
INFLUENCE OF SELF-PRESENTATION ON FACEBOOK TOWARDS SOCIAL CAPITAL AMONG UUCSI STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the correlation between self-presentation on Facebook and social capital, which includes bridging and bonding social capital among university students in Kuala Lumpur. A quantitative study framed with Goffman's Dramaturgical Model and Social Capital Theory was designed. Survey data from 375 UCSI university students were collected for this study. The results show that most of the participants have used Facebook for 7 to 9 years, and spent 1 to 2 hours daily on Facebook. The self-presentation on Facebook and each type of social capital was rated as moderate level among these participants. The self-presentation on Facebook has a significant relationship with bridging and bonding social capital. This study indicates the applicability of Goffman's Dramaturgical Model and Social Capital Theory in the context of a social networking site study. Additionally, a selective self-presentation on Facebook is a good strategy to build social capital and reap benefits from the social network. Limitations and future recommendations were discussed in the last section of this paper.

Keywords: *self-presentation, social capital, Facebook, university students, Malaysia*

INTRODUCTION

Online self-presentation is defined as the management of an individual's identity through an online profile (Ellison et al., 2006). Globalization and advancements in technology have enhanced the way people self-present themselves to stay connected and communicate with people around the world. One of the technological advancements that have transformed the way people communicate is the use of social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook that

has more than 500 million users worldwide. (Facebook, 2011). Through such online platforms, individuals craft their own identities by presenting themselves selectively (Ellison et al., 2006). Through self-presentation management, they shape and portray their identity through their online profile, and possess high control over any information disclosure on social media. A study done by Yurchisin et al., (2005) has identified that selective self-presentation will cause false identity interpretation by the audience. The consequences of this manipulation lead to stalking (Whelan, 2011), blackmailing, harassment, identity theft, and so forth (Gross & Acquisti, 2005).

Self-presentation management occurs when a person observes and controls their behaviors according to social cues (O’Cass, 2000). Social networking sites allow users to selectively disclose information in their user profiles. By highlighting and minimizing information about themselves, this management ability allows a higher opportunity for users to interact with new online users that they have not been able to do so in the past while sustaining existing relationships successfully (Ellison et al., 2007). In this process, individuals are bridging and bonding their social capital.

Social capital broadly refers to the resources obtained through online interactions and relationships among people (Coleman, 1988, as cited in Rozan et al., 2014). Bridging social capital refers to the capacity to access resources through weak ties formed among the wide array of social relationships. Meanwhile, bonding social capital refers to a strong tie among networks, involving emotional support and sharing intimate and reciprocal relationships (Putnam, 2001). Bonding social capital allows a person to draw resources such as useful information, personal relationships, or psychological support from where these networks belong (Preece & Rosson, 2008).

Malaysia has a ranked of top 45th in terms of usage of the Internet worldwide (“Global Internet Maps,” 2016), and ranked 10th in South East Asia for the most internet users (Internet World Stats, 2015). However, with 18 million Malaysians engaged in Facebook, which is more than half of the country’s population (Internet World Stats, 2015), this topic is hardly discussed in the local literature.

A study done by Yurchisin et al., (2005) has identified that selective self-presentation will cause false identity interpretation by the audience perceived. The consequences of this manipulation lead to stalking (Whelan, 2011), blackmailing, harassment, identity theft, and so forth (Gross & Acquisti, 2005). Abro and Li’s (2013) study found that the self-presentation on social networking sites make a tremendous impact in the process of forming bridging social capital, and enlarged their social circle with the intention of mutual benefits in general.

Past studies (Greenhow & Burton, 2011; Steinfield et al., 2008) have also found that the association between the usage of social networking sites and social capital is significant, especially in forming bridging social capital. Social platforms have increased the amount of bridging social capital formed due to online sites grant users to present selectively, and therefore increase the initiate taken by individuals to form new connections in social situations (Ellison et al., 2007). Burke et al. (2011) have also identified that social networking sites are more beneficial for bridging social capital, where it forms weaker, yet heterogeneous social ties among the social connections.

Works of literature have discussed the associations of social networking sites and social capital. These studies have focused on self-esteem, the Big Five personality Traits, the Dark Triad, and other psychological areas (Forest & Wood, 2012; Fox & Rooney, 2015; Seidman,

2013). However, limited literature has covered self-representation on social networking sites in the Malaysian context from a mass communication angle. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the relationship between an individual's self-presentation on Facebook and social capital; namely bridging and bonding social capital from the perspective of mass communication in Malaysia by integrating Goffman's Dramaturgical Model and Social Capital Theory.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Internet and Facebook Use in Malaysia

The use of the internet has brought a big transformation to our daily life. The Social Networking Sites (SNS) was developed as a communicating system that allows users to interact with others through the internet (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Currently, Facebook has become the largest SNS in the world with approximately 2.5 million active users monthly in the fourth quarter of 2020 (Tankovska, 2021).

A report of Internet Users Survey 2014 has been done by the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (2015) to determine the various classes of categorization schemes and key variables of Internet users in Malaysia (p.4). Amongst the variables included are digital devices used to surf the Net, the purpose of using the internet, demographics and geographical locations of research respondents, and many more.

The result of the Internet Users Survey 2014 (Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission, 2015) shows that Selangor and Putrajaya have the most internet usage (19.6%) in Malaysia, followed by Sabah and Labuan with the percentage of 11.9% and followed by Johor (11.7%). The amount of smartphone users in Malaysia has tremendously hiked to 10.1 million in 2015, compared to 8.9 million in 2014 (The Statistics Portal, 2016). The laptop is ranked the second most used device for the Internet, followed by desktops, tablets, and other digital devices (The Statistics Portal, 2016). The results of the survey have also provided an understanding of how the internet is used by Malaysians (Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission, 2015). Using the internet to obtain information was ranked the first, followed by accessing social networking sites, online communities, communication, leisure, education, government services, and many more (Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission, 2015, p.24). The most engaged SNS is Facebook (86.8%). From this number, 12.6% of the Facebook users own more than one personal Facebook account by 2014 (Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission, 2015).

Self-presentation Strategies on Facebook

Social settings in the dramaturgical model can be understood as the location where the social setting takes place. The social settings could also be affected by the props at the location (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, as cited in De Vries, 2014). For example, perceiving a person being wealthy and powerful, or an ordinary citizen with middle or low social status by acknowledging their demographic surrounding. A past study (Guha & Birnholtz, 2013) has found a strong association between location sharing on social networking sites and impression management.

Other than that, appearance also influences an individual's perception and impression building (Miller & Cox, 1982; Sharma & Chen, 2011). Appearance only affects those who are

highly self-conscious about their public appearance, less applicable to those who have low public self-consciousness (Buss, 1980; Carver & Scheier, 1985).

Similarly, manner also affects an individual's impression. Manner can be defined as how a person wanted to be perceived in a particular situation (Tashmin, 2016). An individual who fits in a setting with appropriate behavior are expected to perform a certain extend of appropriate manner. Goffman (1959) explained that social interactions are role governed, where the interaction will proceed smoothly when these roles are carried out effectively.

Relationship between self-Presentation on Social Networking Sites and Bridging and Bonding Social Capital

The relationship between self-presentation on social networking sites and social capital has been investigated throughout the past decades (Ellison et al., 2014; Liu & Brown, 2014; Steinfield et al., 2008). A growing body of literature provides evidence indicating that there is a link between self-presentation in social networking sites generally, and Facebook specifically and social capital.

Based on the explanation by Putnam (2001), bridging social capital can be defined as weak ties and loose connections formed without a close relationship and intimate interactions. The nature of bridging social capital depends on the benefits, also known as instrument support that one could potentially gain whenever needed to go through a phase of hardship in life (Liu & Brown, 2014). The study also claimed that these forms of weak ties established through social networking sites allow social media users to form a wider array of connections with more people (Adler & Kwon, 2002). This is due to the characteristic of bridging social capital requires less commitment for a sustainable connection. Therefore, online users can form a greater range of connections among their social communities. However, bridging social capital has a lower probability to gain significant resources such as financial and emotional supports whenever needed due to the weak bond and low trust established in the relationship (Ellison et al., 2014; Rozan et al., 2014).

Unlike bridging social capital, bonding social capital is strongly tied where it usually involves a closer relationship within one another within the network (Putnam, 2001). Bonding involves more sustained support, especially emotional support from the connections that share a more intimate and reciprocal relationship. However, bonding requires a high degree of commitment towards sustaining the relationship (Liu & Brown, 2014). This commitment constrains the individual in further expanding his or her network as it limits one's ability to maintain the connections formed, including bridging and bonding social capital. Thus, the hypotheses were formed as below:

H1: Self-presentation on Facebook has a significant relationship with bridging.

H2: Self-presentation on Facebook has a significant relationship with bonding.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework chosen in this research acts as a basis for the relationship between self-presentation on Facebook and social capital. The theories underlying this research are Goffman's Dramaturgical Model and Social Capital Theory. Based on Goffman's dramaturgical model (1959), individuals "attempt to control and guide the impression that others might

make of him by changing and fixing his or her setting, appearance, and manner” in a social environment. In this model, Goffman (1959) has used the imagery of a theater as a metaphor to portray the importance of human and social actions and interaction. He further elaborated that social interaction consists of front stage and backstage just as theatrical performances. In the front stage, individuals try to present an idealized version of self in their specific role in the social settings. The backstage refers to the authentic version of self. Practices and work are also being done backstage to prepare and keep up with the appearance of an ideal self.

Meanwhile, Social Capital theory can be defined as the resources obtained through social relationships that are the instruments that help one to overcome life circumstances (Coleman, 1988; cited in Rozan et al., 2014). The theory explained that the ultimate goal of sustaining and forming new connections is to reap benefits from these relationships. These resources gained from social capital vary in form and function based on the relationship with the connection in multiple fields of life. It is necessary to sustain existing networks while forming new social relations to accrue instrument support when needed. While expecting support from others, trust also plays a remarkable role in sustaining the newly formed relations in building long-lasting relations. From the support and trust, an individual can achieve the ultimate goal of social capital, that is to have a mutual benefit relationship from their connections.

METHODOLOGY

The design of this study requires quantitative methods to achieve the research objectives. A quantitative research method is widely used in gathering numerical data and generalizing it across a particular group of people (Babbie, 2010). Data collection was conducted for two weeks. The data collected was then analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to generate descriptive and inferential analysis to test the hypothesis of the study.

Measurement

The questionnaires were categorized into three different sections; the first is sociodemographic, including, age, gender, ethnicity, education level, and other information. Respondents were assessed with their self-presentation on Facebook and social capital (bridging and bonding) in the second and third sections of the questionnaire.

Participants and Sampling

The samples chosen are UCSI University undergraduates in Kuala Lumpur. The targeted age group of these participants would be 18-25, where according to Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (2015, p.15), Malaysians aged from 20-24 (24.2%) are found to be the most engaged in internet and social media use in Malaysia. Referring to the Krejcie and Morgan’s (1970) table, data has been collected from 375 undergraduates from UCSI University, Kuala Lumpur campuses through convenience sampling method (Given, 2008). All participants have given their consent to participate in this study.

The majority of the respondents are aged 22 (36.3%), followed by 23 years old (18.4%). Among the respondents, 63.2% are males and 80.8% are Chinese. The result also showed that more than half of the respondents’ marital status is single (65.9%).

Most respondents browse Facebook every day (76%), with an average of one to two hours of browsing daily. The majority have been using Facebook for seven to nine years (62.9%), while others have used Facebook for one to six years (29.1%), and very few have used Facebook for more than nine years (8%). Most respondents have as many as 751 to 1500 friends on their Facebook friend list (41.1%), and 87.5% of the respondents' Facebook friends are from Chinese ethnicity. Other than this, 54.7% of the respondents preferred to set their privacy settings on Facebook to be visible to their own Facebook friends only.

FINDINGS

Level of self-presentation, bridging and bonding social capital among UCSI University students

Table 1 shows that the overall respondents have a mean score of 2.02, with a standard deviation of 0.65 for their self-presentation. Based on the result, the majority of them had a moderate self-presentation on Facebook (58.8%).

Table 1. Frequency Distribution Table of Self-Presentation on Facebook (n=375)

| | Frequency | % |
|--------------------|-----------|------|
| Self-presentation: | | |
| Low | 75 | 20 |
| Moderate | 219 | 58.4 |
| High | 81 | 21.6 |
| M | 2.02 | |
| SD | 0.65 | |

Note. M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation.

Table 2 explains the level of bridging and bonding social capital among the respondents. The mean score for bridging and bonding are 2.05 (SD=0.680) and 2.08 (SD=0.750) consecutively. Most respondents, 53.2% and 43.7% of them had a moderate level of bridging and bonding.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution Table of Bridging Social Capital (n=375)

| | Frequency | % |
|-------------------------|-----------|------|
| Bridging social capital | | |
| Low | 79 | 21.2 |
| Moderate | 199 | 53.2 |
| High | 97 | 25.6 |
| M | 2.05 | |
| SD | 0.68 | |
| Bonding social capital | | |
| Low | 90 | 24 |
| Moderate | 164 | 43.7 |
| High | 121 | 32.3 |
| M | 2.08 | |
| SD | 0.75 | |

Note. M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation.

Hypotheses test

A correlation was carried out to test the first and second hypotheses on the relationship between the self-presentation on Facebook and social capital, including bridging and bonding social capital (see Table 3). It was identified that the correlation between self-presentation on Facebook and bridging social capital was significant, $r(375) = 0.718, p < .001$, two-tailed.; supporting the first hypothesis. Self-presentation has a strong positive influence on bridging social capital where an increase of self-presentation leads to an improvement of bridging social capital too.

For the self-presentation on Facebook and bonding social capital, the relationship was found significant, $r(375) = 0.563, p < .001$, two-tailed; supporting the second hypothesis. A moderate positive relationship between the two variables indicates an improvement of bonding social capital at any increase of self-presentation on Facebook.

When both types of social capital were combined, the correlation between self-presentation on Facebook and social capital was found to be statistically significant too, $r(375) = 0.631, p < .001$, two-tailed. Self-presentation on Facebook influences social capital moderately and positively. The social capital as a whole improves when self-presentation increases.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Table for Self-Presentation, Bridging Social Capital, Bonding Social Capital, and Overall Social Capital (n = 375)

| | Social capital | | Overall social capital |
|-------------------|----------------|----------|------------------------|
| | Bridging | Bonding | |
| Self-presentation | 0.718*** | 0.563*** | 0.631*** |

Note. *** $p = .000$.

DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis of this study is accepted, where self-presentation has a significant relationship with bridging. The result is supported by a previous study (Abro & Li, 2013), which explains that self-presentation of social networking site users is effective in the process of bridging social capital and enlarging their friendship circle with the hope of mutual benefits from one another. It was also found that social networking sites in general, and Facebook to be specific have increased the opportunities for individuals to present themselves selectively and form a favorable impression to other social networking site users, and therefore their bridging social capital is increased (Ellison et al, 2007). By presenting oneself selectively on Facebook, weak ties among other Facebook users are formed due to the impressions made through selective self-presentation is usually positive (Steinfeld et al., 2008). However, honest self-presentation is more common among individuals who try to build deeper connections with their existing bonded social capital. More specifically, the deeper connections that are formed and maintained with effort and sacrifices rather than seeking new affiliations (Seidman, 2014).

Supporting the second hypothesis, the self-presentation on Facebook helps individuals to identify other Facebook users that are opened to form a deeper connection among one another with similar interest researches (Rozaan et al., 2013). Positive feedback such as compliments and supports towards an individual’s social media activity including social

causes gives an affirmation of openness and willingness to maintain the connection. Hence, a potential to form a deeper bond with one another that leads to emotional and other forms of deeper social support (Liu & Brown, 2014).

Similar to a previous study (Abro & Li, 2013; Brandtzaeg & Nov, 2011), there is a significant correlation between the use of self-presentation on Facebook and the expansion of social capital as well as the frequency of interactions online and offline. This helps individuals to have a positive impression and perception towards an individual who presents themselves selectively. Consequently, an boosted positive feedbacks from other online friends, new friend requests from other Facebook users, and existing social circle (Tifferet et al., 2012).

IMPLICATIONS

Theoretically, this study indicates the applicability of Goffman's Dramaturgical Model and Social Capital Theory in the context of social networking sites. This study provides a better understanding for future scholars that would like to further study the relationship between self-presentation on social networking sites and how it contributes to an individual's social capital.

Practically, self-presentation skill on SNS is important in expanding an individual's online and offline social circle, thus benefit from their online relationships. Social capital leverages impression management that includes forming a selective impression through personal branding and selective self-presentation. The formation of impression also relies on an individual's online behaviour and information disclosure. Impression management benefits students to reap the benefits from a big social circle, including personal branding for their future careers.

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations are taken into consideration for this study, including generalizability, comprehensiveness of the result, and the demographics of the sample population. First of all, the result of this study is unable to be generalized to other universities besides UCSI University due this study is fully conducted using UCSI University students as samples. Therefore the findings of this study are solely based on UCSI University students. Secondly, the method used to conduct this research is a quantitative method, where the findings obtained are based on questionnaires with multiple choice questions and the Likert Scale. Therefore the results are merely on the surface of this topic and are not in-depth. Thirdly, the majority of the samples that took part in this study are Chinese. This is due to the majority of the population in UCSI University is made up of local Chinese students.

In future researches, it is recommended to increase the locality of the research and to use a qualitative method. First, the generalisability of this study may be improved by enlarging the locality of the study to private and public universities in Kuala Lumpur to obtain a diversity of race, culture, and social background. Secondly, an in-depth understanding of self-representation and social capital may only be obtained from a qualitative method such as an interview or focus group.

CONCLUSION

This study focuses on identifying the relationship between self-presentation on Facebook and social capital, including bridging and bonding among students in UCSI University Kuala Lumpur campus. Undergraduate students are moderately active in selectively presenting themselves on Facebook. This activity leads to a high social bridging and bonding with their network which benefits them in many ways, including for their future career.

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