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“People You May (or May Not) Know:” Usage Intensity, Status Motivation, and Intimate Self-Disclosure as Predictors of Bridging Social Capital on Facebook

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PEOPLE YOU MAY (OR MAY NOT) KNOW: USAGE INTENSITY, STATUS MOTIVATION, AND INTIMATE SELF-DISCLOSURE AS PREDICTORS OF BRIDGING SOCIAL CAPITAL ON FACEBOOK

Ryan Paul Castillo
Western Michigan University

Introduction

Social networking sites (SNS) such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, allow not only for the formation and maintenance of both casual and intimate relationships, but offer individuals an unprecedented degree of control over their self-presentation as users exchange information over channels unbound by spatial and temporal restrictions. Currently, 71% of adults in the United States use SNS, a nearly sevenfold increase over the past decade (Poushter 2016). Individuals from ages 18 to 29 are the most common users, with 90% among this age group using social media (Poushter 2016). In recent years, the increasing popularity, pervasiveness, and even necessity of SNS has attracted the attention of researchers in the field of online communication who are interested in gaining insight into the potential benefits and adversities of involvement in these extensive, diverse platforms.

Facebook, currently the most popular social networking platform online, hosted an average of over 1.7 billion monthly active users as of July 2016 (Facebook Press Release 2016; Poushter 2016). Although there are countless alternatives for online social networking, users and researchers alike are drawn to Facebook (FB) by its distinct communicative features. Unlike other popular sites that restrict users to sharing limited-character posts, captioned photos, or strictly public information, FB permits users to connect in a variety of ways, from instant messaging and restricted groups, to their own public profiles and open community pages. Moreover, the site places few restrictions on the type and amount of content that can be shared (e.g. photos, videos, links to other websites, etc.). Arguably the most unique aspect of FB, however, is the ease with which users are able to browse the network and connect with others, as the site suggests ‘people you may know’ and offers a search function that locates other users by name, personal information, mutual group affiliations, and general profile content. In sum, Facebook constitutes a vast, diverse online network that permits users to selectively share self-information, maintain connections with offline acquaintances, and form relationships with other users whom they may not know personally via shared interests, common contacts, or by simply browsing the network (Attrill and Jalil 2011; Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe 2007; Maghrabi et al. 2014; Walther et al. 2008).
Social Networking Site Use and Social Capital

The large, heterogeneous networks afforded by SNS has prompted a considerable amount of research that examines the effects of involvement in these online mediums on users' access to, and accrual of, social capital. Although the concept has come to be understood differently across the social scientific community (see for example Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), Robert Putnam’s (1995:67) more recent conception of social capital has been popularized due to his introduction of dimensionality into the construct, which broadly refers to “the features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.” More specifically, Putnam (2000) views social capital as a means of strengthening connections among individuals of relatively homogenous groupings and expanding connections between members of a broad range of social groups. As such, Putnam makes the distinction between two dimensions of social capital: bonding is characteristic of more homogenous social groupings and has the potential to reinforce exclusive identities and provide individuals with emotional support, social support, and feelings of trust; bridging social capital, on the other hand, is characteristic of interactions between members of diverse groupings and has the potential to broaden social identities, informational access, and worldviews (Putnam 2000:22-23). Thus, in Putnam’s terms, the concept of social capital can be used to understand how individuals’ feelings of security, as well as their access to information, emotional support, and general social support are shaped by the composition of the various networks within which they interact, and the ways in which exposure to varying degrees of homogeneity and heterogeneity influences group solidarity and intergroup involvement.

Whereas the relationship between SNS use and bonding social capital is not widely agreed upon among researchers, previous studies have often linked SNS use to increases in bridging social capital (Aubrey and Rill 2013; Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe 2011; Hofer and Aubert 2013). Given the wide-ranging, heterogeneous networks hosted by SNS, individuals are often exposed to profiles that highlight differences among users (Ellison et al. 2011; Hofer and Aubert 2013; Maghrabi et al. 2014). As Ellison et al. (2011) found in their study of FB users, initiating interaction with strangers on the site was not significantly related to increases in bridging social capital. Rather, using the site to explore others’ profiles and learn more about them (i.e. social information-seeking) was positively related to perceptions of bridging. This makes sense given other studies which have found that SNS users are more likely to directly interact with those whom they are already acquainted (Ellison et al. 2007; Walther et al. 2008).

The greater influence of publicly available information on users’ perception of bridging capital can likely be attributed to how such information is customarily assessed by users of these platforms. It has been suggested that SNS users present information about themselves selectively in order to appeal to various subsets of their online network by emphasizing certain personal characteristics via profiles and posts (Ellison, Heino and Gibbs 2006; Maghrabi et al. 2014). As Bazarova (2012) found in her study of undergraduate Facebook users, intimate information shared publicly was both considered inappropriate and misinterpreted as less intimate by its receivers, consequently rendering the
sender less attractive to their audience. Both the ability to selectively present oneself on SNS and the restrictions placed on posted information in terms of perceived appropriateness and attractiveness suggests that the publicly available information that exposes users to differences among members of the network serves a “relational maintenance” function rather than a means whereby they are able to form strong ties with others (Tong & Walther 2011). In other words, access to social capital on SNS may be founded on the presentation of more ‘superficial’ information that is motivated not only for reasons of sociability, but by a concern with status (Aubrey and Rill 2013; Maghrabi et al. 2014). Information shared in this way may neither prompt nor permit users to seek the close connections requisite of bonding capital, but likely provides the necessary exposure to diverse opinions, beliefs, and worldviews required to positively impact users’ access to bridging social capital.

While there is ample evidence in support of a link between SNS use and bridging capital, past studies commonly disagree on which elements primarily account for this association, highlighting disjointed aspects of online interaction, such as user motivation, the number of ‘friends’ one has on a social networking platform, and time spent online (Chang and Hsiao 2013; Hofer and Aubert 2013). Although research has revealed significant relationships between these variables and social capital, other important elements of online interaction that may help to reconcile often conflicting findings remain considerably understudied within the field. Self-disclosure, the sharing of self-information with a single individual or a multitude of others, is a process that occurs in all interactive online mediums. In her studies of online self-disclosure, Attrill (2012) found that users are more likely to disclose superficial self-information in both private and public contexts on SNS, and that positive attitudes toward forming relationships online are not related to increases in intimate self-disclosure (Attrill and Jalil 2011). These findings are in keeping with Tong and Walther’s (2011) contention that SNS is better suited for relational maintenance via the public sharing of mundane personal information rather than the formation of strong ties via intimate self-disclosure, and suggest that the self-expositional nature of communication on SNS involves meeting socially acceptable standards of information sharing (Bazaravo 2012). Still, the factors found to impact bridging capital via online interactions, such as concerns with self-presentation, self-disclosure, routine use, and time spent online remain sporadic within the literature and are oftentimes incompatible (Attrill and Jalil 2011; Aubrey and Rill 2013; Hofer and Aubert 2013. In an attempt to synthesize these elements of SNS use under one model and gain a better understanding of their interplay, this study will test several hypotheses involving usage intensity, status motivations, and intimate self-disclosure on public profiles as predictors of bridging social capital.

Given that 1) FB use has been found to positively predict bridging social capital (Ellison et al. 2007; Liu and Brown 2014), 2) SNS users are exposed to heterogeneity via information shared on public profiles (Ellison et al. 2011; Hofer and Aubert 2013), and 3) users may selectively disclose self-information in order to appeal to subsets of a diverse online network (Maghrabi et al. 2014), we can expect to find that:

Hypothesis 1: Usage intensity will be positively associated with bridging social
Hypothesis 2: Status motivations will be positively associated with bridging social capital.

Also, given that 1) intimate self-disclosure in public contexts on FB decreases the social attractiveness of the sender (Bazarova 2012), and 2) users are more likely to disclose superficial rather than intimate information in all contexts on SNS (Attrill and Jalil 2011), we can expect to find that:

Hypothesis 3: Self-disclosure of intimate information on public profiles will be negatively associated with bridging social capital.

Data and Methods

Participants

Data collection for this study was achieved using an online survey instrument. The questionnaire was distributed to 4,000 randomly selected undergraduate students at a large Midwestern university via the university email system. In total, 580 students completed the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of approximately 14.5%. The considerably low response rate may be attributed to the explicit focus of the survey on Facebook use, which did not permit participants to respond according to their experiences on other forms of social media. A contingency question was included in order to determine whether respondents had used Facebook during the previous two months, with 90.9% of respondents (N=527) indicating that they had recently used the site.

Dependent Variable

Online Bridging Social Capital: For this study, bridging social capital was measured using items from the bridging subscale of Williams (2006) Internet Social Capital Scale (ISCS). The six items with the highest factor loadings from Williams (2006) confirmatory factor analysis were chosen and appropriately reworded to reflect respondents’ experiences on Facebook. Items include such statements as: “Interacting with people on Facebook makes me feel like part of a larger community,” and “Interacting with people on Facebook makes me want to try new things.” These items were assessed using a 5-point Likert-type scale of agreement ranging from 1 “Strongly Disagree” to 5 “Strongly Agree.”

A confirmatory principal components analysis was conducted on the six items in order to verify the anticipated factor structure. The indicators were found to be adequately intercorrelated (KMO=.841) with factor loadings ranging from .632 to .862. A high level of internal consistency was found (α=.876) and the items were combined into a summated scale for the measurement of bridging social capital.

Independent Variables

Usage Intensity: Facebook usage intensity was assessed using the Facebook intensity scale developed by Ellison et al. (2007). The scale includes one self-reported item that asks respondents to estimate the amount of time they spend on Facebook daily, and six attitudinal indicators including statements such as “Facebook is part of my everyday activity” and “I would be sorry if Facebook shut down.” Each of the usage intensity items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale of agreement, ranging from 1 “Strongly Disagree” to 5 “Strongly Agree.”

In order to verify the expected factor structure, a confirmatory principal components analysis was run on the seven intensity items. A high degree of intercorrelation was found among the
variables (KMO=.827), with high factor loadings on a single component, ranging from .604 to .850. The seven items were found to have a high level of internal consistency (α=.851) and were combined into a summated scale.

Status Motivation: In order to measure status motivation, three items from Aubrey and Rill’s (2013) adapted status motivation subscale were employed. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following statements: “I use Facebook to provide others with information about myself,” “I use Facebook as a way to impress people,” and “I use Facebook as a way to feel important.” These items were assessed using a 5-point Likert-type scale of agreement, ranging from 1 “Strongly Disagree” to 5 “Strongly Agree.”

A confirmatory principal components analysis was run and the three items were found to be adequately intercorrelated (KMO=.636), with factor loadings of .519, .805, and .820. The items were found to be internally consistent (α=.789) and were combined into a summated scale for the measurement of status motivation.

Intimate Self-Disclosure: In order to measure the extent to which users shared intimate self-information with other Facebook users via their own public profiles and/or the public profiles of others, a contingency question was developed which asked respondents to estimate how often they communicate with others online using this function. The item was assessed on a 5-point Likert-type scale of frequency, from 1 “Never” to 5 “Very Often.” Respondents who indicated that they “Never” use profiles to communicate with other users were not asked any further questions regarding their use of this function, while those who chose any other response category were asked subsequent questions regarding their behaviors, feelings and encounters within this channel of communication.

For this study, items from the adapted version of Magno’s (2009) self-disclosure scale employed by Attrill and Jalil (2011) were used to measure intimate self-disclosure via public profiles on Facebook. Sixteen items were chosen from the original 60-item scale based on the face validity of each statement and the dissimilarity of each indicator from others included in the instrument in order to minimize the likelihood of response-fatigue. The items were reworded to appropriately reflect behaviors, feelings and experiences on Facebook public profiles. The self-disclosure indicators were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale of frequency, ranging from 1 “Never” to 5 “Very Often.”

An exploratory principal components analysis was conducted on the sixteen self-disclosure items in order to identify any underlying latent constructs (see Table 1). A very high degree of intercorrelation was found among the items (KMO=.916) and the rotated component matrix identified three dimensions that met the Kaiser criterion, with ten items loading on the first component (λ=8.076), five items on the second component (λ=1.946), and two items on the third (λ=1.097). Two items were found to have low loadings on their respective components and were excluded from further analyses: “I tell people on Facebook about my problems in the forms of a joke” and “I give information about myself in casual situations on Facebook.”
**Table 1.** Exploratory Principal Components Analysis of Intimate Self-Disclosure Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Component 1</th>
<th>Component 2</th>
<th>Component</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I tell people on Facebook the things I worry about the most.</td>
<td>.718*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I open up about my situation to others on Facebook when I feel troubled.</td>
<td>.760*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tell my personal insecurities to others on Facebook.</td>
<td>.806*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I talk about my love life in detail with others on Facebook.</td>
<td>.727*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I talk about the things in the past or present that I feel ashamed of with others on Facebook.</td>
<td>.727*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I talk about my family problems with other people on Facebook.</td>
<td>.812*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel the need to have somebody to talk to on Facebook when I experience failure.</td>
<td>.832*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable revealing secrets about myself to others on Facebook.</td>
<td>.825*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tell people on Facebook about my problems in the form of a joke.</td>
<td>.495</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I share my happiest moments in life with others on Facebook.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.881*</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tell people on Facebook about my life goals.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.726*</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tell people on Facebook the kinds of things that make me proud.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.855*</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I talk about my successes in great detail with others on Facebook.</td>
<td>.417</td>
<td>.707*</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I give information about myself in casual situations on Facebook.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.550</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I talk about my spiritual life to other people on Facebook.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.841*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I share my views about God with others on Facebook.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.901*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Factor analysis was conducted using Varimax rotation and all values below .40 were suppressed. The precise wording of each item on the instrument is represented. Items are ordered according to component and do not reflect the order on the instrument. Items with asterisks (*) were chosen for inclusion in summated scales based on high factor loadings.
Because the eight items with the highest loadings on the first component involved the disclosure of sensitive, adverse self-information, and given a very high level of internal consistency among the items (α=.937), the eight indicators were combined into a summated scale for the measurement of ‘negative self-disclosure’. The four items with the highest loadings on the second component involved the disclosure of favorable self-information and were also found to be internally consistent (α=.861); thus, the indicators were combined to create a summated scale for ‘positive self-disclosure’. Lastly, the two items loading on the third component involved the disclosure of religious, or spiritual self-information; these items were found to have a high level of internal consistency (α=.887) and were combined into a summated scale for ‘religious self-disclosure’.

Results

Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was used to test the hypotheses following a multiple imputation of the original data. Before imputing the data, each of the bivariate relationships between the dependent and independent variables were assessed for linearity. Curve fit estimations were calculated and three significant nonlinear relationships were found between the dependent variable and negative self-disclosure, religious self-disclosure, and status motivations. Incremental F-tests revealed a significant increase in explained variance of bridging social capital between the linear (R2=.056) and logarithmic (R2=.134) models for negative self-disclosure (F=21.178(304, 1, 1), p<.001), between the linear (R2=.046) and power (R2=.072) models for religious self-disclosure (F=1.579(312, 1, 1), p=.004), and between the linear (R2=.248) and power (R2=.273) models for status motivation (F=16.404(479, 1, 1), p<.001). However, upon imputation, log transformations of the dependent and independent variables resulted in a non-normal distribution of the residuals and a condition index greater than 30, indicating severe instability among the predictors (Allison 1999). Therefore, none of the variables were logged in the final model.

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics of the original dataset and pooled statistics of the five imputations. Similar to the original data, Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality revealed significantly non-normal distributions of each of the imputed variables. Both the dependent variable, bridging social capital (t=-.504, S.E.=.109), and the independent variable usage intensity (t=-.216, S.E.=.109) were found to have slight negative skewness. The remaining independent variables, negative self-disclosure (t=1.789, S.E.=.109), positive self-disclosure (t=.238, S.E.=.109), and religious self-disclosure (t=1.066, S.E.=.109), as well as status motivation (t=.432, S.E.=.109) were found to be positively skewed. Log transformations of the variables did not correct the non-normal distributions, and caused multicollinearity and multivariate non-normality within the model; therefore, the variables were not logged for the regression.
An OLS regression\textsuperscript{3} was run using the unlogged variables and collinearity diagnostics revealed no problematic\textsuperscript{4} variance inflation factors (VIFs), tolerance levels, or condition indices, indicating no extreme multicollinearity within the model. A Shapiro-Wilk test of normality was conducted on the model residuals (N=506), revealing a significantly normal distribution (t=.995, p=.082) and indicating multivariate normality within the model. In order to assess homoscedasticity, the residuals were squared and regressed on the five independent variables, resulting in an $R^2$ value of .0144 (N=506, df=5). A White’s test revealed a significant homoscedastic condition (t=7.2864, p=.2002) and it was concluded that heteroscedasticity was not an issue in the model.

As displayed in Table 3, the OLS regression showed a significant association between the predictors and bridging social capital (F(5,506)=83.984, p<.001). An adjusted $R^2$ value of .4508 was found, indicating that, taken together, usage intensity, status motivation, and the three types of intimate self-disclosure on public profiles (negative, positive, and religious) account for 45.08\% of the variance in bridging social capital for the Facebook users included in this study.

The results show a significant, positive association between FB usage intensity and bridging social capital (B=.451, p<.001), lending support to H1 and indicating that, for each additional unit increase in usage intensity, a .451 unit increase in bridging social capital can be expected. In support of H2, status motivation was also found to significantly predict increased bridging social capital (B=.466, p<.001) where, for every unit increase in status motivation, a .466 increase in bridging capital can be expected. Finally, no significant associations were found between the three intimate self-disclosure variables and bridging social capital. Positive, insignificant relationships were found between both negative ($\beta=.013$, B=.015) and positive intimate self-disclosure ($\beta=.032$, B=.042), and the dependent variable. Religious self-disclosure was found to be the weakest predictor of bridging among the three intimate self-disclosure measures ($\beta=-.012$, B=-.034), albeit not significant, where a negative association between the variables lends partial support to H3 and suggests that religious self-disclosure on public profiles may lead to a slight decrease in bridging social capital.

### Discussion, Conclusion, and Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study provide further support for a positive association between social networking site use and bridging social capital. The results reveal both Facebook usage intensity and status

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\textsuperscript{3}The OLS regression was run on the five imputed datasets. All reported numbers reflect pooled values of the five imputations.

\textsuperscript{4}Allison (1999) suggests that VIFs of 2.50 and higher, tolerance levels of .40 and below, and condition indices greater than 30 indicate problematic multicollinearity.

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Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Original and Imputed Datasets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Original Dataset</th>
<th>Imputed Datasets (N=506)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging Social Capital</td>
<td>19.02</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Self-Disclosure</td>
<td>10.68</td>
<td>8.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Self-Disclosure</td>
<td>9.94</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Self-Disclosure</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usage Intensity</td>
<td>20.74</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status Motivation</td>
<td>7.19</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. OLS Regression Predicting Bridging Social Capital with Usage Intensity, Status Motivation, and Intimate Self-Disclosure on Public Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model\textsuperscript{5}</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Beta\textsuperscript{6}</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Usage Intensity</td>
<td>-.451*</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>-.506</td>
<td>11.341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status Motivation</td>
<td>-.466*</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>-.248</td>
<td>6.230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Self-Disclosure</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Self-Disclosure</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Self-Disclosure</td>
<td>-.034</td>
<td>.153</td>
<td>-.012</td>
<td>-.222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All numbers reflect pooled imputation values. \textsuperscript{*}p < .001

\textsuperscript{5}Numbers reflect standardized beta coefficients averaged between the five imputations.

\textsuperscript{6}Numbers reflect unstandardized slope coefficients.
motivations as predictors of increased bridging capital, lending support to the contention that social networking sites serve a “relational maintenance” function by exposing users to a wide-range of information shared among users of a diverse online network (Bazarova 2012; Tong & Walther 2011). The positive association between status motivation and bridging capital seems to suggest that users not only perceive the information they share on FB as being viewed by a larger, heterogeneous audience beyond those with whom they are already acquainted, but that publicly shared information is in some way intended to appeal to this audience as Maghrabi et al. (2014) contend, and is likely moderated by standards of information sharing defined by communicative norms on the site (Bazarova 2012). However, aspects of the public information sharing process on Facebook and its implications for bridging social capital remain unclear.

Although a strong, negative association between the various types of intimate self-disclosure and bridging capital was not found, no significant positive association was revealed, suggesting that the public sharing of deeply personal information on FB is not a primary means whereby users connect with a range of dissimilar individuals who constitute sources of bridging social capital. Rather, the informational access and general social support made available by involvement in the diverse networks that make up SNS may be achieved through the exchange of information that Attrill and Jalil (2011) term ‘superficial’: postings of messages, pictures, videos, articles, and other forms of public self-disclosure that convey incremental, ‘on the surface’ information about the sender that does not wholly capture their attitudes, beliefs, and experiences, but instead expresses who they aspire to be, or rather, the person they wish others to perceive them as. While this study cannot speak to the sharing of ‘superficial’ information, it suggests that intimate self-disclosure is not the bridge connecting users of wide-ranging backgrounds, experiences, and worldviews across social networks such as Facebook, a finding that raises questions regarding the process of identity construction and socialization in a society that is ever-shifting from offline to online.

Although the results yield valuable insights for future studies of SNS use and provide support for previous research regarding the behaviors and motivations that contribute to the accrual of bridging social capital in online social networking, this study is not without its limitations. First, the cross-sectional design of this research precludes the inference of causality from the model. Although, intuitively, the independent variables included in this study can be accepted as antecedents of bridging capital, it is possible that bidirectional relationships exist among the variables in the model, such that increases in bridging social capital may affect the degree of intimacy in online self-disclosure, or the extent to which use becomes routine (i.e. usage intensity) by virtue of the informational and social resources individuals enjoy by using Facebook and other SNS. Future research should attempt to explore feedback between bridging capital and the independent variables included in this study through either the development of longitudinal research designs or the use of nonrecursive path analysis.

The measurements employed in this study qualify as an additional limitation. Data obtained via attitudinal measures
are often difficult to validate and, even when criterion-related methods of validation are available, the link between associated behaviors and what is measured attitudinally may be confounded by additional, unexamined internal and external factors (Oppenheim 1966). Moreover, this study did not collect data on the type of information users share on Facebook in order to convey intimate self-information (i.e. text, photos, videos, etc.), leaving questions regarding how rather than simply whether intimate self-disclosure is carried out publicly on the site. For this reason, future studies should strive to employ both behavioral measurements that allow for the assessment of criterion validity, as well as qualitative forms of data collection that permit stronger claims to construct validity, such as in-depth interviewing in conjunction with questionnaires employing open- and close-ended items.

Finally, the findings of this study should not be taken as generalizable given the community-specific nature of data collection in the current research design. Future studies of SNS use and social capital should sample from larger, more wide-ranging populations that offer higher levels of external validity but that, as in this study, also allow for probability sampling techniques via adequate sampling frames. While the undergraduate population sampled in this study closely reflects the demographic of the majority SNS user-base throughout the U.S. (Poushter 2016), data collected from populations that are representative of the general SNS user-base would undoubtedly yield more valuable insights regarding the potential benefits of involvement in these sites for users’ access to social capital.


