

To Explore the Relationship between Socio-Demographic Factors and Online Social Capital among Undergraduate Students in Hong Kong

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Abstract

Along with the development of information technology, the concept of social capital has been extended to the online perspective. Major limitations of the offline social capital include the information was most often describing the socio-economic status of parents rather than the children per se. The main objectives of the study was to examine the current relationship and effect of the socio-demographic factors and online social capital. 298 students were recruited in a cross-sectional quantitative study. The Internet Social Capital Scale (ISCS) and 17 socio-demographic factors were assessed by self-reported measures. The correlation results found that mothers' education level and occupation level, living district, types of housing, types of the department, were significantly associated with both online bonding and online bridging. In addition, the father's education level and occupation level, perceived financial status were only associated with online bonding. Family income, course types, and job status were only associated with online bridging. According to the results of hierarchical linear regression, model 5 explained 25.9% of online social capital, $F(11,163) = 6.543, p < .001$. In details, mother occupation, housing types, types of departments, and perceived financial status were significant predictors to online social capital. The most important predictor was the housing group (including types of housing and living status), which uniquely explained 7.2% of the variation in online social capital. To conclude, the housing conditions were the most important factor that affected the online social capital among university students in the Hong Kong context.

Keywords: Online Social Capital, Socio-demographic, Students

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Introduction

Online social capital has been widely applied in different social sciences research. Previous study discovered that socio-demographic factors were related to online activities (Ma et al., 2016; Olsson & Viscovi, 2016; Morueta et al., 2016). Studies suggested that online activities were highly related to individual's capital accumulation (Aubrey & Rill, 2013; Burke & Kraut, 2016; Ellison et al., 2007; Ellison et al., 2011). However, the relationship between online social capital and socio-demographic factors were remain unclear. Thus, the study aimed at finding out the primary relationship between socio-demographic factors and online social capital in Hong Kong.

Body

The concept of social capital has been well-developed and applied in different social science perspectives in the offline context (Coleman, 1988; Murayama et al., 2012). Social capital referred to the individuals' resources that are allowed to access through social interaction (Khosravi et al., 2019). There were traditionally classify social capital in two types of capital: bridging social capital and bonding social (Granovetter, 1973; Putnam, 2000; Williams, 2006). The difference between bridging social capital and bonding social capital was the tie strength (Burke & Kraut, 2016; Chen & Li, 2017). The bonding social capital referred to an individual's connections within the community, and bridging social capital represented the connections between the community (Aldrich, 2012a, 2012b; Kawachi et al., 2004). Despite the offline context, along with the development of Information Communication Technology (ICT), the appearance of the internet allowed people to interact through social media and other online communications. Scholars indicated that resources were not limited in a tangible form, but also an intangible form (Einarsdóttir et al., 2019). Many studies discovered that social network sites could facilitate bridging social capital accumulation (Aubrey & Rill, 2013; Burke & Kraut, 2016; Ellison et al., 2007; Ellison et al., 2011). In the light of the literature, social capital could be accumulated in the online context.

Studies have discovered that socio-economic factors were associated with digital activates (Ma et al., 2016; Olsson & Viscovi, 2016; Morueta et al., 2016). But research on internet usage were mostly conducted in Western countries rather than in Asian countries (Teo, 2001). Moreover, there were fewer studies that aim to investigate the relationship between individual's socio-demographic factors and the internet. On the other hand, youth nowadays are active on Internet media (Chan & Fang, 2007). Internet communication has become an essential part of information transformation and integration in modern society (Ahmed et al., 2015). Internet communication allowed individuals to exchange knowledge, engaging with group members (Ahmed et al., 2015). This is believed is one type of capital transformation. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the relationship between an individual's socio-demographic factors and the internet.

In the light of the literature review, it is assumed that socio-demographic background was one of the indicators of internet use among youth, and here we used online social capital to represent the information transformation and communication on the internet.

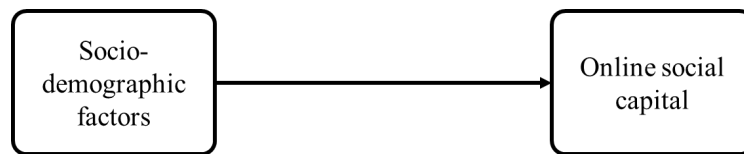


Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework of Presented Study.

There were seventeen socio-demographic factors included in the study as the independent variables, such as parent's education level, parents' occupation, family income, etc. The online social capital is the dependent variable. The Internet Social Capital Scale developed by Williams (2006) was used to measure the youth's online social capital, this scale included two subscales online bonding and online bridging.

To examine the relationship between socio-demographic factors and online social capital, Pearson correlation and hierarchical linear model were applied. All data were analysed on the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS, version 26). The overall significant level and confidence interval were set at 5% and 95%.

The correlation results found that mothers' education level and occupation level, living district, types of housing, types of school, were significantly associated with both online bonding and online bridging. In addition, the father's education level and occupation level and perceived financial status was only associated with online bonding. Family income, course types, and job status were only associated with online bridging. According to the results of hierarchical linear regression, model 5 explained 25.9% of online social capital, $F(11,163) = 6.543, p < .001$. In detail, mother occupation, housing types, types of school, and perceived financial status were significant predictors to online social capital. The most important predictor was the housing group (including types of housing and living district), which uniquely explained 7.2% of the variation in online social capital.

Conclusion

To conclude, the housing conditions were the most important factor that affected the online social capital among university students in the Hong Kong context. Since Hong Kong has the highest property price in the world, the result further proves that the housing conditions are reflected in the individual's scale of capital. On the other hand, the study found that the mother's occupation and education level were more important to the youth's online social capital accumulation when compared to the father's. At last, this study indicated the importance of demographic factors in shaping youth's online social capital. Further study is needed to examine how demographic factors in shaping the online social capital accumulation process.

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