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Enhancing self-efficacy for career development in Facebook

Young E. (Anna) Argyris^{a,*}, Jingjun (David) Xu^b^a Department of Media and Information, School of Communication Arts and Sciences, Michigan State University, 404 Wilson Road, Room 403, East Lansing, MI 48824, USA^b W. Frank Barton School of Business, Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount, Wichita, KS 67260 0048, USA

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ABSTRACT

The literature has two competing perspectives on Facebook: One claims positive effects of Facebook on individuals, while the other suggests detrimental effects. The contrasting perspectives are due to the technology-deterministic approach centering on Facebook “use” as opposed to non-use, neglecting the idiosyncrasies of members and the roles of their context. Accordingly, this study focuses on current college student members and enhancement of their self-efficacy for career development in Facebook, given college students’ loyalty to Facebook and their increasing financial uncertainties in the US. We posit that Facebook provides two affordances (i.e., affordance of virtual people watching and affordance of garnering social support), which in turn increase chances of two important sources of self-efficacy—i.e., gaining vicarious experience and social persuasions. An online survey with 260 college student Facebook members was conducted; the results of data analyses corroborated our hypotheses. These findings identify the unique affordances of Facebook for self-efficacy development, thereby expanding the social cognitive theory by demonstrating that technology affordances translate into effective sources of self-efficacy.

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1. Introduction

The literature has two competing perspectives on Facebook: One claims positive effects that Facebook brings to individuals, while the other suggests detrimental effects. The two strands are in sharp contrast on many important issues. In regards to privacy, for example, negative viewers claim unintended disclosure of personal information in Facebook and subsequent threats to privacy (Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn, & Hughes, 2009), while the counterpart posits that self-disclosure in Facebook increases relational closeness (Ledbetter et al., 2010). Likewise, critiques associate Facebook use with first-year college students’ low self-esteem (Debatin et al., 2009), while advocates maintain Facebook increases college students’ self-esteem (Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011). Facebook is criticized by some for lowering academic performance (Junco, 2012; Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010), while the results from a nationwide survey correlate Facebook use with higher grades (Pasek, Moore, & Hargittai, 2009).

We propose that the contrasting and ambiguous results are due,

at least in part, to the monolithic approach centering on Facebook “use” as opposed to non-use. Specifically, many previous researchers compared Facebook users with non-users (or less frequent users), assuming that the frequency of Facebook “use” will bring universal results without regard for the goals, circumstances, abilities and perspectives of users. An identical technology brings varying outcomes to people because they appropriate technology in a way that serves their goals most appropriately under the given circumstances (Leonardi, 2014). Witnessing organizations’ massive successes and utter failures with the same technology, DeSanctis and Poole (1994) criticize technology determinism and suggest that researchers recognize that individuals perceive and appropriate a given technology adaptively to their needs, thereby accruing varying results from its use.

Along this line, a group of researchers have recently proposed the concept of technology affordance—an opportunity of an action provided by a technology to a user situated in particular context (Faraj, Jarvenpaa, & Majchrzak, 2011; Leonardi, 2014; Markus & Silver, 2008). Applying this affordance concept, we posit that the impact of Facebook can vary widely, not simply depending on the frequency of use, but depending on *what users want in the particular context and what abilities Facebook affords users to manage the particular context that they are in*. As such, by employing the concept

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: yelee@msu.edu (Y.E. Argyris), david.xu@wichita.edu (J. Xu).

of technology affordance, we attempt to resolve the previously mentioned ambiguous results and provide more accurate understanding of the impact Facebook has on users.

Following the suggestions of previous researchers who underscore the importance of incorporating users' context (Xu et al. 2014a, 2014b), we center on how Facebook helps current college students foster their career development self-efficacy in the unfavorable financial circumstances. The reason we focus on this topic is two-fold—current college students' loyalty to Facebook and their increasing financial predicament in the US. First, current college students remain the heaviest users of Facebook compared to any other age groups (Pew Research Group, 2014). Despite recent reports on Facebook losing its stronghold among young audiences, 95% of college students still patronize Facebook (Viner, 2014), which is much higher than any other age cohort (Pew Internet, 2014). Indeed, the emergence of social media has changed individual interaction patterns, ways of communication, and relationship maintenance among youth (Rainie & Wellman, 2012; Xu et al., 2012).

Secondly, to foster their career development as they cope with their difficult economic circumstances in the United States, current college students need enhanced self-efficacy—a belief in their capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations (Bandura, 1995). Challenges faced by current college students include the high cost of tuition, which has increased exponentially in the past few decades (Baum & Ma, 2012). The traditional path to a college education often leads to massive debt, which has become a public concern since the national student debt load is currently more than \$1 trillion dollars (Smith, 2014). In addition, underemployment among college graduates under 25 has increased by more than 30% from 12% in 2003 to 16% in 2013 (Shierholz, Davis, & Kimball, 2014), leading to a large share of college graduates who can find only part-time jobs or low-skill jobs such as those without college degrees obtained before the economic crisis induced by sub-prime mortgages.

To overcome the predicament, one's self-efficacy matters (Bandura, 1995). Self-efficacy determines how persistently, resiliently, and tenaciously one pursues his/her goals despite setbacks and adversities. Accordingly, we investigate whether Facebook has proper affordances to foster college students' self-efficacy. Among many domains of self-efficacy, we focus on career development self-efficacy because (i) career development is one of college students' primary goals (Zimmer, 2014) and (ii) college students can overcome their financial predicament by obtaining and developing successful careers (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996).

Drawing on the social cognitive theory, we suggest that Facebook provides unique affordances that facilitate college students' career development self-efficacy. Two sources of self-efficacy—vicarious experience and social persuasion (Bandura, 2001)—are provided by Facebook, given its affordance for allowing people to watch others closely (Joinson, 2008) and to garner social support from a large crowd. These affordances are unique to Facebook, because Facebook allows an individual to observe a large number of people on a regular basis and to gather many encouraging comments promptly and easily.

To examine whether these two affordances translate into sources for developing self-efficacy, we employed an online survey, using 260 college students as respondents. We revised the existing instruments and developed new ones to fit the context of this study by undertaking interviews and conducting two-rounds of card sorting method (Moore & Benbasat, 1991). The results of data analyses using a structural equation model show that the affordance of virtual people-watching and the affordance of garnering social

support are significant sources of college student's career development self-efficacy.

2. Background

2.1. Current college students and Facebook

Current college students contrast clearly with college students of predecessor age cohorts, such as baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) and Generation X (born between mid-1960 and 1980), in the ways they use technology in general and Social Networking Sites (SNSs) in particular, and in the ways they view their abilities to prosper financially (Smith, 2014).

First, many current college students have integrated SNSs into their daily lives (Smith, 2014). An SNS is a web-based service that allows “individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile ..., (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). We focus on Facebook given its dominant status among SNSs (Chou & Edge, 2012).

Despite Facebook's expansion to older audiences and the growth of other SNSs, such as Pinterest and Instagram, current college students are still the heaviest patrons of Facebook. 95% of college students use Facebook (Shweiki Media, 2014), the percentage of which is higher than that of any other age groups (Pew Internet, 2014). The average number of contacts they have on Facebook is 250, considerably higher than for any other age group (Pew Research Center, 2014), and 40% of the college students check Facebook six times per day (Viner, 2014), post 3.45 times per day (Merchant et al., 2014), and spend nearly 8 h per week on Facebook (Campusbooks, 2014). To them, Facebook is essentially an information technology-enabled social space. It is a great example of the “new social operating system” created by intertwining technological and social networks (Rainie & Wellman, 2012).

Another notable difference between current college students and predecessors is their outlook for the future despite their financial burdens. Current college students have higher levels of student loan debt, poverty, and underemployment, and lower levels of wealth and personal income than their predecessor generations had at the same stage of their life (Pew Research Center, 2013). Underemployment rates among college graduates has increased (Shierholz et al., 2014), while the cost for higher education rose by nearly 100%, from \$10,649 per person in 2003 to \$20,326 per person in 2013 (Louis, 2013). Nonetheless, college students maintain a positive outlook on their economic future, believing it will be better than the present (Pew Research Center, 2014). Young adults tend to have a positive outlook but current college students have more positive outlooks than their predecessors (Pew Research Center, 2014). Current college students believe they will achieve a level of prosperity that exceeds what previous age cohorts believed even though these older generations had much better economic circumstances at the same age (Pew Research Center, 2014).

We examine whether and how Facebook, which is an integral part of current students' lives, affects their outlook for future, especially testing the possibility that their positive future outlook reflects their self-efficacy fostered by Facebook.

2.2. Career development self-efficacy (CDSE)

To investigate whether and how Facebook affects current students' outlook, we employ the concept of career development self-efficacy (CDSE). This aspect of self-efficacy is particularly relevant to achieving financial stability and prosperity, and our research

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