two, “to broaden and deepen individuals’ understanding of professional roles . . . through cross-professional, cross-cultural, and interdisciplinary materials” so that “students can


\textsuperscript{172} ABA SURVEY, \textit{supra} note 24.
explore the merits of particular occupational norms and regulatory structures.”

Because code-based guidance and regulatory responses have yet to develop in the area of social networking and social media use, a good pedagogical starting point is with the second objective. Law schools should consider how they might create a more self-reflective sense among students of how social media use can be unprofessional.

Social media use and networking pose a niche set of professionalism problems, so integrating these topics into schools’ current professionalism training could prove difficult at first. In general, there are recognized challenges to the success of academic efforts to “teach” professionalism, and expanding programs seems an uphill battle at many institutions. One author wrote that professional responsibility is the “dog of the law school [curriculum]—hard to teach, disappointing to take, and often presented to vacant seats or vacant minds.” However, social media might be better received. The professionalism issues associated with social media use and networking are relevant to law students’ lives in ways that other legal ethics and professionalism issues are not yet. Students will more readily see the practical applications, and find it easier to draw connections between problem and solution, than they might in other standard courses. New programs on social media use could, therefore, avoid some of the abstractness that has made teaching professionalism difficult in the past.

Rather than re-arranging current syllabi to address these topics, an alternative way to introduce the topic is through a mandatory orientation program. There is already some traction for such programs. As of 2006, eighty percent of schools had a professionalism orientation. Some used lecture format (85%), some small discussion groups (61%), and some used panels

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173 Rhode, supra note 25, at 42-43.
174 Id. at 42.
175 Rhode, supra note 25, at 40 (alternation in original).
Sixty-four percent of schools with professionalism orientation programs used hypotheticals.\textsuperscript{177} An orientation session in any of these formats, and probably most usefully with some use of hypothetical social networking issues, would raise awareness of the issue in the beginning of students’ law school experience. As an isolated training session, an orientation program could be a smoother way of adding social media and networking topics into the professionalism curricula. Orientation programs could also be more impactful than a one-off session on social media issues in a course otherwise dedicated to the rules of ethics or more traditional ethical dilemmas. Ideally, the program would be mandatory for all students. As Rhode has noted, the benefit of mandatory training in professionalism is that it forces students to think about “what kind of [professionals] [they] want to be and what kind of profession [they] want to serve.”\textsuperscript{178}

2. Policy

A second component of a law school’s norm-shifting strategy is applied, through effective law school policies on professionalism. Developing, publishing, and enforcing policies that govern law students’ use of social media and networking is key.\textsuperscript{179} As the ABA noted in its survey of law school policies on conduct and integrity, “[i]t is important for students who are preparing to be part of the legal profession to learn to accept the full responsibilities that are entailed in such participation and the ramifications for not adhering to those responsibilities.”\textsuperscript{180}

The College of Law at West Virginia University has such a policy. It “encourage[s] students to use [social media] as a professional tool, [and] educate[s] them about etiquette, ethics

\textsuperscript{176} ABA SURVEY, supra note 24, at 42.
\textsuperscript{177} Id.
\textsuperscript{178} Rhode, supra note 25, at 44.
\textsuperscript{179} See Vinson, supra note 5, at 406 (advocating for the use of law school policies and guidelines on social networking).
\textsuperscript{180} ABA SURVEY, supra note 24, at 11.
and best practices. [The University] seek[s] to model how social networking can contribute to a
professional public presence by using it to communicate with the world.”181 Harvard Law
School also has a policy in place, though its concern is more so with the use of the Harvard
domain name for publishing blogs and websites and less so the question of whether social media
use is professional.182 Regardless of the policy, it should be applied and enforced through the
use of review boards (which include student members) and be subject to an appeals process, to
mimic the type of regulatory responses students will see as members of the professional bar.183

Overall, inculcating professional norms for social media use will ease students’ transition
from academia to the regulated profession, ideally, avoiding incidence of misunderstanding or
censure in their early careers. In those jurisdictions that adopt a rule without disciplinary
capability, norm-shifting is an especially important goal for law schools because, with solid
norms in place, the new attorneys that they train will be more likely to adjust their conduct. As
with many social norms, “[a]ctors might come to obey [them] even when they would suffer no
adverse consequences if they did not.”184 If a lawyer “who violates a norm can expect to suffer a
range of external but nonlegal sanctions, including a loss of reputation as well as raised
eyebrows, disparaging remarks, and other social ‘punishments,’” then this could be an effective
way to incentivize him or her to forgo questionable online behavior.185 Indeed, “[a]ttorneys and
judges have a wide variety of tools for punishing norm violations [and] [n]egative gossip is

Va. Law. 16, 17.
182 Weblogs at Harvard Law School, HARVARD L. SCH., http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/terms-of-
use (last visited May 24, 2011).
183 See ABA SURVEY, supra note 24, at 11-12.
184 Lynn A. Stout, Social Norms and Other-Regarding Preferences, in NORMS AND THE LAW 13,
28 (Josh N. Drobak ed., 2006).
185 Id.
invariably documented as a sanction.”186 Because “[r]eputation and credibility are a form of social capital that can make a substantial difference to the attorney’s material well-being,”187 such a ‘soft’ sanction will go far in reining in unprofessional social media use.

**CONCLUSION**

This Essay has demonstrated how attorneys’ use of social media and networking implicates their professionalism. It argued that our current standards of professionalism, and the ethical rules on which they lean, are inadequate to curtail unprofessional social media use and networking. But, for better or for worse, we live in the Facebook age. Unregulated, these tools pose risks to our professionalism. However, with proper guidance, they can be powerful and productive tools for the legal community.

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186 Brown, *supra* note 166, at 811.
187 *Id.* at 812.