

Social impact of the social web

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Carnegie Mellon University

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LONGITUDINAL U. S. SURVEY

- Carnegie Mellon University June 2000 and March 2002 Study
- Effects of Internet Use and Social Resources on Changes in Depression
- Measure of depression and dysphoria
- 1,222 respondents (6 months later, 1011 respondents)
- Ages range: 13 to 101 - Median age: 44 years
- 85% were adults
- 43 % Men / 57% Women - 61% were married
- 89% Caucasian
- Median household income US\$30,000 - 50,000 (22 730€ - 37 880€)

DEPRESSION SYMPTOMS

- 12-item version of the CES-D (Radloff 1991)
- Experienced several symptoms of depression:
 - “My sleep was restless”
 - “I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with help from my family or friends.”
- Depressive or Dysphoria affect, not clinical depression

BUT WHAT IS DEPRESSION AND DYSPHORIA ?

- DSM IV (TR) - Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders- Fourth Edition Text Revision from the American Psychiatric Association, 2000 (DSM or DSM-IV)
- Current reference used by mental health professionals and physicians to diagnose mental disorders.
- Began publishing the DSM in 1952
- Latest edition was in 2000
- Updated edition expected in 2012
- The current DSM-IV-TR lists over 200 mental health conditions and the criteria required for each one in making an appropriate diagnosis
- **Dysphoria** is the opposite of euphoria and is defined as depressed mood, anxiety - a state of feeling unwell or unhappy.

DEPRESSION - MAJOR DEPRESSIVE EPISODE

By either subjective account or observation made by others:

- 5 or + of the following symptoms have been present during the same 2-week period and represent a change from previous functioning; at least one of the symptoms is either (1) depressed mood or (2) loss of interest or pleasure, Significant weight loss when not dieting or weight gain (e.g., a change of more than 5% of body weight in a month), or decrease or increase in appetite nearly every day.
- Nearly every day: insomnia or hypersomnia / psychomotor agitation or retardation / fatigue or loss of energy / feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt (may be delusional) / diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness / depressed mood most of the day / markedly diminished interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities most of the day
- Recurrent thoughts of death (not just fear of dying), recurrent suicidal ideation without a specific plan, or a suicide attempt or a specific plan for committing suicide

SOCIAL SUPPORT

- Social support was measured using the ISEL-12, a self-report scale measures respondents' perceptions of the availability of various types of social support such as practical help:

“If I had to go out of town for a few weeks, it would be difficult to find someone who would look after my house or apartment”

“When I need suggestions on how to deal with a personal problem, I know someone I can turn to”

“If I decide one afternoon that I would like to go to a movie that evening, I could easily find someone to go with me.”

SOCIAL NETWORK SIZE & EXTRAVERSION

- four questions to determine the size of their offline social network
- number of friends and number of relatives within an hour's drive and more than an hour's drive away.
- indicates one measure of the social resources available to the respondent.
- individual differences in extraversion was measured with 8 items from The Big Five Inventory

“I am talkative”

“I have an assertive personality”

“I am outgoing or sociable”

INTERNET USES

- Respondents' estimates of the frequency with which they used a computer or the Internet at home for different purposes in the previous six months
- 6 components of Internet use: communicating with friends and family, communicating in online groups and to meet people, retrieving and using information, seeking entertainment or escape, shopping and acquiring health information or talking about health, in health related support groups.
- Descriptive statistics and correlations among the control variables, social integration variables, internet use variables and depression
- Argument: social effects of using the Internet depend on people's their ways of using the Internet and, to some extent, on their existing social resources.

RESULTS

- Social augmentation hypothesis

Those who communicate with friends and family online to experience reduced depression, and we found support for this hypothesis. Results show this is true.

- Displacement hypothesis

Internet users who use the Internet to meet people would be distracted from maintaining their everyday close relationships with friends and family or perhaps would substitute Internet socializing for more valuable offline activities with friends and family. The results show that on average, and especially for those with high levels of social resources, use of the Internet to meet people increased depression.

RESULTS

➤ Social compensation hypothesis

People who used the Internet to meet people online who also had poor offline social resources would benefit from this use. Results did not show much support for this hypothesis.

In this study, those who had smaller social networks, less initial perceived social support, and who were more introverted did not experience the same levels of increased depression as did those with higher levels of social resources, but neither did we find strong evidence of declines in their levels of depression when they used the Internet to meet people.

STUDY CONCLUSIONS

- Internet is a composite technology with a wide range of uses, sharing some features of television, newspaper and telephone. Research demonstrated the value of decomposing Internet use into its components. When looked at as a whole, Internet use was not associated with changes in depression.
- **Who are you ?** – individual differences: personality, personal social context
- **Who are you interacting with ?** - matters a great deal when it comes to the psychological consequences of Internet use. People communicating with friends and family on the Internet showed reduced depression whereas participants communicating to meet new people showed increased depression, among those with higher levels of social support but not among those with low support.
- **What are you doing ?** - Social impact of technology internet related depend upon how it is used and that affects the relationship between Internet use and depression
- **What are your social resources ?** - People's social resources not only influenced their well being apart from their use of the Internet but also systematically interacted with their choices of how to use the Internet and with its effects.

MY OWN INPUT

- Non-social uses of the Internet for entertainment/escape and acquiring information had no discernable consequences for well-being (although those with higher levels of depression were highly likely to use the Internet for entertainment and escape).
- Internet use to meet people was a much less frequently reported purpose than using internet to communicate with family and friends. This predicted increases in depression especially among those with higher levels of social support
- Study information was collected from 2000 to 2002. This study is 8 to 10 years old, which is a lot considering the research field.
- Think about how much the internet uses and online communities have changed in the past 8 to 10 years. So has changed the impact on user's lives.
- Importance of conducting longitudinal research of the impact of actual technology in the future and also the impact of new technology that is developed in the future.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

- **Robert D. Putnam, Harvard University in 1995 Lecture**
- **Social Capital (SC)- Features of social life-networks, norms, and trust-that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives**
- **Refers to social connections and the attendant norms and trust**
- **The theory of SC presumes that, generally speaking, the more we connect with other people, the more we trust them, and vice versa.**
- **In several contexts this generally turns out to be true: social trust and civic engagement are strongly correlated.**

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

- Is it true that America's stock of social capital has diminished?

YES - Putnam's answer

- Does it matter?

YES - Putnam's answer

- What can we do about it?

Answering requires first understanding the causes of the strange malady afflicting American civic life.

This is the mystery I seek to unravel here: Why, beginning in the 1960s and accelerating in the 1970s and 1980s, did the fabric of American community life begin to fray? - Putnam's answer

TRENDS IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

- Evidence from a number of independent sources strongly suggests that America's stock of social capital has been shrinking for more than a quarter century.
- Membership records of such diverse organizations
- Time spent on informal socializing and visiting
- Individual politics participation activities increased, but collective politics decreased
- Decreased membership has afflicted all sorts of groups, from sports clubs, professional associations, literary discussion groups, labor unions and church attendance

WHY DOES IT REALLY MATTER ?

- SC allows citizens to resolve collective problems more easily. People often might be better off if they cooperate, with each doing her share.
- SC greases the wheels that allow communities to advance smoothly. Where people are trusting and trustworthy, and where they are subject to repeated interactions with fellow citizens, everyday business and social transactions are less costly.
- SC improves our lot is by widening our awareness of the many ways in which our fates are linked. When people lack connection to others, they are unable to test the veracity of their own views, whether in the give or take of casual conversation or in more formal deliberation. Without such an opportunity, people are more likely to be swayed by their worse impulses.

- The networks that constitute SC also serve as conduits for the flow of helpful information that facilitates achieving our goals.
- SC also operates through psychological and biological processes to improve individual's lives.
- Community connectedness is not just about warm fuzzy tales of civic triumph. In measurable and well-documented ways, SC makes an enormous difference to our lives.

DEMONSTRATED BENEFITS

- Child development is powerfully shaped by social capital. Trust, networks and norms of reciprocity within a child's family, school, peer group, and larger community have far reaching effects on their opportunities and choices, educational achievement, and hence on their behaviour and development.
- In high social-capital areas, public spaces are cleaner, people are friendlier, and the streets are safer. Traditional neighbourhood "risk factors" such as high poverty and residential mobility are not as significant as most people assume. Places have higher crime rates in large part because people don't participate in community organizations, don't supervise younger people, and aren't linked through networks of friends. (also verified by other authors studies)

- Where trust and social networks flourish, individuals, firms, neighbourhoods, and even nations prosper economically. Social capital can help to mitigate the insidious effects of socioeconomic disadvantage (suggested by a growing body of research)
- There appears to be a strong relationship between the possession of social capital and better health. 'As a rough rule of thumb, if you belong to no groups but decide to join one, you cut your risk of dying over the next year *in half*. Regular club attendance, volunteering, entertaining, or church attendance is the happiness equivalent of getting a college degree or more than doubling your income. Civic connections rival marriage and affluence as predictors of life happiness. (also verified by other authors studies)

WHY IS IT HAPPENNING (IN THEORY) ?

- **Business and time pressure**
- **Economic hard times**
- **Residential mobility**
- **Suburbanization**
- **Women as a paid labor force (stresses of two-career families)**
- **Disruption of marriage and family ties**
- **Changes in the structure of the American economy, such as the rise of chain stores, branch firms, and the service sector**
- **“The Sixties”, including - Vietnam, Watergate, and disillusion with public life**
- **The cultural revolt against authority (sex, drugs, and so on)**
- **Growth of the welfare state**
- **The civil rights revolution**
- **Television, the electronic revolution and other technological changes**

CONCLUSIONS

Although Putnam's theory was born previous to the internet use became available to almost everyone, the problems that it addresses are now even more actual.

Now, more than ever the huge decrease of face to face communication and interaction being replaced by distance communication.

I reckon that on online communications, many times faces and bodies are replaced by avatars and characters and physical interaction is none

As a result, communication is done without what is a substantial portion of our communication. We respond to thousands on nonverbal cues and behaviors.

THE END

While the role of non verbal communication has been widely studied and research since Charles Darwin's first mentioned it in his very well known 1872 publication: *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*.

I find it would be interesting to find out what more recent research finds about to what extend the online communication is similar, differs or compensates the differences towards the offline communication methods.

Hope you enjoyed my lecture and I inspired you think further about these matters.

Barbara

SOCIAL CAPITAL

- Social resources like trust and shared identity make it easier for people to work and play together.
- A network of people who have developed communication patterns and trust can accomplish much more than a bunch of strangers
- When a group draws on its social capital to act collectively, it will often generate even more social capital.
- The participation in clubs like and civic organizations reducing social capital

HOW SOCIAL CAPITAL WORKS

- Facilitate information routing
- Makes it easier for people to provide emotional support to each other
- Enables coordination of interdependent actions
- Help people overcome dilemmas of collective action

HOW TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP INCREASING SOCIAL CAPITAL?

- Reduce the cost of coordinating and publicizing activities.
- Try to invent new forms of togetherness that may be more suited to current lifestyles.
- Community networks are helping to publicize local organizations and activities, and are creating new spaces for public deliberation about civic matters

INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

- ICTs enables interactions that otherwise be cumbersome or impossible like communication at a distance or communication across time
- ICTs make it possible to interact with much larger social networks
- Messages can routinely reach hundreds or thousands of people on mailing lists and computers can help people monitor and aggregate information from many sources.
- Use ICTs to restrict information flows.

INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

- Access controls like emails an email list where moderators approve new members and new messages
- Calendar programs remind people of appointments and notification services alert them when messages arrive or other events occur.
- Can contribute to social capital through indirection in naming

SOCIAL TECHNICAL RELATIONS

What new kinds of social relations seem like promising forms of sociotechnical capital?

- **Enhanced Group Self-Awareness:** groups can use captured traces as a basis for reflection on their own activities like visualizations of who knows or interacts with whom
- **Brief interactions:** people can engage in short interactions, if the setup for each interaction is easy enough; technology-mediated communication can eliminate the need for co-location; monitoring and notification technologies can make it easy to coordinate schedules

SOCIAL TECHNICAL RELATIONS

- **Maintaining Ties While Spending Less Time:** either by actually spending less time interacting, or by doing other things while interacting
- **Support for large groups:** in larger groups, there are more opportunities for information and resource sharing, but it's difficult to coordinate these, and it is also difficult to overcome problems of collection action.
- **Introducer systems: just-in-time social ties:** in larger and diffuse groups technology can assist in the social process of introduce friends and colleagues to each other

SUMMARY

The concept of social capital provides of thinking about intermediate states, immediate effects of people's interactions that have long-term consequences

New forms of social relations can emerge that would be infeasible without computers mediating interactions and managing the interaction traces and artifacts that are created during interactions

It is clear that society is changing, and that older forms of togetherness that generated social capital no longer draw people in the way they once did

THE STRENGTH OF INTERNET TIES

People's communities are transforming:

The traditional human orientation to neighborhood- and village-based groups is moving towards communities that are oriented around geographically dispersed social networks.

The internet and email play an important role in maintaining these dispersed social networks.

With the help of the internet, people are able to maintain active contact with sizable social networks, even though many of the people in those networks do not live nearby

INTERNET & RELATIONSHIPS

In the early years of the internet some prophets felt that the internet would create a global village, transcending the boundaries of time and space

Does the time spend online damage our social connection?

A general concern is that the internet sucks people away from in person contact, fostering alienations and real-world disconnection

Now persons sit at they computer screens at home instead of going out and talk to neighbors across the street or visit relatives

INTERNET & RELATIONSHIPS

Some questions about the impact of the internet to our social relationships

- Does internet contact take away from people's in-person contacts or add to them?
- Relationships continue to flourish in the internet age?
- People's life on the screen is different of their real life?
- Do people's relationships (on- and offline) provide usable help?
- If people are not going to churches, the Lions Club, or scouting groups as much, has civic involvement died?

POSITIVE SOCIAL NETWORKING EFFECTS

- The internet is enabling people to maintain existing ties, often to strengthen them, and at times to forge new ties. The time that most people spend online reduces the time they spend on the relatively unsocial activities of watching TV and sleeping.
- A large amount of the communication that takes place online is with the same set of friends and family who are also contacted in person and by phone

TYPES OF SOCIAL TIES

- **Core Ties:** these are the people in a person's social networks with whom they have very close relationships
- **Significant Ties:** these are the people outside that ring of "core ties" in a person's social networks, who are somewhat closely connected.

The substantial numbers of core and significant ties show that most persons are not isolated.

CORE & SIGNIFICANT TIES

- We found that as the number of core ties grows, the percentage of those ties that represents immediate family members becomes smaller.
- Even with the flourishing of the internet, people still most commonly communicate with their social ties in traditional ways person and by landline phone.
- Even though people have a larger number of significant ties in their networks, they are in at least weekly contact with more of their core ties than with their significant ties.

CORE & SIGNIFICANT TIES

- Americans rely heavily on in-person encounters and telephones — both cell phones and landline phone to connect with core ties
- In-person meetings are the most widespread way by which significant ties are contacted weekly
- Landline phones have a more important role in connecting people with their core ties than with their significant ties.
- When people have internet access, email is important for maintaining contact with both core and significant ties

LARGE SOCIAL NETWORKS

- There are more people to socialize with and to provide social capital.
- There is the possibility for more diversity in larger networks
- It takes time and energy to maintain a large network
- The amounts of time people spend on in-person and phone contact with their core and significant ties, on a percent basis, decreases when they have large networks
- People contact the same percentage of core and significant ties at least once per week regardless of whether their networks are large, medium, or small.

EMAIL

- Those with higher percentages of core and significant ties living more than an hour away are the most active email users
- In comparison, phone contact, both landline and cell, and IM is not affected by the geographical dispersion of core ties
- Email does not replace other forms of contact for significant ties. The higher the percentage of significant ties contacted by email, the higher the percentage of significant ties contacted by other media.

GETTING HELP

- People use their social networks to seek information and advice
- People are generally more likely to turn for help to their core ties than to their significant ties.
- Those who are more heavily involved in community or professional groups, or who know people across a wide range of occupations, are more likely to draw on those networks for help
- Significant ties have a statistically significant, and positive, impact on the amount of help people say they have received

SUMMARY

- People routinely integrate the internet into the ways in which they communicate with each other, moving easily between phone, computer, and in-person encounters
- The internet it has made it easy for people to connect without living nearby and without knowing each other well
- The internet now helps people in maintaining ties with large and diversified networks.
- People not only socialize online, but they incorporate the internet into seeking information, exchanging advice, and making decisions.