

Social Media Enabled Community Empowerment:

A Social Capital and Collective Action Perspective

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This research aims to provide insight into the social media enabled mechanisms of community empowerment in physical communities. We aim to address the following research questions: (1) What is the relationship between social capital and empowerment among community members in social media? (2) How does social media enabled collective action influence the relationship between social capital and empowerment among community members in social media? This study adapts the relational and cognitive dimensions from social capital theory (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998) and the collective action model (Hargrave and Van de Ven 2006) to explore the interactions among community development and planning stakeholders to understand how they empower community members. These social capital dimensions may promote users to participate in community development plans and projects over social media, and have an influence on alliances (Diani, 2011).

We have collected over 142,000 messages from Twitter using hashtags related to community development projects in the area of Boston, Massachusetts, USA. In addition, 3,963 unique messages between community members and developers for 10 projects have been collected from an online community outreach platform, and 16 interviews have been conducted. An inductive and iterative data analysis approach with natural language processing (NLP) is used to analyze the social media messages using customized R scripts.

In this study, we can observe characteristics, such as shared identification, related to community empowerment. The preliminary results show the topics of discussion among community members to help explain the shared narratives and obligations to understand the cognitive and relational aspects of the communities. The potential contribution is to provide understanding of the influence of social capital in the collective action processes for empowerment over social media in the context of community development and planning. The remaining data analysis will be conducted prior to the conference and the preliminary findings will be shared at the conference.

References

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