

Social Capital and Social Media

The Effects of Social Media Use on Perceived and Real Political and Community Involvement

Research Questions:

- Does increasing use of social media result in changing levels of community and political involvement?
- Does increasing use of social media result in a greater "feeling" of political/community involvement?

Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to look at the effect of social media use on social capital. This paper attempts to establish a dichotomy between 'real' and 'perceived' social capital and the effect of social media use on both. I use a survey instrument measuring both the social media use and 'real' social capital of one group compared with the social media use and 'perceived' social capital of the second group. I find that while social media use is related with survey respondents feeling more involved politically and in their community, there is no correlation between actual political/community involvement for other respondents.

Hypothesis:

- My goal in creating the survey experiment was to test for two distinct involvement sets, which I termed "real" involvement and "perceived" involvement. The theory behind my choice was the idea that social media use would have no effect in contributing to real or measurable involvement, but that social media use does lead people to feel like they've done more.
- If greater social media use does indeed lead people to feel like they have done more, on average there will be a higher score for the "feeling" measurable variables than the "real" involvement variables

Existing Research:

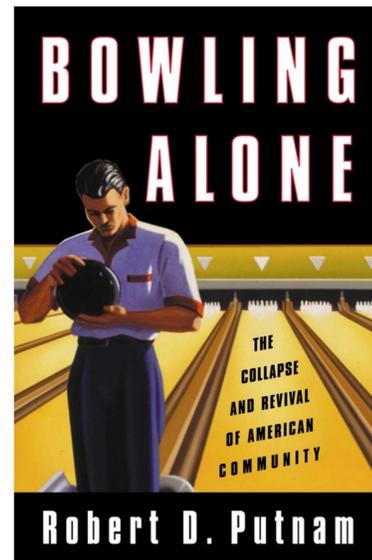
-Historical Definitions: collectivization in the pursuit of some form of betterment

-Putnam's *Bowling Alone* "bonding" vs "bridging" social capital

-Fears of the deterioration of social capital due to expanding technologies (TV)

-The internet as an emerging technology, is it similar to TV? Or is it a new technology that can help reinforce "bonding" social capital?

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Experimental Design

- I gathered a total of 678 respondents using MTurk human intelligence software, directed respondents to BU's Qualtrics portal.
- Respondents all received basic demographics questions from the HSCCS and my own questions measuring social media use
- Respondents were then randomly assigned to two experimental groupings. One group received questions measuring "real involvement" (taken from HSCCS), the other received questions measuring "perceived" involvement" (my own creation)

Summary Statistics

307 Women (45.3%) 371 Men (54.7%)	597 voters (88.1%) 81 non voters (11.9%)	152 Conservatives (22.4%) 199 Independents (29.4%) 326 Democrats (48.2%)
154 Age 15-24 (22.7%) 303 Age 25-34 (44.5%) 115 Age 35-44 (17%) 65 Age 45-54 (9.6%) 32 Age 55-64 (4.7%) 6 Age 65- (.9%)	3 Less than High School (.05%) 79 Only High School (11.7%) 181 Some College (27%) 84 Associates' (12.4%) 227 Bachelors' (33.5%) 19 Some Graduate (2.8%) 82 Graduate Degree (12.1%)	224 Make less than \$30,000 yearly (33%) 454 make more than \$30,000 yearly (67%)

Results

Voting and Social Media Use	(1) voter	(2) voter	(3) voter
social media use	0.005 (0.34)	0.007 (0.48)	0.013 (0.97)
education		0.038 (4.62)**	0.035 (4.23)**
age			0.026 (2.35)*
Constant	1.884 (152.03)**	1.725 (47.21)**	1.649 (34.05)**
Observations	671	671	671
R-squared	0.00	0.03	0.04

Absolute value of t statistics in parentheses
* significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%

Volunteerism and Social Media Use	(1) volunteered	(2) volunteered	(3) volunteered
social media use	0.090 (0.94)	0.092 (0.96)	0.100 (1.03)
education		0.064 (1.17)	0.061 (1.11)
age			0.044 (0.55)
Constant	0.959 (11.49)**	0.683 (2.72)**	0.548 (1.56)
Observations	330	330	330
R-squared	0.00	0.01	0.01

Absolute value of t statistics in parentheses
* significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%

Public Meeting Attendance and Social Media Use	(1) public meeting	(2) public meeting	(3) meeting
social media use	0.055 (1.86)	0.056 (1.89)	0.067 (2.26)*
education		0.026 (1.52)	0.022 (1.29)
age			0.063 (2.53)*
Constant	0.336 (12.98)**	0.224 (2.88)**	0.033 (0.31)
Observations	332	332	332
R-squared	0.01	0.02	0.04

Absolute value of t statistics in parentheses
* significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%

Feeling of Community Involvement and Social Media Use	(1) Feeling	(2) Feeling	(3) Feeling
social media	0.358 (2.35)*	0.379 (2.54)*	0.388 (2.51)*
education		0.371 (3.97)**	0.367 (3.84)**
age			0.026 (0.21)
Constant	3.507 (24.65)**	1.954 (4.71)**	1.885 (3.57)**
Observations	333	333	333
R-squared	0.02	0.06	0.06

Absolute value of t statistics in parentheses
* significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%

Feeling of Political Involvement and Social Media Use	(1) Feeling	(2) Feeling	(3) Feeling
Social media use	0.259 (1.55)	0.282 (1.73)	0.320 (1.89)
education		0.396 (3.88)**	0.377 (3.62)**
age			0.117 (0.87)
Constant	3.906 (25.15)**	2.250 (4.96)**	1.940 (3.36)**
Observations	333	333	333
R-squared	0.01	0.05	0.05

Absolute value of t statistics in parentheses
* significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%

Additive Measure for Involvement and Social Media Use	(1) feeling additive	(2) feeling additive	(3) feeling additive
Social Media Use	0.616 (2.20)*	0.661 (2.43)*	0.708 (2.51)*
education		0.767 (4.51)**	0.744 (4.28)**
age			0.143 (0.64)
Constant	7.413 (28.40)**	4.204 (5.56)**	3.825 (3.98)**
Observations	333	333	333
R-squared	0.01	0.07	0.07

Absolute value of t statistics in parentheses
* significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%

Findings:

- Unlike TV for Putnam and unlike the doomsayers' predictions, social media use does not appear to be correlated with drop offs in participation either. When regressed against social media use, my 'real' involvement measures have very limited affects, providing support to my alternative hypothesis that social media is neither the great connector, or another force destroying America's civic community.
- Importantly, my findings imply that people are more and more likely to feel like they are doing more, when they really are not. Actual involvement appears mostly stagnant. At least some part of this, I argue, should be attributed to the more time they spend using social media. Still, because real involvement shows no positive or negative correlation with social media use, I don't think there is cause to worry that social media use is further contributing to the deterioration of social capital.

Discussion

The evidence I present implies that the more time people spend on social media, whether it be 'liking' candidate pages or causes, joining a community or political 'group', or even posting statuses advocating for causes gives them the same type of feeling a more tangible involvement might. I also show that this same greater use of social media has no meaningful effect on people going out and taking part in more real world activities. Essentially, it indicates that people are more than happy to 'like' something on Facebook or some other social media site without feeling the need to actually go out and take part in the cause for which they have