

*The Relationship between Social Support and Self-Esteem to the Self-Disclosure of
Social Media on Older Adults*

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Abstract

Social Media profoundly changed people's daily life experiences. Whether it is to collect information, consumer trading, and express their viewpoints, participate in activities or making friends all connected with social media. Social Media is also the future of global mainstream business opportunities, although the elderly is not the main users. During 2009-2010, media survey reveal that 88% of middle-aged (50-64 years old) using a network growth trends, and the elderly (over 65 years) with a growth rate of 100%. The trend of an aging population makes the older adults become a mainstream consumer market, but also have to face the inescapable media impact. The group of older adults into using social media is the target. Self-disclosure is the individual's behaviors in relationships with others to maintain performance; social support is the individual whether or not to accept the external recognition and finally support feelings; self-esteem is a long-term evaluation of the individual. The purpose of this research was to examine the relationship among self-disclosure, social support and self-esteem on social media. Three types of perceived social support, emotion, information and tangibility of social support, and amount, depth, honesty, valence and intentionality of self-disclosure were also examined. The results show that older users with high self-disclosures, especially on the depth, honesty and intentionality are higher on social support and self-esteem. Intentionality and depth of self-disclosures can significantly be predictors of older users' emotional and tangible support. Honesty of self-disclosures can significantly be a predictor of older users' self-esteem.

Keywords: Social media, Self disclosure, Social support, Self-esteem, Older adult

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Introduction

Many older adults believe that they make less of a contribution to society and that they participate in fewer social activities than in their past. Being older has traditionally also been associated with low status and non-competitiveness, especially in Asian cultures, such as Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and South Korea (Cuddy *et al.*, 2008). Currently, many older adults are more confident, active and hold a stronger position in society. They feel good about this stage of their lives, use information and communication technologies to contact friends and may attend e-learning programs or activities to improve their lifestyle.

Social Media and Self-disclosure

Social media, presented as a combination of all previous communication technologies, have become immensely popular (Bargh and McKenna, 2004). Indications are that social media primarily involve the consumption of digital media, and are primarily used for communication and interaction, rather than to acquire information. This includes services such as chatting, instant messaging, micro blogging and social networking sites. The trend of using social media is being accelerated by the pervasive use of the smart phone. It has become a tool for bringing individuals with the same interests or social connections into contact (Ellison *et al.*, 2007), allowing users to sustain and strengthen their social relationships by exchanging information, announcing events through status updates, posing for photos or reading news feeds. The use of social media may result in stronger relationships than may be possible through face to face methods (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010; Ross *et al.*, 2009).

Building trust online with strangers seems to be difficult and with lower internet experience and minor functional limitations (Chadwick-Dias *et al.*, 2007), but older adults engaging in social activities would increase their chances of their enjoying a successful retirement. Older adults' well-being was significantly increased by their use of the internet, i.e. by increasing interpersonal contact (Sharpira *et al.*, 2007). Social media seems well suited to the needs of older adults, particularly to keep them connected to friends and family members, but also to increase their opportunities to partake in social activities.

Self-disclosure is considered as an important concept in social psychology and a behavior which involves disclosing personal information and sharing privacy (Attrill

& Jalil, 2011). Over time, the breadth and depth of self-disclosed information would enhance a sense of trust and the feeling of intimacy between individuals. As such, self-disclosure is also an important factor in relationship development (Derlega et al., 1987). An individual would not reveal information about oneself to another person arbitrarily. A process of reciprocal information exchange is essential for two parties involved in communication. That is, the other party has to reveal personal information in order to facilitate relationship development (Park, Jin, & Jin, 2011). According to research on self-disclosure behavior on social media, in the self-expression process in the community, the users gain opportunities to establish connection and social relationships with others, thus in turn, enhance their subjective sense of wellbeing (Ko & Kuo, 2009). Hollenbaugh (2010) proposed that an individual's self-disclosure behavior is subject to gender, personality traits, and the intention to satisfy various utilitarian and recreational purposes, all of which stimulate the volume and depth of self-disclosure. Park, Jin and Jin (2011) stated that the amount and positivity of factors in self-disclosure would enhance friends' impression and fondness of users, and further reinforce their friendship and intimacy. However, the honesty and intentionality for self-disclosure have no direct association with the extent to which the friendship is reinforced.

Social Support and Self-esteem

Social support is a mode of interaction when individuals seek emotional or substantive support when they are under stress or encounter setbacks. Social support includes instrumental, informational, and value support. Faced with changes in the environment, individuals could use some positive support from other people, groups, or organizations. Cobb (1976) proposed that social support has the effect of giving information support and forming a reciprocal interpersonal relationship. Such exchange satisfies individuals' social needs and has the function of protection. When stress in life becomes too overwhelming for an individual to cope with, his/her self-esteem would be threatened. Positive social relationships give the individual a more balanced psychological state and reduce the individual's negative psychological state. Also, the regulatory function of such social relationships gives support to the individual's emotions and affirms the individual's self-worth. On the contrary, an instable state is likely to lead to assaults or unfriendly attitudes.

Self-esteem is an overall emotional judgment that an individual makes after factoring in the individual's self-perception, self-value, and perceived self-importance. Self-esteem has a close association with self-consciousness. Psychologists define

self-esteem as a lasting personality trait, an indicator of subjective wellbeing, and an important factor in psychological health and the quality of life. An individual could have high self-esteem or low self-esteem. High self-esteem has a positive relationship with positive features such as life satisfaction, social support, independence, adaptation, and positive adjustment. In contrast, low self-esteem leads to negative emotions, and negative psychological states thoughts lead to various non-adaptive psychological states and behaviors, which affect an individual's attitudes towards life and interpersonal relationship performance (Gibbs et al., 2006).

There is a positive correlation between social support and self-esteem, both of which are indicators of an individual's social psychology. This study observed older adults' self-disclosure behavior on social media, in order to infer the extent of the social support they receive and their sense of self-esteem. Compared to traditional media, social media have changed the modes and immediacy of interpersonal communication. Hence, the behavioral models of social media have become effective tools to understand regulatory function of social relationships for individuals and individuals' self-evaluation.

Research design

The subjects of this study were 229 older adults aged between 45 and 79 years old, in the early stage, onset stage, and middle stage of seniorhood, and have the experience of using social media. The questionnaire was based on a 5-point Likert scale. SPSS was employed to test the research hypotheses. T test and Pearson correlation and regression analysis were adopted to the research significance and correlation. The first part of the questionnaire concerns the subjects' basic information and usage of social media (Facebook); the second part explores the subjects' self-disclosure on social media; the third part investigates the subjects' self-evaluated social support and self-esteem.

Self-disclosure is measured by using a self-disclosure scale proposed by Gibbs et al. (2006). The scale contains five dimensions of self-disclosure: amount, depth, honesty, valence and intentionality. In particular, "amount" refers to the frequency and duration of self-disclosure; "depth" refers to the depth of information that an individual discloses; "honesty" refers to the truthfulness of information that an individual discloses; "valence" refers to the different impacts of the disclosed information, including positive and negative information; "intentionality" refers to an individual's intentionality to disclose information about him or herself voluntarily.

Social support is measured by using the multidimensional Berlin Social-Support Scales (BSSS), which covers three aspects, including tangibility, emotion, and information (Ralf & Ute, 2000). Self-esteem is measured by using the broadly-applied Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES), which has confirmed reliability and validity (Schmitt & Allik, 2005; Leung & Wong, 2007).

The purpose of this research is intended to explore the correlations among high/low self-disclosure, social support received by the subjects, and their self-esteem. Second, it aims to determine whether the five dimensions of self-disclosure could be used to predict variables of social support and self-esteem of older adults show use social media.

Analysis

The results of the reliability test showed that the Cronbach's α of self-disclosure is .724, that of social support is .820, and that of self-esteem is .772. This suggests that the items have high consistency. In other words, the questionnaire items on older adults' self-disclosure, social support, and self-esteem are fairly reliable.

Among the subjects, 54.1% are male and 45.9% are female; 45.4% are aged 45-54 years old, 31.4% are 55-64 years old, and 23.1% are 65-79 years old; 78.6% have an educational level of high school/vocational high school; nearly 70% work part-time and not retired; 47.6% have individual income of over \$40,000 NTD (about \$1250 USD).

The results of descriptive statistics on the subjects' use of social media (Facebook) showed that most of subjects have used social media for 1-3 years, followed by over 7 years; 65% of the subjects use social media once per day or more, most of which spend less than 60 minutes on social media; 34.1% have 10-50 Facebook friends, and 17.5% have over 200 Facebook friends. Given that 22.3% of the subjects have used social media for over 7 years and 30.6% spend 1-3 hours per day on social media, it is clear that though older adults have only been exposed to social media for a relatively short time, there are heavy users.

The results of differential test on self-disclosure, social support, and self-esteem revealed that for the main variables and all dimensions, $p < .05$, showing a statistically significant difference on the subjects' self-disclosure, social support, and self-esteem (see Table 1). The test results on the correlation of high/low self-disclosure with

social support and self-esteem showed that social support, emotional support, instrumental support, and self-esteem all have a p-value less than .05, indicating that older adults' different extent of self-disclosure has no significant difference on informational social support (see Table 2).

Table 1 T test of self-disclosure, social support and self-esteem

	N	Mean	SD	DF	T	P
Self-disclosure	229	3.28	.395	228	11.073	.000**
SD_amount	229	2.67	.612	228	-8.070	.000**
SD_depth	229	3.14	.815	228	2.736	.007**
SD_honesty	229	3.51	.606	228	12.721	.000**
SD_valence	229	3.54	.575	228	14.319	.000**
SD_intentality	229	3.56	.508	228	12.019	.000**
Social Support	229	3.85	.501	228	25.710	.000**
SS_emotion	229	3.85	.611	228	21.158	.000**
SS_information	229	3.90	.539	228	25.311	.000**
SS_tangibility	229	3.79	.607	228	20.092	.000**
Self-esteem	229	3.93	.508	228	27.802	.000**

Note: *P<.05, **P<.01

Table 2 The relationship of social support and self-esteem on high and low self-disclosure

High/Low self-disclosure		SS	Df	MS	F	P
Social Support (SS)	within	.975	1	.975	3.933	.049*
	between	56.298	227	.248		
	total	57.273	228			
SS_Emotion	within	2.739	1	2.739	7.544	.007**
	between	82.409	227	.363		
	total	85.148	228			
SS_Information	within	.011	1	.011	.036	.849
	between	66.367	227	.292		
	total	66.377	228			
SS_Tangibility	within	1.453	1	1.453	4.079	.045*
	between	80.840	227	.356		
	total	82.292	228			
Self-esteem	within	1.506	1	1.506	5.952	.015*
	between	57.429	227	.253		
	total	58.934	228			

Note: *P<.05; **P<.01

The results of Pearson correlation on the variables indicated that there is a significant correlation between the three dimensions of social support and self-esteem. However, there is no correlation between the amount of self-disclosure, social support, and self-esteem. The depth, honesty, and intentionality of self-disclosure are significantly correlated with emotional and tangible support. There is no significant correlation between informational social support and self-disclosure. The valence of self-disclosure is only correlated with self-esteem (see Table 3).

Table 3 Person correlation of self-disclosure (SD), social support (SS) and self-esteem (SE)

SD1	Amount	SD1							
SD2	Depth	.316**	SD2						
SD3	Honesty	.085	.500**	SD3					
SD4	Valence	-.236**	.044	.299**	SD4				
SD5	Intentionality	-.156*	.280**	.328**	.262**	SD5			
SS1	Emotion	.051	.274**	.234**	.118	.263**	SS1		
SS2	Information	.057	.127	.057	-.084	.125	.595**	SS2	
SS3	Tangibility	.094	.208**	.218**	.086	.228**	.653**	.560**	SS3
SE	Self-esteem	.034	.220**	.363**	.182**	.187**	.426**	.344**	.335**

Note: *P<.05, **P<.01

Table 4 A logistic regression analysis on self-disclosure and social support

Model Summary(c)

Model	R	R square	adj of R square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	sig
1	.243(a)	.059	.055	.487	14.256	.000**(a)
2	.302(b)	.091	.083	.479	11.341	.000**(b)

a. Predictor: (Constant), Intentionality of self-disclosure

b. Predictor: (Constant), Intentionality of self-disclosure, Depth of self-disclosure

c. Dependent variable: Social support

Coefficient (a)

Model		Unstd. Coefficients		Std. Coefficients	t	sig
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.245	.164		19.821	.000**
	Intentionality	.170	.045	.243	3.776	.000**
2	(Constant)	3.015	.181		16.676	.000**
	Intentionality	.133	.046	.191	2.887	.004**

Depth	.115	.041	.187	2.826	.005**
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a. Dependent variable: Social support

See table 4, $F(1,227)=14.256$, $p<.01$ and $F(2,226)=11.341$, $p<.01$, intentionality and depth of self-disclosure can be predictors of older adults' integrated social support. See table 5, $F(1,227)=18.485$, $p<.01$ and $F(2,226)=14.397$, $p<.01$, intentionality and depth of self-disclosure also can be predictors of older adults' emotional support. See table 6, $F(1,227)=12.442$, $p<.01$ and $F(2,226)=9.162$, $p<.01$, intentionality and honesty of self-disclosure can be predictors of older adults' tangible support. See table 7, $F(1,227)=34.400$, $p<.01$, honesty of self-disclosure can be a predictor of older adults' self-esteem. Sum up, Intentionality and depth of self-disclosures can significantly be predictors of older users' emotional and tangible support. Honesty of self-disclosures can significantly be predictors of older users' self-esteem (see Table 4-Table 7).

Table 5 A logistic regression analysis on self-disclosure and emotion of social support

Model	R	R square	adj of R square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	sig
1	.274(a)	.075	.071	.588	18.485	.000**(a)
2	.336(b)	.113	.105	.578	14.397	.000**(b)

a. Predictor: (Constant), Depth of self-disclosure

b. Predictor: (Constant), Depth of self-disclosure, Intentionality of self-disclosure

c. Dependent variable: Emotion of social support

Model		Unstd. Coefficients		Std. Coefficients	t	sig
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.207	.156		20.615	.000**
	Depth	.206	.048	.274	4.299	.000**
2	(Constant)	2.726	.218		12.517	.000**
	Depth	.163	.049	.218	3.335	.001**
	Intentionality	.172	.056	.202	3.100	.002**

a. Dependent variable: Emotion of social support

Table 6 A logistic regression analysis on self-disclosure and tangibility of social support

Model Summary(c)						
Model	R	R square	adj of R square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	sig
1	.228(a)	.052	.048	.586	12.442	.001**(a)
2	.274(b)	.075	.067	.580	9.162	.000**(b)

a. Predictor: (Constant), Intentionality of self-disclosure

b. Predictor: (Constant), Intentionality of self-disclosure, Honesty of self-disclosure

c. Dependent variable: Tangibility of social support

Coefficient (a)						
Model		Unstd. Coefficients		Std. Coefficients	t	sig
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.116	.197		15.818	.000**
	Intentionality	.191	.054	.228	3.527	.001**
2	(Constant)	2.716	.258		10.526	.000**
	Intentionality	.147	.057	.175	2.587	.010*
	Honesty	.159	.067	.161	2.373	.019*

a. Dependent variable: Tangibility of social support

Table 7 A logistic regression analysis on self-disclosure and self-esteem

Model Summary(c)						
Model	R	R square	adj of R square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	sig
1	.363(a)	.132	.128	.474	34.400	.000**(a)

a. Predictor: (Constant), Honesty of self-disclosure

b. Dependent variable: Self-esteem

Coefficient (a)						
Model		Unstd. Coefficients		Std. Coefficients	t	sig
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.867	.185		15.535	.000**
	Honesty	.304	.052	.363	5.865	.000**

a. Dependent variable: Self-esteem

Discussion

Social media activities, social support received by older adults, and their self-esteem are influenced by the opportunities to interact with other people. Older adults are positively and highly satisfied in the emotional, informational, and tangible dimensions of social support, indicating that social media have the value of meeting and satisfying older users' social needs. Compared with people who have low self-disclosure behavior, those with high self-disclosure behavior do obtain more emotional support and self-approval. That is, when older users are willing to take the initiative to express themselves and share with others, their connection with others and their social relationships would be improved, their self-worth would be enhanced, and their interpersonal relationships would be better. In particular, the depth, intentionality, and honesty of self-disclosed information are the most important. It means that when older users give their personal information, reveal truthful information and personal intentionality, they can effectively improve their friendship with others in the social community and others' emotional feedback. However, neither does the amount of information nor the positive or negative content of information affect older users' positive support and self-evaluation.

Conclusion

This study explored older adults' self-disclosure behavior on social media, in order to understand the difference in their social support and self-esteem. The observation on the subjects' self-disclosure behavior revealed the support and evaluation that older adults receive on social media. Based on this, we could have an understanding of users' traits so as to establish grounds for selecting a particular group or determining the effects of communication. The majority of subjects in this study are still in the workforce, highly receptive to social media, and some of them are heavy social media users. It indicates that older adults' ability to give up a conservative attitude towards emerging media is associated with their positive and open acceptance of the mobile trend. There is a correlation between social support received by older adults and their self-esteem. Also, most social media users are in the category of high social support and high self-esteem. Older adults' high digital information literacy skills would continue to manifest in social communication and behavioral performance in the future. The impacts of social media on older adults will expand in the future. It is foreseeable that many years from now, older adults in the late stage of seniorhood might become a new generation that could interact and communicate on social media more comfortably. The impacts of social media may continue their impressive buying power and effects of communication.

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