Chapter 5
Investigating the Dynamics of Trust in Social Capital on Social Media Platforms

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a 10-year (2013-2022) longitudinal research study among college students aged from 18 to 39 who were social media users. The chapter covers three topics: 1) student use of social media platforms to establish social networking, 2) perception and attitude towards level of trust on social media platforms, and 3) correlation between social media trust and media consumption. The results indicate that there are more students using social media to keep a close relationship with friends and family members to maintain existing communities than those to find new friends to expand social circle. Students have increased concern with trust on social media and the level of trust is declining throughout the years. Despite the trust issue, there is no correlation between level of trust and student use of social media to share and use online information to find solutions.

INTRODUCTION

Social capital remains an interesting area for researchers ever since the late 19th century when sociologists such as Lester Ward, Émile Durkheim, and Jane Addams are extensively credited with pioneering theories and approaches in the field. According to Oxford dictionary on Lexicon.com, "Social capital is the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively" (n. d.). Throughout the decades, researchers have made a great effort to investigate in depth the core elements in various types of social capital in different contexts and across different disciplines such as economics, sociology, politics, and psychology. These efforts have significantly expanded the research scope and have provided a much better understanding of the impact of social capital on individuals, organizations, and societies as a whole. "Social capital revolves around three dimensions: interconnected networks of relationships between individuals and groups (social ties

or social participation); levels of trust that characterize these ties, and resources or benefits that are both gained and transferred by virtue of social ties and social participation" (Britannica, n.d.). No matter what area of social capital is investigated in or researched on, trust is the top important element in all types of social capital. Trust is the foundation for any type of relationship. "Trust is a fundamental component of interpersonal relationships" (Cialdini & Fincham, 1990, p. 1001).

The modern internet technology has brought the level of interconnected networks of relationships between individual and groups to all time high. In addition, social media platforms have shrunk the world and brought everyone so close together virtually. Undoubtedly, the quality of people's life has been notably improved with the fast internet connection and convenient access to rich information from all resources. Technology has positive impact on online social capital development through connecting people, sharing information, building relationship, and promoting cooperation globally. Trepte and Reinecke (2022) conducted a meta-analysis of 103 studies on the relationship between internet use and social capital concludes "internet use was positively associated with social capital, but the effect size was small" (2022, p. 627).

Today, the fast expansion of AI technology has brought huge disruptions in every aspect of people's life, and trust in any kind of relationship is facing another critical challenge. As AI technology continues to advance, it is likely that Chatbots and AI-based platforms will increasingly become a more commonplace and heavily used in social networks. AI technology is like a double-edged sword, it definitely brings enormous benefit to people's life, at the same time it poses a great urgency for everyone to understand and prepare for the new future as AI technology will be an integral part of people's life. With advanced internet and AI technologies infusing into the platforms of online communication and interaction, it is necessary to better understand how people use and behave virtually and find out if social media platforms are an effective environment to promote social capital development. Hence, the purpose of this chapter's research study is to explore the three dimensions revolving social capital development in the dynamic realm of social media platforms. The investigation aims to uncover the following: 1) student use of social media platforms to establish social networking, 2) perception and attitude towards level of trust on social media platforms, and 3) correlation between social media trust and media use and consumption. Additionally, the study further investigates the gender difference on trust level to find out if gender makes any difference in social networking on the media platforms

THE STUDY

The research study in this chapter is a 10-year longitudinal research study from 2013 to 2022. It was conducted among college students at the University of Houston (UH), which is a Carnegie-designated Tier One Public Research University and the second most ethnically diverse major research university in the United States. Students come to UH from more than 137 nations and from across the world. In this study, for ten-year average, Hispanic students make up 35% of total participants, followed by Caucasian students of 31%, next is the African and American students of 16%, Asian students is in the fourth place of 12%, the rest students are from Native American, Pacific Islander and others. Most racial groups stay in pretty much the same percentage with a variation less than 5% each year. However, Hispanic group increased from 29% in 2013 to 47% in 2022, and Caucasian group dropped from 42% in 2013 to 17% in 2022. According to the US census, in the grand Houston area, Hispanic population is increasing while

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