Aric Gaunt
CEP 900/930
07.10.2016

Article Critique 3

Tufekci, Zeynep (2010). Who Acquires Friends Through Social Media and Why? "Rich Get
Richer" versus "Seek and Ye Shall Find." In Proceedings of the 4th International AAAI
Conference on Weblogs and Social Media (ICWSM, 2010). AAAI Press. Forthcoming.

Theoretical Perspective

Critique the author's conceptual framework
Tufekci tackles the question of whether or not people make friends on the internet, particularly,
via social media. Research suggesting friend making is possible on the internet is used to validate
this question as relevant. The author then presents 3 models of explanation: "Rich Get Richer"
"Social Comparison"; and "Seek and Ye Shall Find".

While there is adequate work cited for the existence of friend making, the author fails to cite any
work to support the existence of opposition to the existence of friend making on the internet.
Justification for its existence is made in the introductions first paragraph when the he suggests a
refusal of the topic's death as proof of the opposition's existence. Each of the 3 models offers
unique explanations of the topic, helping the study to avoid being examined and designed
towards a specific outcome or set of measures

Comment on the need for this study and its importance
The author argues the importance of researching friend making on social media by discussing the
ongoing argument among educational research regarding whether or not it's occurring and then
discussing the millennial generation's ever growing presence on social media applications. He
concludes by discussing the need to understand attitudes towards social media and its modalities
as it becomes more integrated into millennials' lives in order to avoid discourse (pg. 1, par. 5).

The argument for the need of this study is not compelling. No explanations for necessity are
made regarding friend making on social media in relation to student outcomes nor educational
application in general. The study lacks in its ability to convince its audience that its results will
yield results with contributable implications towards education and does not provide explanation
as to how its results could be displaced onto discussions concerning education.

How effectively does the author tie the study to relevant theory and prior research?
In addition to the 3 models previously mentioned, the author draws upon works concerning
increased social capital and how the internet has eliminated embodiment and how anonymity
increases it.

For the most part, the prior works cited strengthen the framework of the study, and because of
this, the study fits well into relevant theory. Works by Gennaro & Dutton and Wang & Wellman
support the idea that online friendships exist and even may emigrate to face-to-face friendships.

Work by Walther strengthens the appropriateness of the author's use of social comparison as one of the study's referenced models by discussing how interactions change without visual cues present. Mention of Derlega & Chaikin and Rubin results in an overstretched attempt to support this notion as these works do not seem to have implications directed towards studies concerning internet intimacy.

Evaluate the clarity and appropriateness of the research questions or hypotheses
The author presents 4 discernable research questions: Do the socially rich get richer? Do the disadvantaged catchup? How much impact do individual beliefs have? The last question inquires about individuals who believe internet relationships do not exist yet find themselves interacting with others.

It is clear that the first 2 reference the Rich Get Richer model. The connection between this section of the study's framework and questions is appropriate. However, "rich" is never operationalized, only being described as "social benefit" (pg. 2, par. 2) and quantity of social ties which is not clarified in these questions. The last 2 reference the "Seek and Ye Shall Find" model, again, appropriate in connectivity to the framework but lacking in clarity. What kind of individual beliefs (epistemic? If so, along which dimension(s) is the study interested?).

Research Design and Analysis

Critique the appropriateness and adequacy of the study's design in relation to the research questions or hypotheses.
Topics of the research question such as internet sociality were operationalized in order to establish objective references for dependent measures and avoid subjective interpretation. A qualitative methodology measured justifications for internet epistemic beliefs that added a depth of social context to quantitative information regarding time spent on internet and SNS . Employing mixed methods provides methodological strength, given the necessity to consider motivation in the Seek and Ye Shall Find model and objective measures of social capital mentioned by the Rich Get Richer and Social Comparison Models.

Critique the adequacy of the study's sampling methods (e.g., choice of participants) and their implications for generalizability.
The sample was described as "fairly diverse" with sizeable white, African-American, and Asian representation along with smaller hispanic representation. Gender was representation was equal.

The study properly narrowed the initial sample to 617 to ensure participants included characteristics (SNS use) of interest. Ethnic representation is considered and appropriate, given the proper analysis methods are employed. The sample does not, however, achieve great generalizability, even in the context of internet users. Undergraduates, reflect only a portion of the age demographic (M = 19, SD = not provided) of internet users. In addition, undergraduates may possess different levels of cognitive skill relevant to internet use compared to other people of similar age not in college. Lastly, qualitative data was only collected from 175 participants- percentage of the sample, suggesting additional difficulties of generalizability.

Critique the adequacy of the study's procedures and materials (e.g., interventions, interview protocols, data collection procedures).
Data regarding internet sociality was collected via Likert scale ratings of time for internet and SNS. Number of friend interactions was used to quantify offline sociality.

The study's write up does a poor job of supporting the legitimacy of the interventions and data collection procedures used. There was little explanation of the study's physical procedure and materials. It is not mentioned where, when, and through what medium (paper or online) participant questionnaires are administered. The nature in which the qualitative measure of reasoning is not mentioned either. This is a significant flaw in the methodological framework, as timing, place, and medium have influence on differences among participant responses.

Critique the appropriateness and quality (e.g., reliability, validity) of the measures used.
Internet sociality was inferred through time spent on the internet and SNS and beliefs regarding friend making on the internet were measured by coded participant responses.

The author justifies the use of time as a measurement for sociality by inquiring about 3 different uses in order to control for communication outside of SNS sociality. The validity of using time is not strong, as there is no framework of evidence to support that it is a measure that represents the construct of interest, sociality. The use of different intervals of time for this measure also decreases its reliability as it does not provide a consistent metric of which to present results.

Critique the adequacy of the study's data analyses.
T-tests are appropriate in that the author sought to investigate differences among sample means along the axis of believers and non-believers of internet friend making. Considering the number of independent measures included in data collection, a multivariate test of analysis may have yielded potential interaction effects on the dependent variables. The study does not appear to meet the assumptions of conducting a chi squared test; The sample is not discussed to be normally distributed. Coding of qualitative data was appropriate for extrapolating participant reasoning. A criticism is that this method has limitations towards coder subjectivity since specific coding criteria did not appear to be present. Interrater reliability would have strengthened the validity of this measure.

Interpretation and Implications of Results

Critique the author's discussion of the methodological and/or conceptual limitations of the results.
The author discusses the lack of generalizability and correlational nature of the measures used as the study's major limitations. While the acknowledgment of these limitations is important, the author does not follow with suggestions of which research could use to improve future work. He also states that the results, while not generalizable to all internet users, is generalizable to college students, despite this study pulling from a section (incentivised students in a social science class) of a single university in a single region.

How consistent and comprehensive are the author's conclusions with the reported results?

The author concludes that friend making on the internet is independent of all demographic measures except being African-American, number of offline friends, and IM use. It is stated that results support neither the Rich Get Richer nor Social Comparison Models.

While it the results support the notion that African-Americans spend more time on social media, it is not necessarily appropriate to conclude friend making as a direct correlate to this measure. This is an issue of inference regarding dependent measures meant to signify friend making- there is no data that directly represents likelihood of friend making online, only measures time on the internet, beliefs of this occurrence's legitimacy, and offline sociality. The author does, however, appropriately acknowledge the nature of the study's qualitative results, discussing them as rare and implied.

How well did the author relate the results to the study's theoretical base?
The author guides conclusions along previous work concerning effects of social capital, gender, and ethnicity on beliefs about the internet and sociality. Discussion of the results does tie to the theoretical base often, most frequently referencing the 3 models introduced in the framework. He cites Walther (1996) again to discuss the results implications towards social comparison and the opposite perspective which is afforded by the results of qualitative data. He contrasts the result that gender is not a significant predictor of internet sociality by citing previous work with alternative implications. While these connections to the framework are present, it is still important to keep in mind that the measures used were not necessarily indicative of relationships between friend making on the internet and independent measures. In this way, results cannot be fully displaced onto the study's theoretical framework.

In your view, what is the significance of the study, and what are its primary implications for theory, future research, and practice?

This study contributes to the understanding of how internet users view friendships as well as how sociality online and offline may predict and be informed by internet and SNS use. Most importantly, this study provides evidence towards the notion that user attitudes are not dichotomous, rather dimensions to view modalities. This concept has implications towards future work seeking to understand user attitudes and sociality by suggesting a lens of which to organize independent measures and outcomes. There is no criticism for the legitimacy of discussions towards implications in education and practice for they were not mentioned.