

Chapter 13

Do College Students Benefit from Their Social Media Experience? Social Media Involvement and Its Impact on College Students' Self-Efficacy Perception

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ABSTRACT

As young people are increasingly dependent on Social Networking sites (SNS) to socialize, seek information, and self-broadcast, their SNS consumption has been found to be associated with social capital and social support in a positive way especially among individuals with low psychological assets. This exploratory study investigated SNS involvement in relation to college students' perceived self-efficacy change afterwards based on the social cognitive theory and literature review on social media effects studies. Undergraduate students ($N = 395$) in a Midwest U.S. public university participated in a web survey in September 2012. Results indicated a positive potential of involving in SNS activities to strengthen users' self-efficacy. Research data also point to the mediating roles of social support and social learning on SNS involvement and self-efficacy, especially among low self-efficacy college students with homogenous SNS networks. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8450-8.ch013

INTRODUCTION

College is a major life transition for young people, who usually face with challenges in different domains of life and need to gain various kinds of support to cope with problems and adjust to transitions. As the foundation of human agency, the self-efficacy belief is predictive of individuals' achievements and coping capability in adversities (Bandura, 1986). Although previous research on social media effects paid more attention to self-esteem, perception of self-efficacy, as a useful behavioral indicator and college educational goal, deserves more attention. In an age of building their self-efficacy, young people may constantly reassess themselves based on information they process from real-life or virtual environment. Applying the social cognitive theory in social media settings, this study examines students' self-reported self-efficacy change after using SNS as a proxy measure to explore the short-term positive effect of SNS involvement.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

SNS Attributes, Uses and Gratifications

Social networking sites are the latest online communication tools that allow users to create a public or private profile to interact with people in their networks (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). The first social networking site was founded back in the 90s but the success of the sites was obtained with the rise of MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter. The popularity of SNS has now become one of the Internet's most visible and intriguing phenomena. As of December 2012, there are more than a billion monthly active Facebook users and 618 million daily active users. Boyd and Ellison (2007) defined SNS as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (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". Young people have been in the forefront of SNS and spending time on social networking sites appears to be part of most U.S. young adults' daily activities (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Pew Research Center, 2010). As of December 2012, 86% of Internet users between 18 and 29 use Facebook (Pew Research Center, 2012). A recent study of 2,359 college students found that they spent almost two hours daily on Facebook (Bosker, 2013). The popularity of SNS can be explained from its unique attributes and capability of satisfying diversified needs. Four major and unique SNS attributes contribute to its popularity among college students are summarized as: richness, sociability, publicness, and participation.

Richness. The rich functionalities of SNS possesses contributes to its capability to satisfy diversified needs and its popularity. As a mediated communication channel with both attributes of mass media and interpersonal communication technologies, SNS not only serves as a multimedia platform providing traditional media content like news, picture, audio, or video, but also offers a combination of computer-mediated communication tools like instant messaging, blog, interest groups, bulletin boards, games, customized applications, and email (Ha & Hu, 2013; Mount & Garcia Martinez, 2014).

Sociability. Besides providing media content like traditional media, SNS also enables a many-to-many interactive communication model among SNS users and serves as a virtual social place for relationship initiation, maintenance, and development (Rafaeli, 1998). The friend list, as a fundamental SNS component, displays users' social connections. Other major SNS features, like searching, personal profile,

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