Online Social Networking across the Life Span:
Extending Socioemotional Selectivity Theory to Social Network Sites

Natalya N. Bazarova, Pamara F. Chang, Yoon Hyung Choi, Corinna E. Lockenhoff
Social networking site use by age group, 2005-2012

What are age-related differences in online social networking?
Age

Network Size & Composition

Effects on Well-Being
Socioemotional Selectivity Theory

Perception of Time Horizon

Socioemotional Selectivity Theory

Perception of Time Horizon

Age

Social Motivations & Goals

Older Adults

Younger Adults

Size & Composition of Network

Size & Composition of Networks

(Lang & Cartensen, 2002; Carstensen, 2006; Cartensen et al., 2000)
Composition of Social Networks

- Range of relationships (Parks, 2010)
Size & Composition of Social Networks

(Ellison et al., 2011)
Extending SST to Social Networking Sites

H1a: Age is **negatively associated** with the **total number** of friends in Facebook social networks

H1b: Age is **positively associated** with the **proportion** of actual friends relative to total friends in Facebook social networks
Extending SST to Social Networking Sites

H2: Age is **negatively associated** with a) self-posting and b) checking information on others on SNSs
Social Network Composition and Well-Being

- Focus on social capital in regards to social benefits of SNSs (Ellison et al., 2011)

- Bridging social capital —— Future-oriented goals

- Bonding social capital —— Present-oriented goals
Social Network Composition and Well-Being

Network Size & Composition

Effects on Well-Being
Social Network Composition and Well-Being

H3: The proportion of actual to total Facebook friends is **negatively associated** with social isolation and loneliness.
Method

• National telephone survey in the U.S.
• N=1000 adults
• Measures
  o Gender, age, marital status, socioeconomic status and education
  o Internet use
  o SNS use
  o Health
  o Loneliness (UCLA loneliness scale, $\alpha = 0.85$, Russell, 1996)
Method

• Measures
  o Gender, age, marital status, socioeconomic status and education
  o Internet use
    • Comfort with Internet

• Hours/week spent on Internet
  • 1=less than 1hr/week → 4=more than 10 hr/week
Method

• Measures
  o Gender, age, marital status, socioeconomic status and education
  o Internet use
  o SNS use
    o Checking information about others
    o Share information about self
    o 1=never, 5 = all the time
Method

• Measures
  o Gender, age, marital status, socioeconomic status and education
  o Internet use
  o SNS use
  o Health
    o Mental, Physical, and Overall Health
    o Past 30 days
    o 1 = excellent, 5 = poor
Method

• Measures
  o Gender, age, marital status, socioeconomic status and education
  o Internet use
  o SNS use
  o Health
  o **Loneliness** (UCLA loneliness scale, $\alpha = 0.85$, Russell, 1996)
    o How often do you feel alone? Isolated? Lack companionship?
    o 1=never, 5 = always
Results

- H1a: Age is **negatively associated** with the total number of friends in Facebook social networks

### The number of total FB friends and the proportion of actual to total FB friends on Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>β For log of total FB friends</th>
<th>β For % of actual FB friends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.56**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort w. Internet</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.11*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Use</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Health</td>
<td>-.09*</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Mental health</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Physical Health</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.13**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: **p<.01, *p<.05, ^p<.10. For the total FB friends: F(10, 537)=34.85, p<.001, adjusted R² = .38. For the proportion of actual friends: F(10, 536) =9.71, p<.001, adjusted R²=.14.
**Results**

H1b: Age is **positively associated** with the proportion of actual friends relative to total friends in Facebook social networks

*The number of total FB friends and the proportion of actual to total FB friends on Age*

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## Results

**H2: Age is negatively associated with a) self-posting and b) checking information on others on SNSs**

*Frequency of checking information about others and self-posting on age*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>β Checking on others</th>
<th>β Self posting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.26**</td>
<td>-.26**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort w. Internet</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.10*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Use</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.15**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Health</td>
<td>-.10**</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Mental health</td>
<td>.12**</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Physical Health</td>
<td>.08*</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: **p<.01, *p<.05, ^p<.10. For checking information about others: F(10, 537)=10.95, p<.001, adjusted R²=.15. For self-posting: F(10, 537)=9.69, p<.001, adjusted R²=.14.
H3: The proportion of actual to total Facebook friends is **negatively associated** with social isolation and loneliness.

### Social loneliness and isolation on percentage of actual to total FB friends

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>B(SE)</th>
<th>β</th>
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<tr>
<td>% of actual to total FB friends</td>
<td>-.01(.01)</td>
<td>-.08*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.01(.01)</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort w. Internet</td>
<td>.08(.05)</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Use</td>
<td>.03(.03)</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Health</td>
<td>.11(.04)</td>
<td>.13**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Physical Health/30 days</td>
<td>-.01(.01)</td>
<td>-.09*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Mental Health/30 days</td>
<td>.04(.01)</td>
<td>.40**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: **p<.01, *p<.05, ^p<.10; F(11.535)=15.29, p<.001, adjusted R²=.22.
Findings

• **Selectivity of FB social partners increases with age**
Findings

- Compared to younger adults, older adults:
Findings

Higher proportion of actual to total FB friends is associated with lower levels of social isolation and loneliness across the life span.
Implications

• Contributes to our understanding of online social networks
• SST provides a conceptual framework
• Novel findings
Future Directions

• Application of SST to online social networks segways into exciting future research
  
  o How do online networks change across the life span using a longitudinal design?
  
  o When do younger people start actively decreasing their network size?
Future Directions

- SST emphasizes changes in social goals and motivations

- Social preferences can change due to geographical relocation, illness, or societal-level events (Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990).