AN INVESTIGATION ON THE CONSEQUENCES OF USING VIRTUAL SOCIAL NETWORKS IN PROMOTING THE SOCIAL CAPITAL

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A R T I C L E I N F O	A B S T R A C T
	This research investigated the consequences of using virtual social networks in promoting social capital. The research method was qualitative, type of phenomenology and the field of research included managers and experts in the field of media and communications, as well as the professors and social science experts. A purposive sampling method was used and the data were extracted using semi-structured interviews and analyzed by Colaizzi seven-step method. The results were collected until the theoretical saturation of the information. Findings indicated that the most important factors of social capital enhancement included the easy interaction and communication in cyberspace, increasing the coherence and participation by virtual social networks, social bonding in virtual social networks, interactive communication between people and government, and the power of virtual social networking. On the other hand, the most important barriers to social capital promotion included the gradual change in the norms and positive beliefs in cyberspace, social isolation, the publication of negative news in cyberspace, the expansion of individualism in cyberspace, weakening of the traditional social communication network, the promotion of disconfidence in social relations and weakening of ethics. The findings also indicated that virtual social networks have both positive and negative outcomes. The social capital can be promoted with the correct use of social capital strengthening factors and removing the barriers of social capital. © 2019 INT TRANS J ENG MANAG SCI TECH.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, virtual social networks as a social phenomenon have focused on many intellectuals. These networks are a new generation of Internet websites that provide access to a new

form of communication and content sharing on the Internet, both virtual and non-existent.

In fact, "the new media is a distinct set of communication technologies and common features of digitalism and the wide access of citizens to it for personal use " (Mehdizadeh, 2013, p. 319).

In the meantime, the emergence of the phenomenon of using virtual messaging software has opened up new horizons in the field of human communication due to the diverse and attractive features and capabilities.

Ziaei Parvar (2009), has referred to some features of virtual networks, including sharing, mobilizing and organizing, friendship, confidence, audience circles, citation and generalization, multimedia, chat, cruel critique, following and follower, prestige, forwarding, collective wisdom, globalism, entertainment, democratic structure, social capital power, social mobility, initiative and creativity (Hakimi, 2011), which are very much considered in the study of social capital.

From the definitions and functions of social networks, it can be concluded that these new media can affect elements such as confidence, values, norms, group communications, and so on, that all of them are components of social capital.

However, according to the analysis of reports and polling conducted over the past two years, 52.18% of Iranian households have access to the Internet, and among every 100 Iranian men, 55 ones and out of every 100 Iranian women, 51ones have been members of social networks. In total, 53% of Iranians have been a member of at least one of the mobile social networks, which are increasing (Gholizadeh and Zamani, 2017). It shows that with increasing the penetration rate of the Internet and simultaneously increasing the number of users, the impact of the use of virtual social networks on users' lives is also increasing.

It should be acknowledged that virtual social networks, on one hand, promotes and reproduces social capital, with create and strengthen collective wisdom, continuous virtual communication, promote human and moral values, develop social partnership, increase confidence, intimacy and honesty, reduce physical distances, creativity in ideas and familiarity with various ideas, information facilitation, etc. and on the other hand, with creating distance from the real world, addiction to cyberspace and social networks, creating a generation gap, diminishing social values, change in lifestyle, compromising privacy, providing conditions for the virtual crimes, the easy access of young people and teenagers to brutalism, and etc. threatens the various social institutions, and in particular families, and weakens the components of social capital in society (Akbari, 2010; Solemanipour, 2010; Zanjanizadeh, 2005).

With studying the effects of social capital, "social confidence ", "social union " and "social participation" can be mentioned as the components of social capital (Putnam, 2001), which, of course, are mutually interrelated and how to use virtual social networks can also have an impact on it.

It can be said that social capital has elements and components that, if strengthened, can create the field of improvement and development in other sectors. Knowledge and information, values and norms, confidence, mutual relations, participation, responsibility, formal and informal networks, help and assistance, cooperation, religious beliefs, discipline, rational thinking, respect for each other, efficiency of government, feeling of security, adherence to the rule of law and regulations, kindness,

honesty, faith, law, peace, friendship, cooperation, an etc. are some of the elements that are considered as indicators of social capital. Meanwhile, confidence and participation are emphasized over other components (Jasbi, 2001: 125).

Accordingly, positive and negative outcomes from virtual social networks can be expected, and users may take advantages to reduce injuries and increase social capital by using a proper scientific model. Therefore, this work attempts to answer the question "What are the consequences of using virtual social networks in promoting social capital?", by studying how users use virtual social networks based on the promotion of social capital.

2. THEORETICAL FUNDAMENTALS OF RESEARCH

2.1 VIRTUAL SOCIAL NETWORKS

Being a new generation of web sites, virtual social networks, the users are gathered together in the virtual space on a common issue and form the online constituencies (Molaie, 2010).

In other words, the virtual social network is a collection of web-based services that allow individuals to connect with the other members on a network with their own public or private descriptions or, share their sources and search for new communications among the other general public descriptions (Soltanifar, 2010: 53).

In this regard, Macquail (2005) has identified and introduce the important dimensions and features of new media: 1) interactivity; 2) social presence; 3) media richness; 4) independence (autonomy); 5) playfulness; 6) privacy; and 7) personalization, and the four main categories of new media include the interpersonal communication media; interactive media; media and information search; identifying and communicating participatory media.

Earlier, Elihu Katz using the "use and satisfaction" theory suggested that the individuals use the media for very different purposes. The basic assumption, people are looking for content that provides the most satisfaction, the degree of satisfaction depends on the individual's needs. The more people feel that the actual content meet their needs, the more likely they select that content (Hamedi, 2012; Sorin and Tankard, 2002)

According to this theory, the total needs and motives of the audience in using the media can be classified into four main categories: 1) awareness and supervision, 2) personal relationships, 3) personal identity, and 4) entertainment and avoidance of reality (Mehdizadeh, 2013).

Accordingly, the virtual social networks are not the exception to the features of the modern media. In fact, cyberspace social networks are created to boost the social interactions, and thorough information on people profiles i.e., user photos, personal interests and other information (which provide the information about the individual's identity), facilitates the communication. Users can see the profiles of others and communicate with each other through various applications such as email and chat (Pempek et al., 2009).

Here, the theory of "propagation of innovations" can be mentioned to explain the widespread use of virtual social networks. This theory examines the propagation of the social process of innovation

including new ideas and methods of using the means, and how to reach them, and how they are expanded into a social system. Rogers (1995) defined innovation as an idea, an act, a goal, a means, or an adaptation to a variable situation that a person assumes as new. From his point of view, propagation is a particular kind of relationship that extends innovation. Rogers considered the process of promoting innovation in five steps: 1) awareness, 2) stimulation, 3) decision-making, 4) implementation, 5) consolidation, (Rogers, 1995, and 1997).

Drahošováa and Balco (2017), studied the benefits and disadvantages of using social media in the European Union, the most commonly used Web 2 platform in the EU are system wikis, video sharing websites, search engines and social sites. The three most commonly used social media sites in the EU are Facebook, Google Plus and Instagram. On the other hand, the goals of using web platform 2 are, respectively, contacting friends, receiving information, selling products, online marketing, monitoring messages, and searching for new friends. The benefits of social media, respectively, are the exchange of information and communication, information sharing, education, teamwork and work from home and services, as well as disadvantages of social media are the internet addiction, insecurity, excessive information, and the loss of social communication (Drahošováa and Balco, 2017).

2.2 SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital is one of the concepts first introduced by Hanifan L. J. in entering the field of social sciences and was highlighted by Putnam R. (Jamshidiha, 2004: 67).

Hanni Fan's (1916) believes that there is a close relationship between social capital and the social connection, and social capital lies within the social connection.

The foundation of social capital is based on the value of the relationship between individuals and groups. In a general sense, social capital is the wealth and hidden assets that exist in the social connection between the activists of society and resulted from the quality of the relationships and their interactions, and it causes the relationships between individuals to be transformed in a manner that facilitates the action. (Baghini, 2008: 9).

With studying the effects of social capital produced, the "social confidence", "social union" and "social participation" can be named as the components of social capital, which are mutually interrelated (Putnam, 2001).

Putnam (1993) believes that all social features of institutions and organizations, such as confidence, norms, and social networks, are called social capital. Putnam brings the main axis of this discussion to the values of the social network, which people tend to emerge them in social relationships and engage in their own communications. According to Putnam, social capital is defined as a cultural phenomenon that includes the level of the civic mentality of members of the community, the existence of social norms that promote collective action and the degree of confidence in public institutions.

Contrary to Putnam's definition, social capital in the definition of Bourdieu's (1983) petition refers to the investment of individuals in social networks. In this definition, social capital is a private commodity that can be transformed into cultural capital, real wealth, or "symbolic capital", which

represents social status. Therefore, the extent to which a person benefits from social capital determines a very important part of his power in society (Jamshidiha, 2004: 66).

In a division, five types of social capital including 1. bonding social capital, 2. bridging social capital 3. synergy social capital, 4. limited social capital, 5. connection social capital, which can be used to identify resources and analyze them (Baghini, 2008: 47).

In fact, social capital has elements and components that, if strengthened, can create the ground for improvement and development in the other sectors. Knowledge and information, values and norms, confidence, mutual relations, partnership, responsibility, formal and informal networks, help and cooperation, cooperation, religious beliefs, orderliness, rational thinking, respect for each other, sense of security, adherence to law and regulations, altruism, honesty, devotion, peace and friendship, cooperation, and etc. are some elements that are considered as the indicators of social capital. Meanwhile, confidence and participation are emphasized over the other components (Jasbi, 2001: 125).

Here, it should be noted that the concept of social capital has two general dimensions: "cognitive" and "structural", whose cognitive dimension refers to interactions of members and public confidence, including beliefs, attitudes, norms and common values among the members of a group, from which the social mental asset is also referred to. The structural dimension of social capital also includes the pattern of communication among the members of group and the composition of their organization such as network degrees, the density and degree of homogeneity of the group or group members, the social communication method, cohesion and social solidarity, social participation and networks, unofficial institutions and connections which have been introduced as the factors behind the social capital (Faghihi and Feizi, 2005; Tavakoli et al., 2014).

However, with little contemplation in today's society, we find that virtual social networks affect different aspects of social capital. In this regard, the previous researches have shown that social networks, cyberspace, and the internet have affected the components of social capital, and the use of these networks increases or decreases all or some of the components of social capital. Previous researches have shown that there is a positive, direct, and significant relationship between the use of virtual social networks and the internet with confidence, participation and cooperation, civil participation in the real world and participation in elections, and in general, with social capital (Khodayari et al., 2014; Mortazavi et al., 2014; Kermani and Pakdaman, 2016; Ghazi et al., 2016; Vosoughi and Khalil 2014; Panahi, 2015).

In this regard, Mirfardi and Valinejad (2015) also reported an inverse relationship between the increase of membership history and the level of social capital, so that the history of membership in social networks (independent variable) has reverse and significant effect on the social capital (dependent variable).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mortazavi et al. (2014), in his research entitled "The Effect of Virtual Social Networks on Social Capital of Students, Case Study: University Students of Science and Research", selected 172 students

of Faculty of Management and Economics by random sampling method. The results showed that the effect of the virtual network on the components of social capital (participation, confidence, and co-operation) of students was less than average. The main hypothesis test also showed that electronic social networks had a relatively strong impact on the components of social capital, such as participation, cooperation, and confidence.

Mirfardi and Valinejad (2015) studied, using the survey method based on the Lane formula, selected 400 ones with the random sampling method and studied using a researcher-made combination questionnaire. The results showed that the membership history variable in social networks (independent variable) had reverse and significant effect on social capital (dependent variable) and, with increasing membership history, the level of social capital was reduced and vice versa. Also, the results showed that the status and type of use of social networks had no effect on the social capital of students.

Ogagh and Mousavi (2016) studied with the linguistic analysis method among 10,000 users from 20 telegram groups entitled "Art, Science, and Sports". They concluded that the presence of target-oriented activities is evident in these groups and the social network of a telegram, while providing an opportunity for the presence and formation of the group, but the following relationship is much observed in these groups, rather than the interactive relationship. The representation of users in telegram groups is often done through the approval and acceptance of messages. Also, the results indicate that the support norm in these groups has come up with a new concept that people use for positive-face performance, expansion of positive communication, and targeted impact management.

Shaverdi (2017) studied social capital in real and cyber social networks of girl students in Tehran Universities, The results showed that the average of all components of social capital was in the interest of the social capital of the real society.

Taleshi et al. (2017) found that there was a significant relationship between attracting attention to the animations and television commercials of the telegram and participating in the elections. There was a significant relationship between the functions of the telegram software (network availability, availability, and high speed) and the dissemination of advertising messages by-election candidates. There was a significant relationship between the charm of slogans and the advertising of candidates in the telegram and participation in elections. There was a significant relationship between the use of symbols and signs in the advertisement of candidates and parties in the telegram and participation in elections, and there was a significant relationship between trust in advertising in the telegram and participation in elections.

Counts (2007), in qualitative and phenomenological research, entitled "A Mobile-Based Messaging Group Supporting the Social Orientation of Leisure Time", tested four groups of 6 to 8 participants using the mobile messaging systems and showed that there was a significant increase in sending the group fun messages, as well as in the quality of mobile social communications when sending group messages to person-to-person messages.

Zillien et al. (2009), using a quantitative survey method and a questionnaire tool, examined how users used the online activities and in what field they use them, showed that people with high and low status use the internet in different ways and for different purposes. The results showed that different

uses of the internet depend on the social and economic background of users, and users with higher status were more likely to use the internet in their capital activities.

In research by Venkatanathan (2012), it is concluded that in the field of social capital, introverted people use social networks more than extrovert people. The study also compared the men and women surveyed in general and indicated that social capital among women is more than men.

Grosseck et al. (2011), using a descriptive-survey method, studied on how students perceived the use of social networking Facebook and concluded that the most students spend considerable time on Facebook for social purposes, such as contact with friends and family, sharing pictures and participating in social activities, etc.

Manago et al. (2012) showed that Facebook has expanded the comprehensive social networks for people through telecommunications, and increases the number of relationships with close people and strangers. The results showed that the students who had more members on Facebook, especially those connected with their old high school friends on the network, considered Facebook as a useful tool in social interaction.

Zemmels & Khey (2014) compared the students' attitudes toward privacy and trust in sharing digital images and video through internet-based media, in three forms of Facebook, social networks, and mobile, and also showed that trusting the recipient of images sent over mobile phones was significantly more than the other media.

O' Brolchaim et al. (2015) found that the convergence of virtual reality in social networks has brought ethics problems such as privacy threat and the threat of audience freedom.

Drahošováa and Balco (2017) found that the greatest benefit of using social media is the exchange of information and communication. This was considered as the greatest advantage by 97.7% of participants studying in EU member states.

Ke Xue et al. (2018), studied the new media affected on user characteristics, concluded that the use of new media has a significant positive impact on extrovert, openness and consensus through belonging sense and has a negative impact on emotional stability and conscientiousness through self-regulation. The relationship between the use of new media and a sense of belonging, shown that this relationship is more for women than men.

4. RESEARCH QUESTION

Main Question
- What are the consequences of using virtual social networks in promoting social capital?
- Sub-Questions
- What are the positive consequences of using virtual social networks in promoting social capital?
- What are the negative consequences of using virtual social networks in promoting social capital?

5. METHOD OF RESEARCH

In this research, the qualitative method of "phenomenology" is used. Phenomenology is an essential element of experience in everyday life of people. Therefore, the experience is the central focus of phenomenology (Iman, 2012).

In this research, library and field methods were used to collect the data. The library method was used to collect data about the history of internal and external studies. In the field method, the researcher collected data with conducting deep semi-structured interviews to achieve theoretical saturation.

The research domain of this research includes managers and experts in the field of media and communication as well as professors and experts in social sciences. In this field, eighteen participants were selected using a purposive sampling method of a theoretical type.

6. DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of the findings of this section was carried out using the seven-step Colaizzi Method as follows: At first, the descriptions of all the participants were red and recorded exactly in order to be felt with them. Secondly, each of the protocols was referred to and important phrases were extracted, in which 183 important sentences were extracted.

Third, the meaning or concept of any important phrase, which is referred to as the concepts defined, has been obtained by the researcher, in which 231 concepts were obtained in this field that among them, 61 concepts related to the subject matter of the research were obtained. Fourth, the regulated concepts were organized within the subject categories. Fifth, the findings were integrated into a comprehensive description of the phenomenon and was arranged in the form of 27 main concepts or themes. Sixth, a comprehensive description of the phenomenon under investigation was presented in the form of a clear statement, and was stated in two fields of positive consequences, or "factors enhancing social capital", and negative consequences or "obstacles to the promotion of social capital". In the final stage, the results were returned to the participants and questions were asked about the findings.

After that, validity and reliability of the articles were confirmed, so that the findings were indicated to participants and their views were taken and applied for validation using member control technique, by providing data analysis and its results to the participants in order to know and use their reactions in the reports of the writings. In addition, in order to confirm the reliability of the findings, the researcher showed the concepts extracted to some of the researchers and professors of the field as a guidance committee and ensured their consensus in the objective and scientific evaluation of findings.

7. FINDING

This research was done with the aim of investigating the consequences of using virtual social networks in promoting the social capital; summarizing the most important findings of this research in the form of "social capital enhancement factors" and "barriers to promoting social capital", are presented respectively in Tables 1 and 2.

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Table 1: The Positive Consequences of Using Virtual Social Networks to Promote the Social Capital

	Social capital enhancement factors
1	Easy interaction and communication in cyberspace
2	Increasing the coherence and participation by virtual social networks
3	Solidify and create social communication in the virtual social networks
4	Establishing an interactive relationship between people and governance
5	The power of streaming the virtual social networks
6	The appearance of the individual's real self and the realities of the community in cyberspace
7	Meet the individual needs in cyberspace
8	Getting quick feedback from society about government decisions
9	Increasing political participation in society by cyberspace
10	The consolidation of the family institution
11	Strengthening intra-group values
12	Avoiding social isolation in cyberspace
13	The role of cyberspace in individuals' socialization

Table 2: The Negative Consequences of Using Virtual Social Networks to Promote the Social Capital

	Barriers to promoting social capital
1	Providing massive unauthenticated information in cyberspace
2	The gradual change of the norms and positive beliefs in cyberspace
3	Creating social isolation
4	Publishing negative news in cyberspace
5	The expansion of individualism in cyberspace
6	The inverted reality in cyberspace
7	Paying attention to the rights and neglect of the assignment in cyberspace
8	Weakening traditional social communications network
9	The weakening of traditional social capital by virtual social networks
10	Promote distrust in social relationships
11	Weakening of ethics
12	Modeling Western lifestyles in the face of cyberspace
13	The threat of native traditions and customs
14	Promotion of non-native cyberspace literature in the real world of society

8. CONCLUSION

Findings showed that the most important factors of social capital enhancement include easy interaction and communication in cyberspace, increasing the coherence and participation by virtual social networks, solidarity and social bonding in virtual social networks, interactive communication between people and governance, the power of streaming the virtual social networks, The appearance of the individual's real self and the realities of the community in cyberspace, meet the individual needs in cyberspace, getting quick feedback from society about the government decisions, increasing political participation in society by cyberspace, the consolidation of the family institution, the strengthening of values inside the group, avoiding social isolation in cyberspace, and the role of cyberspace in individuals' socialization.

On the other hand, the most important obstacles to social capital promotion include the massive supply of unwanted information in cyberspace, the gradual change of the norms and positive beliefs in cyberspace, the creation of social isolation, the publication of negative news in cyberspace, the development of individualism in cyberspace, the reversal of reality in cyberspace, paying attention to rights and neglecting the duties in cyberspace, undermining the traditional social communication

network, undermining traditional social capital by virtual social networks, promoting distrust in social relationships, the weakening of ethics, the modeling of western lifestyles in the face of cyberspace, the threat of indigenous traditions and customs, and the promotion of non-native cyberspace literature in the society.

The findings also showed that virtual social networks have both positive and negative outcomes. It can be taken steps to promote social capital in society with virtual social networks through the true use of social capital enhancement factors and avoiding social capital barriers.

9. DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
The used or generated data and the result are presented in this study.

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