Taking Advantage of Using Professionally-Oriented Social Network Sites: The Role of Users’ Actions and Profiles

Completed Research

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Abstract

The main objective of this research is to propose a model that explains the process by which individuals develop social capital through using Professionally-Oriented Social Network Sites (P-SNSs) such as LinkedIn. The theoretical framework of the proposed research draws upon the extant literature in social network analysis and social capital theory. The proposed research model aims to explain how people's investment on their social networks by building their profiles and actively participating on P-SNSs can lead to developing sources of social capital which, in turn, can provide them valuable benefits. Our research results show that profile disclosure and active participation positively affect perceived social connectedness. However, only profile disclosure positively affects network size, and there is no association between active participation and network size. This study differs from previous studies in this field in that it highlights the role of one's profile in the social capital formation process on P-SNSs.

Keywords:
Social network sites, social capital, social network analysis, social connectedness, networking value, LinkedIn

Introduction

Social network sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter are a new class of information technologies that support interpersonal communication and collaboration using Internet-based platforms. These sites differ in their primary purpose of use and are generally categorized as socially-oriented SNSs (S-SNSs) such as Facebook, professionally-oriented SNSs (P-SNSs) such as LinkedIn, and news and event-following medium such as Twitter (Utz and Breuer 2016). In recent years, we have witnessed the rapid diffusion of SNSs. As of 2016, more than two billion people, around a quarter of world population, actively use SNSs, spending on average 118 minutes per day on these sites (Globalwebindex 2017). It is, therefore, reasonable to say that SNSs have become part of our everyday lives, changing various aspects of our daily routines such as the way we communicate with each other, access information, develop relationships, and spend our free time. However, since the beginning of SNSs’ wide adoption in 2003, the question of whether and how people can gain tangible benefits from using these sites has drawn the attention of scholars as well as policymakers. To respond to this critical question a stream of Information Systems (IS) research has tried to understand the benefits of using SNSs under the framework of social network and social capital theories (Steinfield et al. 2012). These theories explain how individuals’ actions to extend and diversify their social networks as well as improve the quality of their relationships can lead to access to new information, opportunities, perspectives and increased social support. Although early studies of SNSs showed a relationship between the use of SNSs and outcomes such as loneliness (Caplan et al. 2009), later studies have differentiated between social activities and pure entertainment, finding that there is indeed a significant positive relationship between specific social activities such as network construction and content generation and social capital outcomes (Burke et al. 2010). However, the extant SNSs literature concerning social capital suffers from several gaps. First, almost all SNS researchers focus on Facebook in their studies, which we believe limits the depth and breadth of our understanding of how social capital forms in SNSs (Zhang and Leung 2015). While it seems
It is obvious that using P-SNSs like LinkedIn is more relevant to some aspects of social capital (e.g., resource exchanges) than using S-SNSs like Facebook, surprisingly there are only a few studies that investigate the process of social capital formation on these sites. In general, P-SNSs are under-researched in IS (Zide et al. 2014). Second, the current measures of social capital may not be as relevant in the context of SNS as they were originally developed for general Internet users (Williams 2006), therefore measuring the unique and tangible benefits of SNSs may be difficult using these scales (Koroleva et al. 2011). This is even more critical in P-SNSs than S-SNSs as P-SNS users tend to have professionally-driven motivations to engage on such sites rather than socializing with close friends. Therefore, they expect to receive a different kind of value from such sites (e.g., networking value such as job leads, social credentials, referrals, recognition, etc.). Third, current studies do not include the effects of important elements of SNS such as one’s profile on social capital formation (Ellison and Vitak 2015). This also seems to be more relevant in P-SNSs than S-SNSs. Expanding professional network in the online world rather than socializing and maintaining relationships with existing and close friends (that already know the user from the offline world) is one of the primary goals for P-SNS users to engage in such sites. P-SNS profile as an online resume (even with more affordances than a resume like a possibility to attach video, audio, etc.) plays a central role to fulfill this goal through affording users to establish common ground and professionally self-promote themselves. In addition, only a few studies researched the role of users’ profile on social capital formation process (either S-SNS or P-SNS). Therefore, this study advances our understanding of users’ profile on both platforms. We believe addressing these gaps as discussed above increase the generalizability of social capital research in digital environments. As such, the main objective of this study is to address the above-highlighted research gaps by proposing an integrated model that explains the process by which individuals develop and accrue social capital through using professionally-oriented SNSs (P-SNS) such as LinkedIn. More specifically, this study aims to understand how SNS users can develop sources of social capital (such as a larger network size and social connectedness) through building their profiles (disclose more personal and professional information on their profiles) and active participation on these sites. Ultimately, how these sources of social capital can provide unique benefits or networking value for SNS users. Therefore, this research aims to answer the following research questions: (1) what are the unique and tangible benefits of using P-SNSs? and (2) how can users’ actions on P-SNSs (such as building their profiles and active participation) lead to those benefits?

**Literature Review**

SNSs as a vibrant form of social media are widely used in a variety of different purposes especially for maintaining, strengthening, and developing social ties (Ellison and Vitak 2015). Ellison and Boyd (2013) define SNSs as a networked communication platform in which participants with uniquely identifiable profiles can publicly articulate connections and consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections (Ellison and Boyd 2013). This definition is particularly robust as it specifies the important elements of SNSs such as one’s profile and a visible network of connections as well as identifies specific actions that people can perform in these sites such as interaction, network construction, and content generation and consumption. As the use of SNS has become widespread, the question of whether and how people can gain tangible benefits from using these sites in their offline world has become critical and gained growing interest among a wide range of professionals and scholars in diverse disciplines and practical arenas (Zhang and Leung 2015). To respond to this critical question a stream of IS research has tried to understand the benefits of using SNSs under the framework of social capital theory and social network analysis (Ellison, N. , Lampe, C., Steinfield, C., & Vitak 2011; Ellison et al. 2006, 2014). A review of the scholarship on SNSs found that social capital theory is a popular theoretical framework among SNS researchers (Meng et al. 2017; Zhang and Leung 2015). Since the beginning of SNSs’ wide adoption in 2003 (Boyd and Ellison 2008), many studies have explored the extent to which SNSs can reinforce people’s offline relationships and supplement social capital development (Burke et al. 2011; Ellison et al. 2007; Koroleva et al. 2011). These studies have mainly investigated the impact of general measures of SNS use (e.g., time on site, number of friends) or more recently specific kinds of activities that SNS users perform (e.g., generating content, social browsing) on important aspects of social capital such as informational and social support exchanges (Ellison and Vitak 2015). While almost all social capital studies in SNS context investigated the impacts of SNS use, specific users’ behaviours, or some attributes of users’ social network on social capital benefits, a study by Koroleva et al. (2011) provided a process-based model of social capital formation on SNSs which...
uncovered the mediating roles of two specific network attributes: network structure and social connectedness on developing social capital benefits. Their research findings support that network structure and social connectedness fully mediate the relationship between users’ actions (active participation and passive following) and networking value. Also, their research results showed the relative importance of social connectedness and active participation on networking value. However, they did not investigate the role of one’s profile in social capital formation process. In SNS contexts, one’s profile plays important roles. It serves as the locus of interaction and represents the individual (Boyd 2010). Users’ profile supports relationship development because individuals through their profiles can communicate their identity information such as their hometown, current job, education and highlight their shared interests such as favorite songs, artists, hobbies. Sharing identity information and interests establishes common ground with other people so that people develop relationships more easily. Therefore, according to Ellison et al. (2015), one’s profile can be used as a “social lubricant, smoothing social interaction by highlighting commonalities and differences”. Lampe et al. (2007) found that there is a significant association between completing some Facebook profile features and number of friends, suggesting that some profile features could help individuals to establish common ground with one another (Lampe et al. 2007). One’s profile, specifically in professionally-oriented SNSs, is a critical feature which can be effectively used for self-presentation purposes (Zide et al. 2014). For example, in LinkedIn individuals can benefit from various profile features such as headline, summary, education, skills, experience, and recommendation to present themselves in their desired way.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Social Network Analysis (SNA)**

Granovetter’s (1973) strength of weak ties theory (SWT) and Burt’s (1992) structural holes (SH) theory are well-known theories that rigorously provide a rich foundation for understanding the interaction processes and mechanisms that can yield certain outcomes for individuals within a social network (Borgatti and Halgin 2011). While SWT theory is based on the strength of ties to explain the extent to which a person could have access to novel information, SH theory explains the same concept (i.e., access to novel information) based on the extent to which an individual’s network has structural holes. A structural hole is defined as a gap between two individuals. When an individual’s network has more structural holes, she has more nonredundant ties and as a result, has access to more novel information (Burt 2012).

**Social Capital Theory**

According to Coleman (1988), social capital exists in the relations among people. Putnam (2000) defines social capital as connections among individuals and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. The core idea of social capital theory as Putnam (2000) stated is that social networks have value. Just like physical or human capital, social capital can increase the productivity of individuals and groups. In his conceptualization, social capital exists in two forms: bridging social capital and bonding social capital. While bridging social capital is associated with new information, diversity, inclusiveness, and broader identity, bonding social capital is linked to the emotional support, solidarity, exclusiveness, and in-group loyalty (Putnam 2000). Lin (1999a, 2008) defines social capital as investment in social relations by individuals through which they gain access to embedded resources in a social structure and mobilize such resources to enhance expected returns of their actions. Three key elements in Lin’s (2008) conceptualization of social capital are (1) investment in social relations through individuals’ actions, (2) access to embedded resources in a social structure by individuals and mobilize them, and (3) expected returns of actions (Lin 1999, 2008). According to Lin (2008), the effects of embedded resources on social capital development can be analyzed through network structure as well as network resources. Network structure analysis focuses on pure effects of structure on expected returns of social capital. Network resource analysis focuses on the value of individuals with whom a person has direct or indirect ties in terms of wealth, power, and status (Lin 1992). Extant literature on social capital identifies another dimension to social capital sources which according to Koroleva (2011) represents the qualitative source of social capital known as social connectedness. This dimension which is very close to what Ellison et al. (2007) proposed as “maintained social capital”, which captures one’s sense of being in touch or connectivity to her network. It can also be interpreted as a measure of one’s aggregate relationships quality within a network in terms of trust (Tsai and Ghoshal 1998). Expected returns of social capital
Taking Advantage of Using P-SNSs

mainly depend on the purposes of actions. However, in the context of this study, SNS users’ networking activities on these sites can result in four specific benefits which may not be explained by other forms of capital such as human capital. These four benefits are (1) information, (2) influence, (3) social credentials, and (4) reinforcement (Lin 1999).

Research Model and Hypotheses

Figure 1 shows our proposed research model. The core concept behind this research model is that people purposefully use of P-SNSs to invest in their social networks by building their profiles and actively participating on these sites. This can lead to developing sources of social capital (including network size and social connectedness) which in turn can provide them valuable benefits (networking value). The proposed model is in alignment with what Zhang and Leung (2015) proposal to define “SNS” as “social networking service” instead of “social network site”. Since people mainly use P-SNSs for networking (Zide et al. 2014), in a broader sense, it is reasonable to say that P-SNSs afford networking for their users. Even, one can argue that networking in offline or face-to-face can be done more effectively and efficiently in the online world. Networking defined as “individuals’ attempts to develop and maintain relationships with others who have the potential to assist them in their work or career” (Forret and Dougherty 2001) is a conscious investment in social relations which can lead to developing and accruing social capital (Resnick 2001). In the online world, SNS affordances enable people to build their profile which functions the same as a resume (though with much more affordances such as adding an external video), actively construct their network by adding people, generate content to establish ties with broader audiences, directly communicate with other people through sending messages or commenting under their posts, and read what other people shared and posted to gather information. As such, people through networking in SNSs not only can develop and accrue social capital in the same way they do in the offline world, but also, they can do it more efficiently and effectively because affordances of SNSs enable people to cross the boundaries of time and location, and therefore, maintain and forms relationships with a wide range of contacts with minimum costs.

Profile Disclosure

In this study, profile disclosure is defined as the degree to which an SNS user discloses her personal and professional information on P-SNSs by completing the profile fields of her personal account. One’s profile plays an important role in networking as it shows how much people can establish common ground with other people in their extended network. Having common ground with other people can facilitate relationship development (Ellison and Vitak 2015). In addition, one's profile is an effective tool that helps people present themselves in a desired way. Research found that the extent to which people felt their profile reflected their personal identity is positively associated with the amount of information they disclosed in users’ Facebook profiles (Nie and Sundar 2013). Therefore, it can be argued that profile disclosure can affect the size of a network. In this study, network size is defined as the number of connections a user has in his/her SNS. Disclosing more identity information and shared interests by individuals in their profiles can establish more common grounds with other people leading to forming more connections (size) and accessing more diverse resources. In addition, through various affordances of
one's profile (e.g., linking videos, presentations, personal websites to one's profile) people can present themselves in their ideal way which helps them connect to more high-status people in their extended network much easier. Lampe et al. (2007) found that in Facebook one's profile is positively associated with network size. Lampe et al. (2007) found that there is a significant association between completing some Facebook profile features (such as hometown, high school, preferences information) and number of friends, suggesting that some profile features could help individuals to establish common ground with one another. According to Utz (2015), past literature on social penetration theory, capitalization effects research, and role of humor in relationship formation and maintenance research proposed that relationship development occurs primarily through self-disclosure, or intentionally revealing personal information to others. Likewise, it can be argued that profile disclosure can be positively associated with perceived social connectedness. Perceived social connectedness is defined as the feelings of belongingness and affiliation that emerge from interpersonal relationships within social networks (Grieve and Kemp 2015). Perceived social connectedness is about the quality and meaning of one's connections (Sinclair and Grieve 2017). Because P-SNS profile as discussed above plays a central role in social capital formation process and the fact that it is always visible to a user's network, P-SNS users spent more time to update their profiles. Also, P-SNS users have the opportunity to compare their profile with their online peers and make appropriate periodic improvements. Therefore, it can be argued that profile disclosure in a P-SNS context requires a higher level of engagement than it does in S-SNSs, which may result in stronger feelings of connections. In addition, past research shows that in general the interaction between self-disclosure and engagement is reciprocal, and reinforced by sources of social capital such as social connectedness (Ledbetter, A. M., Mazer, J. P., DeGroot, J. M., Meyer, K. R., Mao, Y., & Swafford 2011; Trepte and Behavior 2013). A literature review by Abramova et al. (2017) shows that individuals' self-disclosure on SNSs can lead to relational outcomes. Utz (2015) found that the feeling of connection as a relational outcome reported by several SNS users can be fostered by private and public disclosures on these sites (Utz 2015). Thus, the following hypotheses are posited:

**H1a**: Profile disclosure in a P-SNS is positively associated with perceived social connectedness.

**H1b**: Profile disclosure in a P-SNS is positively associated with online network size.

**Active Participation**

In addition to building one's profile by disclosing personal and professional information on P-SNSs, people usually perform various activities on these sites which are central to their daily experiences such as posting an update, sharing their thoughts and feelings, commenting under others' posts, and reacting to others' posts (Burke et al. 2010, 2011; Koroleva et al. 2011). In this research active participation is defined as the degree to which SNS users generate content and react to others' posts. Active participation in SNSs, specifically in P-SNSs, can increase individuals’ network size, allow them to connect with more diverse and high-status people, and make them more engaged in these sites so that they feel more connected to their network. As discussed earlier, people in SNSs can establish different types of ties such as interactions (e.g., sending messages, commenting under posts) and flows (e.g., posting an update, sharing an article, reading a post) without necessarily being in the same network. Performing more network activities such as posting an update, sharing their thoughts and feelings, commenting under others' posts help SNS users to establish such types of ties with broader audiences (latent ties) that help them to extend their networks (size) and facilitate relationship development with more diverse and high-status individuals. For example, once you post an update and it receives a 'like' from one of your connections on it, all connections of that specific connection can see your post and may request to add you to their networks. Conversely, when you read your connections’ posts, you may request to add a latent tie that liked or commented on one of your connections' post if you find common ground with her. Likewise, performing such activities in SNSs more frequently can make individuals more engaged in their social networks and as a result, may increase their perceived social connectedness. Ellison et al. (2007) find that Facebook intensity use is positively associated with the formation of social connectedness. Similarly, Riedl et al. (2013) find that high frequency of tweeting, as a measure of active participation on Twitter, predicts users’ level of social connectedness. A study on Facebook by Koroleva et al. (2011) finds that active participation significantly affects social connectedness. Thus, the following hypotheses are posited:

**H2a**: Active participation in a P-SNS is positively associated with perceived social connectedness.

**H2b**: Active participation in a P-SNS is positively associated with online network size.
Social Capital Sources and Benefits

As people actively perform networking activities on P-SNSs by building their profiles and performing various activities as mentioned above, they create capacity or sources of social capital. Social capital sources such as large network size and high interconnectedness can provide numerous benefits for SNS users. Until now, the majority of SNS studies have measured the benefits of social capital for SNS users under two forms of social capital proposed by Putnam (2000): bridging and bonding social capital. However, most SNS researchers operationalize bridging and bonding social capital by using the scales developed by Williams (2006), which was originally developed for general internet users such as users of chat rooms, email, and online video games (Koroleva et al. 2011). As such, these scales are not appropriate for measuring social capital benefits for SNS users due to the fact that there are technological differences between the general Internet and SNSs which result in distinct behavioral patterns between the general Internet and SNS users. In addition, most of these studies have measured the social capital benefits resulted from using socially-oriented SNSs such as Facebook (Zhang and Leung 2015). Until now, only one study has investigated social capital benefits resulted from using P-SNSs such as LinkedIn (Utz and Breuer 2016). We believe that since the motivations behind using socially and professionally SNSs are different, users of such sites perform differently and as a result, using the same scales for measuring social capital benefits may be inaccurate. Therefore, in this study, we do not focus on traditional bridging and bonding social capital and operationalize social capital benefits as perceived networking value mainly because most users of P-SNSs use such sites for networking purposes. Examples of networking values in the context of P-SNSs includes access to new information, getting professional advice, or claiming social credentials. P-SNSs users can gain more networking value from their online social networks if they have larger network size. SNSs can support larger networks of weaker ties due to the low cost of maintaining relationships in these sites. In addition, due to visibility and association affordances of SNSs, it is easier to connect with latent ties, i.e., “friends of friends” in these sites. (Ellison and Vitak 2015). Therefore, a larger network size in SNSs inevitably leads to more weak ties which increase one’s access to various resources such as new information and opportunities and as a result more networking value. Similarly, a higher sense of connectivity within a social network by P-SNS users can lead to more perceived networking value. A study by Koroleva et al. (2011) finds that there is a significant positive association between social connectedness and networking value among Facebook users. Utz (2016) finds that there is a positive association between network size and professional informational benefits reported by LinkedIn users. Thus, the following hypotheses are posited:

H3: Perceived social connectedness in a P-SNSs is positively associated with perceived networking value.
H4: Online network size is positively associated with perceived networking value.

Research Method

Data Collection

This study targeted younger and mid-aged adults who actively use LinkedIn. The main reason to use this group of people as the target population in this study is that typically they actively perform networking to develop and accrue social capital. Participants were recruited from the target population at McMaster and Ryerson Universities as well as through Qualtrics, a research service firm. We collected 290 responses, of which 275 were usable. Fifteen responses were omitted due to trivial responses (e.g., selecting all 5s for every response), incompleteness, wrong answers to the quality questions, or duplicate responses (as identified by IP address). Table 1 highlights the demographic information of respondents.

Measurement

Constructs were adapted from existing measures. Profile disclosure was measured using Krasnova and Veltri’s (2010) profile disclosure scale; active participation and social connectedness were measured using Koroleva et al.’s (2011) active participation and social connectedness scales, and networking value was built on Utz and Breuer’s (2016) informational benefits scale. As Utz and Breuer’s (2016) informational benefits scale only captures the information dimensions of networking value (access, timeliness, and referrals), we modified the scale to capture other dimensions of networking value based on Lin’s definition of social capital benefits (social credentials, influence, and reinforcement). All items were
Taking Advantage of Using P-SNSs

measured on 7-point Likert scales. Social network size was measured using a single-item asking respondents to reveal their number of connections on LinkedIn.

Analysis and Results

The dataset was examined for missing values, outliers, and non-normality using SPSS version 25. The number of missing values per indicator was less than 2 percent, so we followed Hair et al. (2016) recommendation and applied mean value replacement instead of casewise deletion to treat the missing values. Univariate and multivariate outliers were identified and removed (8 cases) using z-test (z scores with extreme absolute values greater than the critical value of 3.29) and the Mahalanobis Distance approach respectively (Meyers et al. 2016). Non-normality of data regarding skewness and kurtosis is not an issue. Partial least squares (PLS) SEM using SmartPLS version 3.0 was performed to analyze the measurement and structural models. We chose PLS-SEM rather than covariance-based SEM mainly because of exploratory nature of this research and the fact that the goal of this research is predicting the target variable, networking value, rather than testing or confirming a theory. We followed Hair et al. (2016) procedure for evaluation of measurement models and the structural model. Table 2 provides evidence for constructs internal consistency (Composite reliability and Cronbach’s alpha), convergent validity (average variance extracted), and discriminant validity measured by heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) of the correlations. We use HTMT criterion to assess discriminant validity based on the Hair et al. (2016) recommendation. All HTMT values are lower than the conservative threshold value of 0.85 and results of bootstrapping with 5000 samples shows the confidence interval of the HTMT statistic do not include the value 1 for all combinations of constructs. Moreover, results of Fornell-Larcker Criterion in table 3 shows all correlations between constructs are less than the square root of AVE for each construct, thereby indicating more support for discriminant validity. Common method bias was checked by using Kock (2015) approach. There were no occurrences of variance inflation factors (VIFs) greater than 3.3 in all alternative research models with the same constructs but differently assigned predictors, suggesting that common method bias not be an issue. Figure 2 summarizes the test of hypotheses and variance explained as reported by $R^2$ values. Path significance estimates were calculated using 5000 bootstrap samples.

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<tr>
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Table 1. Demographic information

Discussion

The research findings support the effect of profile disclosure on social connectedness (H1a) and online network size (H1b). Past literature on SNSs has mainly focused on the role of one’s profile in sharing
Taking Advantage of Using P-SNSs

identity information such as demographic and personal interests, arguing that one’s profile can be used as a social lubricant, smoothing relationship development and as a result facilitating the expansion of one’s social network (Ellison and Vitak 2015). However, our research shows not only can users’ profiles affect their network size (H1b) positively but they may also create a sense of connectivity, which is more than just a sense of being a member of a social network. This is mainly because one’s profile specifically in P-SNSs is the key means for fulfilling self-presentation purposes, so users tend to more frequently update and improve their profiles on P-SNSs and as a result, spend more time on their profiles on these sites. They also tend to reveal more information via their P-SNS profiles to make sure that their profiles present them in the best way. This causes an increased sense of connectivity among users and helps them expand their online network more rapidly. This is in line with Ellison et al.’s (2007) findings that the intensity of Facebook use is positively related to the formation of social connectedness and network size. Similarly, Riedl et al. (2013) find that users’ level of social connectedness can be predicted by high use frequency of public social networks. Also, Kobler et al. (2010) found that revealing more identity information by Facebook users is positively associated with the increased level of social connectedness among them. The research findings also support the effect of active participation on perceived social connectedness, but the effect of active participation on online network size is not supported. At first glance, the lack of connection between active participation and online network size is surprising as we expect that active participation leads users to be more engaged in their social networks and as a result help them establish ties with broader audiences. We may explain this finding based on two facts: previous studies show that SNS users are more willing to add people to their network that they already knew them from the offline world rather than find them online (Ellison et al. 2011). The second fact is that based on our data analysis the frequency of active participation activities performed by P-SNS users compared to other activities (such as passive consumption) is significantly lower, suggesting that such activities may not sufficiently engage P-SNS users to add a significant number of people to their networks. Finally, both hypotheses H3 and H4 are supported by our research findings, suggesting that both network size and perceived social connectedness positively affect networking value. However, the research results show the effect of social connectedness on perceived networking value is much more than that of network size.

<table>
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Table 2. Constructs’ reliability, convergent and discriminant validity

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<th>Soc_Con</th>
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<tr>
<td>Val_Netw</td>
<td>0.576</td>
<td>0.498</td>
<td>0.179</td>
<td>0.671</td>
<td>0.779</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Discriminant validity- Fornell-Lareker Criterion
Conclusion

This research aims to discover the unique and tangible benefits of using P-SNSs and how users' actions on P-SNSs can lead to those benefits. Built on previous studies (Utz and Breuer 2016), we conceptualize the unique and tangible benefits of using P-SNSs based on Lin's (1999) definition of social capital benefits. In line with Koroleva et al. (2011) we conceptualize these benefits as networking value. By proposing and empirically testing our research model, we found that people's actions on P-SNSs such as profile disclosure and active participation can lead to a larger network size and increased social connectedness, which in turn can provide them valuable benefits. From a theoretical perspective, this research offers an integrated model of social capital formation process for the context of P-SNS. In addition, this research helps us to have a better understanding of users' profile functions in P-SNSs and, more broadly, in the online world. From a practical perspective, this research helps different audiences such as individuals interested in extending their networks (e.g., job-seekers), policymakers, and SNS providers better understand the process of social capital formation and as a result, assist them to play a more effective role in this process. Despite its contributions, this research has several limitations that should be addressed. It is important to note that due to the cross-sectional nature of this research, causality cannot be inferred. Also, using perceived and self-reported data for measuring variables rather than actual records (server logs) may increase the bias of our research. Nonetheless, this research is an important step towards understanding value creation in professionally-oriented social network sites.

References

Ellison, N., and Boyd, D. 2013. “Sociality through Social Network Sites,” in Dutton, W. H. (Ed.), The...
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