



# Social network site use, mobile personal talk and social capital among teenagers



Wenjing Xie

School of Journalism, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Carbondale, IL 62901, United States

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Available online 20 October 2014

### Keywords:

Social network site  
Social media  
Facebook  
Mobile communication  
Mobile phone  
Smartphone  
Social capital  
Teenager

## ABSTRACT

Social network sites (SNSs) and mobile phones are becoming increasingly important in teenagers' lives. Using data collected from a nationally representative survey ( $N = 800$ ), this study explores the variation of social capital by SNS adoption, different SNS activities, and mobile personal talk among teenagers. The results indicate that SNS adoption and mobile personal talk can not only enhance teenagers' close ties with friends, but also jointly promote teenagers' civic engagement. Among SNS users, mobile personal talk also increase teens' network capital. Different SNS activities such as commenting on friend's Facebook pictures and joining Facebook groups have different relationships with social capital, and such relationships are moderated by mobile personal talk.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

With the function of helping people connect or reconnect with friends, enabling social interaction, fulfilling information needs, and sharing user-created content, social network sites (SNSs) have gained immense popularity since their advent (Ellison & Boyd, 2013; Lin & Lu, 2010). As one of the most successful SNSs, Facebook passed Google to become the most visited website in the United States in March 2010 (Dougherty, 2010). By July 2014, the estimated number of monthly active Facebook users reached 1.31 billion (Facebook, 2014) and 60% of social media time is spent on smartphones and tablets (Adler, 2014).

There has been a long history of research examining the relationship between media use and social capital (Carpini, 2000; Shah, Rojas, & Cho, 2009), and the impact of SNS use on social capital is not negligible (for a review, see Ellison & Boyd, 2013). Studies show that the use of SNSs can enhance bonding and bridging social ties (Boase & Kobayashi, 2008; Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007; Vitak, Ellison, & Steinfeld, 2011), mobilize people to attend protests (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012), harness community volunteering (Johnson & Perlmutter, 2011), and change political attitudes and civic behaviors (Vitak et al., 2011; Zuniga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012).

Despite the boost in SNS user growth and the major progress and efforts to analyze SNS usage behaviors, there is still a lack of the empirical research about the social and psychological impacts

of SNS use (Pasek, more, & Romer, 2009; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009; Zuniga et al., 2012). First, previous studies primarily operationalized SNS use as time spent on SNSs or SNS use frequency (Ellison et al., 2007; Wilson, Gosling, & Graham, 2013). Little attention was paid to the nuanced differences among different SNS activities (Burke, Kraut, & Marlow, 2011), which raises the question about how different features of SNS use relate to social capital. One goal of this study is to tease out the relative weight of these different SNS activities and to investigate their relationships with social capital.

Second, though the main effects of SNS use on social capital have been studied (for a review, see Ellison & Boyd, 2013), little research has examined the intersection of SNS use and other technologies such as the rapidly developing mobile technologies. Studies on mobile communication show that mobile phone use, especially for information exchange, is effective in affecting participation in civic life (Campbell & Kwak, 2010a, 2011a, 2011b; Kwak, Campbell, Choi, & Bae, 2011). As individuals increasingly own multiple technology devices and access their SNS accounts on their mobile phones, this technological convergence may provide new avenues to understand the relationship between new media use and social capital (Campbell & Kwak, 2010a).

Third, previous studies primarily used either college student samples or national samples with even higher age ranges (Boase & Kobayashi, 2008; Johnston, Tanner, Lalla, & Kawalski, 2013). The research on teenagers' use of SNS and mobile technology is still notably thin (Ahn, 2012; Ellison, Vitak, Steinfeld, Gray, & Lampe, 2011). However, new communication technologies tend to be more

E-mail address: [wxie@siu.edu](mailto:wxie@siu.edu)

useful social capital resources for younger users than for older adults (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001). As teenagers are rapidly migrating to SNSs (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011) and becoming pioneers of mobile communication (Campbell & Kwak, 2010b), research about teenagers' use of SNSs and mobile technologies calls for our attention.

Using data from a nationally representative survey, this study will attempt to examine the relationship between teenagers' SNS use, mobile personal talk, and social capital. The purposes of this study are threefold: first, it will examine the association between teens' SNS adoption, mobile talk, and social capital; second, it will disentangle various SNS activities and explore how those various activities differently relate to social capital; third, it will examine how mobile personal talk interacts with SNS adoption and different SNS activities in predicting teens' social capital.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Social capital

The term of social capital has a multifaceted meaning, and theorists have defined it from different perspectives (Portes, 1998). Bourdieu and his colleague (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) described social capital from a broad and cultural perspective and defined it as membership in particular social classes or groups. Social network analysts such as Lin (1999) argued that social capital includes the "resources embedded in one's social networks, resources that can be accessed or mobilized through ties in the network" (p.51). Other theorists focused on the relational perspective and described social capital as a basic element of community life, such as interpersonal trust, norms, and social relations, which provides the means for citizens to cooperate on joint problems (Coleman, 1988; Ellison et al., 2007; Putnam, 1995, 2000).

Social capital has both individual and collective levels (Bourdieu, 1986; Brandtzæg, 2012; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 1999). Individual or network capital refers to how individuals capture and use resources embedded in social networks to achieve personal goals (Erickson, 1996; Lin, 1999). Putnam (2000) further differentiated individual capital into bridging capital and bonding capital. Bridging social capital is also referred to as "weak ties", which are loose connections that may provide useful and new information through diverse acquaintances. In contrast, bonding capital is often perceived as "strong ties" and occurs between individuals with strong personal connections who can provide companionship and emotional support. Individual or network capital has been operationalized as the frequency of face-to-face interactions with close friends, personal trust, the number of offline acquaintances, and loneliness (Brandtzæg, 2012; Campbell & Kwak, 2010b).

The construct of collective or participatory capital focuses on the group level and describes how certain groups utilize networks for collective endeavors and how such collective endeavors enhance group members' life chances (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Lin, 1999; Putnam, 2000). Collective capital has been operationalized as civic and political participation, including involvement in community life, participation in civic and political activities, and membership in community or political organizations (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Dekker & Uslaner, 2001; Putnam, 2000).

There is a consensus that social capital is a key component of healthy and democratic societies. Bourdieu (1986) proposed social capital as a framework to understand how collective behavior emerged in society. Social capital has also been linked with a variety of positive social outcomes, such as better public health, lower crime rates, and more efficient financial markets (Adler & Kwon, 2002). However, young people have been identified as contributors to America's declining social capital. Research shows that com-

pared with older generations, young people are marked by lower levels of community involvement, political knowledge, civic and political participation, and interpersonal trust (Lopez & Kirby, 2003). However, recent research about young adults shows that the Internet has functioned as an important tool to collect political information and a possible gateway to increase their political participation (Kann, Berry, Grant, & Zager, 2007; Seongyi & Woo-Young, 2011).

### 2.2. SNS adoption and social capital

Donath and boyd (2004) were among the first who proposed that SNS use could augment one's bridging social capital, as SNSs enabled users to maintain and enlarge more diverse social networks to draw resources. Ellison et al. (2007) found that the use of Facebook could strengthen both weak ties and strong ties among college students and help them maintain their relationships with former friends and classmates. The follow-up studies have yielded consistent findings: active Facebook users exhibit higher bridging, bonding or maintained social capital (Ellison et al., 2011; Johnston et al., 2013; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008). Other studies show that the association between SNS use and social capital is robust not only on the individual level but also within organizations (Steinfeld, DiMicco, Ellison, & Lampe, 2009), in everyday settings (Panovich, Miller, & Karger, 2012), and in political and civic contexts (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012; Valenzuela et al., 2009; Vitak, Zube, et al., 2011).

Although previous research has identified a positive correlation between social capital outcomes and the time spent on SNS or SNS use frequency, little effort has been made to examine the differences between SNS users and non-users (Hargittai, 2007; Lampe, Vitak, & Ellison, 2013). The reason may be because these studies either were solely interested in SNS users or used college-aged samples that had high SNS adoption rates (Brandtzæg, 2012; Lampe et al., 2013). However, digital divide theory, which describes the concern with the gaps between those who do and those who do not have access to information technologies (van Dijk, 2006), has shown that technology "haves" and "have-nots" differ significantly in their public and political participation (Kavanaugh & Patterson, 2001; Schradie, 2011). Tufekci (2008) found that, compared with SNS users, SNS non-users contacted with fewer people on a weekly basis. Brandtzæg's (2012) study of a Norwegian survey panel showed that SNS users reported higher scores on three dimensions of social capital: face-to-face interaction, number of acquaintances, and bridging social capital. By interviewing 614 university staff members, Lampe et al. (2013) found that heavy Facebook users had higher levels of perceived bridging and bonding social capital than light Facebook users and non-users did. Other studies showed that SNS users had more trust, close ties, and social support than non-users did (Hampton, Goulet, Rainie, & Purcell, 2011).

To date, most of the research about SNS use or SNS adoption has been limited to college students or even older populations, and teenagers are often neglected in SNS studies (Ellison et al., 2011). Among the few studies, Ahn's (2012) survey of high school students indicates that time spent on SNSs predicts bridging capital, while positive or negative experiences relates to bonding capital. Wohn, Ellison, Khan, Fewins-Bliss, and Gray (2013) found that using Facebook to find information about college and receiving instrumental support from Facebook friends would increase high school students' college application efficacy. Targeting a younger cohort of 14–22-year-old, Pasek et al. (2009) also identified a positive correlation between SNS use frequency and civic engagement. Nevertheless, those previous studies either aggregated SNS non-users with SNS users in measuring SNS use frequency, or focused on the influences of demographics on teens' SNS adoption (Ahn,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/350392>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/350392>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)