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Attachment to Facebook and the civic lives of minority college students in the U.S. Midwest

by Francis Dalisay, Matthew Kushin, Masahiro Yamamoto, Yung-I Liu, and Wayne

Abstract

A survey of minority college students attending an urban university in the U.S. Midwest was conducted to examine the links between emotional attachment to Facebook and levels along key civic indicators. Results suggested that minority college students' emotional attachment to Facebook is positively associated with their off-line and online political participation, social trust, and neighborliness, but not with their off-line and online civic engagement. Also, the findings indicate moderate levels of emotional attachment to Facebook, off-line civic engagement, off-line political participation, and social trust, and low levels of online civic engagement and online political participation among minority college students.

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Introduction

A growing body of research has investigated the impact of Facebook on key civic indicators among college students. The empirical evidence to date paints a mixed picture for the social network site's pro-civic role. For instance, some studies of college students show that Facebook usage is positively associated with civic engagement, political participation, and social trust (Ellison, *et al.*, 2007). However, other research suggests that Facebook decreases or has no effect on civic engagement and political participation (Vitak, *et al.*, 2011). Despite the accumulating yet mixed research findings regarding the potential impact of Facebook consumption on civics, few studies of this kind have focused primarily on racial minority college students. Such investigation is important in and of itself in light of evidence suggesting a gap in civic behaviors among American minorities (Smith, 2013).

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In the backdrop of the growing interest on Facebook use and civics, research indicates that minority students who are more civically active — involved on their campuses and communities — are more likely to be satisfied with college, stay enrolled through their junior year, and have higher grade point averages (Fischer, 2007; Strayhorn, 2010). Similarly, other research suggests the maintenance of social ties through social networking sites leads to improvement in academic outcomes (Ellison, *et al.*, 2011; Ellison, *et al.*, 2007; Junco, 2012a, 2012b). Given the increasing numbers of minority students attending college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007), and the potential that higher rates of civic involvement among this group are linked with measures of academic success and retention (Fischer, 2007), it is important to assess minority college students' levels along key civic indicators, and how interactive online media such as Facebook impact these levels.

The purpose of the present study is two-fold. First, it investigates minority college students' levels along key civic indicators — including off-line and online civic engagement, off-line and online political participation, neighborliness, and social trust. Second, this study investigates the relationships between emotional attachment to Facebook and these key civic indicators among minority college students. The minority sample in this study includes African-American, Hispanic, Asian-American, and Middle Eastern [1] college students.



Minority use of social networking sites

This investigation is timely because research suggests minorities frequently use online social networking sites. According to data from the U.S. Department of Commerce (2011), 55 percent of African-American, 81 percent of Asian, and 57 percent of Hispanic households use the Internet, compared with 72 percent of white households. Also, Pew survey data indicate that the percentages of African-Americans (68 percent) and Hispanics (72 percent) who report using SNSs are higher than that of whites (65 percent) (Duggan and Brenner, 2013). Additionally, other research has revealed that minorities use social media and create user-generated content more frequently than whites (Correa and Jeong, 2010; Lenhart, 2009). For instance, there is evidence that African-American college students are more likely to use Twitter than white students (Hargittai and Litt, 2011). With respect to Facebook use, about two-thirds (67 percent) of the adult Internet population in the U.S. use this social networking site, making it the most frequently consumed SNS in the country (Duggan and Brenner, 2013; Rainie, *et al.*, 2012). Research by Pew also estimates that roughly 71 percent of adult non-Hispanic whites use the site, while 76 percent of black and 73 percent of Hispanic adults are Facebook users (Duggan and Smith, 2013). Although Pew lacks comparable data for Asian-Americans' use of SNSs, Nielsen (2012) reports that this racial group is "the most active demographic segment on social networks" [2]. On the other hand, use statistics on Middle Eastern student samples in the U.S. are limited, which warrants research on this groups' Internet and social media use.

The present study focuses on emotional attachment as a construct of, and measure for Facebook use. Emotional attachment to Facebook is a concept derived from the work of Ellison, *et al.* (2007) and is a dimension of their intensity of Facebook use scale. Emotional attachment assesses the level in which users are affectively connected to Facebook and the extent to which the site is integrated into their daily activities (Ellison, *et al.*, 2007). Manifestations of emotional attachment to Facebook include the tendency to feel that Facebook is part of one's daily life and feeling proud to tell others that one is using Facebook. Recent research shows Ellison, *et al.*'s (2007) emotional attachment scale as a reliable instrument when administered among college students (Clayton, *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, with respect to research on racial groups' use of Facebook, some evidence suggests whites have expressed some negativity toward the use of Facebook, such as distaste for online arguments on the site (Correa and Jeong, 2010). However, the affective responses of minorities toward Facebook and its potential outcomes on key civic indicators are less clear.



Civic engagement and political participation

Civic engagement and political participation are two commonly examined characteristics of a vibrant, or strong and functioning civil society (Wallace and Pichler, 2009). Civic engagement can be defined as voluntary participation in activities intended to promote the well-being of a

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community (Putnam, 2000; Shah, 1998). Civic engagement includes behaviors such as serving on committees to improve community conditions; getting involved in religious, ethnic, civic, and social groups; attending meetings concerning public issues; and, volunteering for nonpolitical groups (Mastin, 2000; Putnam, 2000). According to Putnam (2000), American society has witnessed declines in civic engagement over the past few decades. These declines have led communication researchers to examine the roles played by a number of variables that may inhibit or promote engagement, including media use (Moy, *et al.*, 1999).

Political participation refers to activities that have an influence on government action. This influence can either be direct, such as affecting the making of public policy, or indirect, such as influencing the elections of leaders who design the policies (Verba, *et al.*, 1995). Political participation includes voting and working for political campaigns. It also includes less formal activities such as contacting elected officials, attending town hall meetings, circulating petitions for a candidate or an issue, and making political donations.

The proliferation of online social networking sites has enabled citizens to engage in online civic and political activities, and research suggests that online participation is uniquely different from off-line participation. Best and Krueger (2005), for example, reported that while civic skills such as writing a letter, participating in a group decision, planning or chairing a meeting, giving a presentation or speech in one's job, church, or other organizational settings predict off-line political participation, these civic skills are not associated with online participation. Rather, Internet skills are important predictors of online political participation (Best and Krueger, 2005). Due to the distinction between off-line and online forms of participation, the present study examines both off-line and online forms of civic engagement and political participation.

In terms of the civic engagement and political participation behaviors of racial groups, a survey conducted by Pew revealed that whites participate in forms of off-line and online civic engagement significantly more than African-Americans and Hispanics (Smith, 2013). The same survey also indicated whites discuss politics online more than African-Americans and Hispanics (Smith, 2013). Yet other research suggests African-American teens are more likely to be engaged civically and politically in online settings than white teens (Harp, *et al.*, 2010). Also, Asian-Americans' off-line civic engagement and political participation have increased in recent years (Wong, *et al.*, 2011), yet their rates of online civic engagement and political participation have not been as thoroughly documented. Similarly, the online political behaviors of Middle Eastern Americans have not been extensively examined. Some research suggests that Arab-Americans, a Middle Eastern group with a population of more than 1.5 million in the U.S., are not as active in off-line civic and political participation than other Americans (Strum, 2006). To extend research looking into the civic behaviors of college students representing these minority groups, the following research questions are investigated:

RQ1: What are minority college students' levels of off-line and online civic engagement?

RQ2: What are minority college students' levels of off-line and online political participation?

As noted earlier, the evidence is mixed regarding the relationships between Facebook's impact on online and off-line forms of civic engagement and political participation. For instance, a study conducted by Valenzuela, *et al.* (2009) showed that using Facebook was linked with greater off-line civic engagement and off-line political participation. In contrast, Vitak, *et al.* (2011) found intensity of Facebook use decreased general political participation, a construct consisting of both online and off-line activities. However, the same study by Vitak, *et al.* found that intensity of Facebook use was positively associated with online political participation, specifically on Facebook. Other evidence suggests the use of Facebook is related to online political participation, but not off-line participation (Baumgartner and Morris, 2010; Towner, 2013).

Only a small handful of studies have examined the impact social networking sites on forms of engagement among minorities. In one study, Byrne (2008) conducted a qualitative analysis of African-Americans' use of BlackPlanet.com, a social networking site for the African-American community. Byrne concluded that discussion of issues on that minority online SNS did not mobilize off-line civic engagement. Yet Hargittai and Hsieh (2010) suggested that when minority students use SNSs, they are more likely to engage in weaker-tie activity. Weaker tie activities focus on meeting new people and strangers, behaviors that could facilitate the social interaction necessary to increase civic and political engagement (McClurg,

2003; Gil de Zúñiga and Valenzuela, 2011).

In sum, although it could be expected that Facebook will positively impact off-line and online civic engagement, the empirical evidence to date remains inconclusive with respect to the strength and direction of the relationships between the consumption of Facebook and off-line and online political participation, and specifically, for minorities. Therefore, the following research questions are investigated:

RQ3: Among minority college students, what is the relationship between emotional attachment to Facebook and off-line and online civic engagement?

RQ4: Among minority college students, what is the relationship between emotional attachment to Facebook and off-line and online political participation?



Neighborliness

Neighborliness is another key civic indicator, and refers to behaviors that occur in social relationships between individuals who live in close proximity to each other (Mann, 1954). Neighboring behavior involves various forms of informal interaction with neighbors such as inviting neighbors for a cup of coffee or dinner, borrowing or exchanging things (*e.g.*, shovels, snow scrapers, bottle openers, etc.), and watching over neighbors' children, pets, or properties (Beaudoin and Thorson, 2004; Mann, 1954). Friendly and caring ties with neighbors can enrich social life through promoting a sense of belonging and emotional attachments, and protecting oneself from a sense of isolation and anxiety. Intimate neighborly ties also foster involvement in civic and political groups (Perkins, *et al.*, 1996) and enable people to share and openly exchange opinions. Although research analyzing levels of neighborliness of minority college students is limited, Lee, *et al.* (1991) showed that African-Americans engage in more neighboring activity than whites do. In an attempt to extend this line of research, the present study analyzes levels of neighborliness among a sample of minority college students, and investigates the following research question:

RQ5: What are minority college students' levels of neighborliness?

As noted above, the present study also analyzes the relationship between emotional attachment to Facebook and neighborliness among minority college students. Research in the 1990s on the then innovative Netville, a wired suburban Toronto community, found community members using interactive technology such as email to get to know one another, share advice, plan get-togethers, and otherwise build neighborly ties (Wellman and Hampton, 1999). Those who interacted via the Internet in the community were more likely to know and interact with one another (Hampton and Wellman, 2003). While Netville relied on online discussion boards in the years before social media, the interactive features of the network resemble early versions of what is now available on Facebook.

More recent research by Beaudoin (2007) demonstrated that after Hurricane Katrina, citizens' exposure to socially oriented campaign messages had positive effects on neighboring behavior at a later time. In another study that used a multi-ethnic sample, Beaudoin (2011) revealed that use of newspapers for news increased neighboring activity with specific ethnic groups. Newspaper news use increased neighborliness with whites, African-Americans, and Hispanics. Yet while newspaper news use increased neighboring activity with different ethnic groups, use of online news and TV news had no effect on neighborliness with these ethnic groups. Correa and Jeong (2010) found that minorities tend to seek out niche-based communities of likeminded folks on social media whereas whites did not. Similarly, evidence shows that neighboring among African-Americans is higher than that for whites, which may be due to a way of maintaining social ties and support among the racial group (Lee, *et al.*, 1991). It is plausible that similar patterns may emerge on account of a need for support and solidarity as a minority group. This raises the question as to whether there is any relationship between online niche behavior and neighboring behavior off-line. Based on the limited and conflicting research focusing on Facebook alone and its potential relationship with neighboring activity, particularly among minorities, the following research question is examined:

RQ6: Among minority college students, what is the relationship between emotional attachment to

Social trust

Social trust, another key civic indicator, can be defined as a norm of generalized reciprocity. It involves having faith in strangers or people who are different from one's self (Uslaner, 2004). It is characterized by a glue-like quality that facilitates participation in formal and informal social networks. Trust has been shown to be empirically separable from local social bonds rooted in kinship, friendship, and acquaintanceship ties (Beaudoin and Thorson, 2004). Citizens who trust others are more likely to volunteer, give to charity, and participate in politics and civic organizations (Putnam, 2000). Some studies show that trust is lower among racial minorities than whites (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2002). Research by Terrell and Terrell (1981), in particular, suggests minorities in the U.S. may hold a level of mistrust of dominant groups and the institutions they control, due to historical mistreatment received from dominant groups.

With respect to the relationship between Internet use and social trust, Best and Krueger (2006) found that online interaction with people met online increased levels of trust. On the other hand, online interaction with existing acquaintances did not increase trust. These findings may be due to the existing levels of trust that people already have with existing ties. Specifically, the level of online interaction increases levels of trust only when one does not have an existing tie and existing levels of trust with the person. In a similar vein, as more interaction takes place online, this may increase opportunities for self-disclosure with others online, which could increase trust (Ratan, *et al.*, 2010). As also noted above, research shows that Facebook positively impacts social trust (Valenzuela, *et al.*, 2009). Yet to date, the body of research looking into levels of social trust and the relationship between attachment to Facebook and social trust for minority college students in the U.S. is limited. In an attempt to narrow this gap in research, the following research questions are investigated:

RQ7: What are minority college students' levels of social trust?

RQ8: Among minority college students, what is the relationship between emotional attachment to Facebook and social trust?



Method

Procedure and sample

A survey of college students attending a large public university in the Midwest was conducted in the spring and fall of 2012, when participants were recruited in communication classes and offered course credit for their participation. The data collected during these two semesters were merged, as t-tests revealed no statistically significant differences between measures across these two semesters. Thirty-two respondents did not identify their race, so they were excluded from the analyses, which left a sample size of 421. We retained participants who identified themselves as African-American, Hispanic, Asian, and Middle Eastern, and excluded those who did not (*e.g.*, white). The total minority sample for this study was 181.

Measures

Emotional attachment to Facebook. To measure emotional attachment to Facebook, we used the following items acquired from Ellison, *et al.* (2007): (a) Facebook is part of my daily life; (b) I am proud to tell people I am on Facebook; (c) Facebook has become part of my daily routine; (d) I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Facebook for a day; (e) I would be sorry if Facebook was shut down. Responses were measured along a seven-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The five items were then combined and averaged to form a single measure ($\alpha = .90$). Descriptive statistics revealed the mean score of emotional attachment to Facebook is 3.48 ($SD = 1.79$). Because this is above the mid-point of three, it suggests there was a moderate level of emotional attachment to Facebook among our minority college student sample.

Off-line civic engagement. Off-line civic engagement was measured by asking respondents how often they did the following activities (1 = *never*, 7 = *often*): worked or volunteer in a community project; work or volunteer for nonpolitical groups such as a hobby club, environmental group or student association; raise or donate money for charity or ran/walked/biked for charity. We combined and averaged these three items to form a single

measure of off-line civic engagement ($\alpha = .84$).

Online civic engagement. Online civic engagement was measured by asking respondents how often they used the Internet through a personal computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone to do the following activities (1 = *never*, 7 = *often*): go online to work or volunteer in a community project; go online to work or volunteer for nonpolitical groups such as a hobby club, environmental group or student association; go online to raise or donate money for charity or sign up for a run/walk/bike event for charity. We combined and averaged these three items to form a single measure of online civic engagement ($\alpha = .84$).

Off-line political participation. Off-line political participation was measured by asking respondents how often they did the following activities (1 = *never*, 7 = *often*): work or volunteer for political groups or candidates; vote in a local, state or national election; try to persuade others in an election; sign a petition; wear or displayed a badge or sticker related to a political or social cause. We combined and averaged these five items to form a single measure of off-line political participation ($\alpha = .87$).

Online political participation. Online political participation was measured by asking respondents how often they used the Internet through a personal computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone to do the following activities (1 = *never*, 7 = *often*): go online to work or volunteer for political groups or candidates; go online to find information about voting in a local, state, or national election; go online to persuade others in an election; go online to sign a petition; go online to share a link related to a political or social cause. We combined these five items to form a single measure of online political participation ($\alpha = .88$).

Neighborliness. Neighborliness was measured with three items adapted from Beaudoin and Thorson (2004): within the last year, how often did you borrow or exchange things with your neighbors, (b) within the last year, how often did you visit your neighbors, and (c) within the last year, how often have you and your neighbors helped one another with small tasks, such as repair work (1 = *not often*, 7 = *very often*). The three items were then combined and averaged to form a single measure of neighborliness ($\alpha = .90$).

Social trust. Social trust was measured with three items adapted from Valenzuela, *et al.* (2009) (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*): generally speaking, people can be trusted; in general, people try to be fair; in general, people try to be helpful. These three items were combined and averaged to form a single measure of trust ($\alpha = .89$).

Demographics and other measures

Several demographic variables including age, sex, income, and ethnicity were included as controls to evaluate independent effects of the theoretical variables. Age was measured in an open-ended format ($M = 23.66$, $SD = 7.49$, range). Sex was measured with females as the high value ($n = 99$, 54.7 percent) and males as the low value ($n = 82$, 45.3 percent). Income was measured by a seven-point ordinal-scale item (median = "between \$25,000 to \$50,000"). Ethnicity was measured by giving participants a list of racial and ethnic groups from which to choose, including black or African-American ($n = 122$, 67.4 percent), Hispanic ($n = 23$, 12.7 percent), Asian ($n = 21$, 11.6 percent), and Middle Eastern ($n = 15$, 8.3 percent). As noted above, because the focus of this study was on minority college students representing these four ethnic groups, participants who did not identify themselves as belonging to one of these groups (*e.g.*, white) were not included in the analyses.

Studies have shown attention to political news to be strongly associated with civic and political behaviors (Gil de Zúñiga, *et al.*, 2012; McLeod, *et al.*, 1996). For this reason, we also measured this variable and included it as a control by asking respondents how much attention they paid to the following sources for political news on a seven-point scale (1 = *none*, 7 = *lots of attention*): (a) online or printed newspapers; (b) television news; (c) radio news; (d) social networking Web sites; (e) news portal Web sites, such as Yahoo! News; (f) books about current politics or national affairs; and, (g) documentary films about politics or national affairs. Responses to the seven items were combined and averaged to form a single index ($\alpha = .83$, $M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.87$). Descriptive results show that participants paid most attention to television news ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 2.03$), followed in descending order by news portal Web sites, such as Yahoo! News ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 1.91$), online or printed newspapers ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 2.04$), social networking Web sites ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 2.03$), radio news ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.95$), documentary films about politics or national affairs ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 2.05$), and books about current politics or national affairs ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.87$).

To investigate the research questions, a series of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models were estimated, with civic engagement, political participation, neighborliness, and social trust regressed on age, sex, income, ethnicity, attention to political news, and Facebook use. Three dummy variables were used for ethnicity with Middle Eastern as the reference group. Resulting coefficients are the unique effects of each independent variable while controlling for the influences of all other variables in the models.

Table 1: Means and standard deviations for emotional attachment to Facebook, off-line and online civic engagement, off-line and online political participation, neighborliness, and social trust of minority college students.

	Mean (SD)
Emotional attachment to Facebook	3.48 (1.79)
Off-line civic engagement	3.43 (1.78)
Online civic engagement	2.27 (1.55)
Off-line political participation	3.11 (1.61)
Online political participation	2.47 (1.54)
Neighborliness	2.83 (1.92)
Social trust	3.91 (1.58)

Table 2: Regression results for the relationships between emotional attachment to Facebook and civic indicators.

Note: $N = 181$. Cell entries are standardized regression coefficients.
+ $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

	Off-line civic engagement	Off-line political participation	Online civic engagement	Online political participation	Neighborliness
Age	-.10	.05	-.01	.03	.13+
Sex (female)	.06	.07	.03	.05	-.09
Income	.07	.10	.13+	.06	.14+
African- American	.25+	.20	.09	.05	-.02
Hispanic	.12	.11	.07	.08	-.00
Asian- American	.14	.09	.07	.09	.04
Attention to political news	.28***	.37***	.28***	.37***	.18*
Emotional attachment to Facebook	.05	.15*	.05	.14+	.27***
R^2	.13**	.20***	.10**	.17***	.14***
Adjusted R^2	.09**	.16***	.07**	.13***	.10***



For the purpose of brevity, this study first reports the results for the research questions that addressed minority college students' levels of off-line and online civic engagement (*RQ1*), off-line and online political participation (*RQ2*), neighborliness (*RQ5*), and social trust (*RQ7*). The following, which are also shown on [Table 1](#), are the mean scores and standard deviations for these variables. The following, which are also shown on Table 1, are the mean scores and standard deviations for these variables: off-line civic engagement ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.78$), online civic engagement ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 1.55$), off-line political participation ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.61$), online political participation ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.53$), neighborliness ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.92$), and social trust ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.58$). These results are significant at $p < .001$ with one-sample t-tests. As these results indicate, off-line civic engagement, off-line political participation, and social trust were above the mid-point of three, which might suggest moderate levels. However, neighborliness, online civic engagement and online political participation were below the mid-point, which might suggest low levels. Interestingly, the minority college students were more actively engaged off-line than online, as they scored higher in off-line rather than online civic engagement and political participation.

RQ3 investigated the relationships between emotional attachment to Facebook and off-line and online civic engagement among minority students. Results reveal that for minority students, the relationships between emotional attachment to Facebook and off-line and online civic engagement were not significant.

RQ4 investigated the relationships between emotional attachment to Facebook and off-line and online political participation. Results indicate that for minority students, emotional attachment to Facebook was positively associated with off-line ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$). Also, a positive relationship between emotional attachment to Facebook and online political participation was approaching significance ($\beta = .14$, $p = .07$).

RQ6 investigated the relationship between emotional attachment to Facebook and neighborliness. Results indicate that for minority students, emotional attachment to Facebook was positively associated with neighborliness ($\beta = .27$, $p < .001$).

RQ8 investigated the relationship between emotional attachment to Facebook and social trust. Findings indicate that for minority students, emotional attachment to Facebook was positively associated with social trust ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$).



Discussion and conclusion

A growing body of research has analyzed the relationships between emotional attachment to Facebook and key civic indicators among college students. To date, the evidence remains mixed with respect to the impact of Facebook on civic indicators. Also, few studies have focused primarily on how emotional attachment to Facebook impacts racial minorities. The present study is important in the context of trends indicating declines in civic participation (Putnam, 2000), coupled with some evidence suggesting lower levels of off-line forms of civic and political participation among specific minority groups (Smith, 2013). Meanwhile, young minorities are heavy users of social networking sites like Facebook (Duggan and Brenner, 2013). We attempted to extend this line of research to focus specifically on minority college students' emotional attachment to Facebook and levels of civic engagement, political participation, and social trust. This study's findings contribute to the current literature in a number of ways.

First, our results indicate moderate levels in minority college students' off-line civic engagement, off-line political participation, and social trust, as the levels were above our mid-point of three. However, our results suggest low levels in minority college students' online civic engagement, online political participation, and online political expression, as the levels were below the mid-point. This latter set of findings is important to highlight, considering that these variables serve as indicators of a functioning civil society. Thus, more research is warranted to examine levels along these variables among minority groups living in different areas of the world.


Second, this study revealed that emotional attachment to Facebook was not associated with civic engagement. These findings can be aligned with those of previous studies that have found use of Facebook has no effect on civic participation (Vitak, *et al.*, 2011). Similarly, when Byrne (2008) examined African-Americans' use of BlackPlanet.com, a social networking site for African-Americans, he found that discussion of issues facing the black community did not mobilize off-line civic engagement. The present study suggests this is also the case for online civic engagement, as emotional

attachment to Facebook did not relate with online civic engagement.

Third, this study indicates that for minority college students, emotional attachment to Facebook is related to increased off-line political participation and marginally related to increased online political participation. These relationships are consistent with and extend prior research (Baumgartner and Morris, 2010), and support a number of studies that have demonstrated similar effects of social networks such as Facebook in increasing civic and political participation among college students (Baumgartner and Morris, 2010; Gil de Zúñiga, *et al.*, 2012; Himelboim, *et al.*, 2012; Östman, 2012).

Fourth, we found that emotional attachment to Facebook increased levels of neighborliness. This finding extends prior research demonstrating a link between Internet use and neighboring behavior (Hampton and Wellman, 2003; Wellman and Hampton, 1999) and Beaudoin's (2011, 2007) research, which more broadly indicates a link between media use and neighborliness. Finally, we also found a positive link between Facebook use and social trust. This reinforces findings in a study conducted by Ellison, *et al.* (2007), which also showed that intensity of Facebook use is positively associated with social trust.

Despite these unique insights, several limitations hamper definitive conclusions. First, the use of the cross-sectional data cannot allow establishing causality regarding the observed effects of emotional attachment to Facebook on political participation, neighborliness, and social trust. On the one hand, emotional attachment to Facebook may predict the dependent variables. Yet the opposite direction is equally plausible. That is, those who participate in civic and political activities, are neighborly, and generally trust others would be likely to be emotionally connected with others on Facebook. Use of longitudinal data obtained at multiple points in time is desired to address these limitations. Second, the sample of the present study consisted of minority students from an ethnically diverse educational institution located in an urban setting in the Midwest, and thus, the generalizability of the findings is necessarily limited. Future studies should consider using samples of minority students from multiple campuses around the nation.

These limitations notwithstanding, the present study has offered important insights into the role of Facebook in college minority students' social life. We found evidence supporting previous work that Facebook can promote social trust, political participation, and neighborliness, while not affecting other forms of public engagement, such as civic engagement. Concerns of the potential negative impact of media, such as television, on civic behaviors have been long explored. With the growing adoption of social networks, like Facebook, similar concerns have been raised. More so, there is some evidence that minorities may not be as civically engaged as whites (Smith, 2013). However, results from our study counter concerns about the potential negative civic impact of emotional attachment to Facebook among minorities. Specifically, our study reveals that emotional attachment to Facebook does not decrease civic engagement, political participation, neighborliness, and social trust among minority college students. 

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Notes

1. While the Middle Eastern population in the U.S. is not categorized as a racial minority group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013), scholars have argued that this racial group is in fact an “invisible minority” and the target of racial profiling and discrimination (see Tehranian, 2009). As such, we have included Middle Eastern college students in our minority student sample.

2. Nielsen, 2012, p. 11.

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