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The Influence of Online Social Capital On Women's Career Change

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Women seeking to manage their careers have faced numerous challenges for decades. The influence of social capital on women's careers has been a concern of researchers, particularly within the contexts of women's underrepresentation in businesses' higher organizational ranks and societal expectations for women. This research builds on previous career studies and improves the understanding of women's career changes with consideration of their social capital behaviors online. The two research questions in the study are: To what degree does online social capital impact women's ability to make desired career changes in business? To what degree do workingwomen view online social networking platforms as a viable means to develop and maintain social capital? In phase one, a quantitative study was conducted via an online survey of over two hundred women working within nearly fifty companies in a southwestern New York and northwestern Pennsylvania region. In phase two, follow-up qualitative questions were asked of an age-stratified sample of women working in the region. The findings suggest that women's use of direct communications channels online is associated with developing and maintaining professional network contacts. Women in the study indicated a limited use and perception of social media tools for developing social capital. Factors including age and field of work were found to impact women's use of social media professionally as well. Future implications suggest investigating the activities women use to develop and maintain their career-related social capital networks over time to identify potential shifts in behavior or social media acceptance.

Keywords: career change; social capital; online networking, social media, women in business; women's careers.

Introduction

This study analyzed the impact of online social capital on women's ability to make desired career changes in business. Women tend to make career changes and adjust their work situations to fit their larger life contexts, based on both family and career implications (O'Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2008). United States Bureau of Labor Statistics have indicated that workers in the United States change jobs nearly eleven times over the courses of their careers (2010). Women in the thirty to forty age range have faced career change issues in that women with children enjoyed less career success, while men with children enjoyed more career ascension (Mason & Ekman, 2007).

Women working in business have been challenged in their career advancement, longevity, and satisfaction (Catalyst, 2014; Eagly & Carli, 2007; The White House Project, 2009; WFD Consulting, 2004). Moe and Shandy's (2009) research found that women in business desiring career change as their family life situations evolved appeared to face organizational obstacles that impacted their career trajectories. One element found to contribute significantly to organizational and career success has been social capital (Burt, 1992; Higgins, 2001; Ibarra, 1992; Lin, 2000). Social capital, defined as value gained through the interaction of individuals and groups, has been found to influence women's career success particularly through the diversity and higher rank of social network contacts (Burt, 1998; Ibarra, 1993, O'Neil et al., 2008). Research on the effects of social capital on changing careers implied that the greater the diversity of an individual's social capital network, the greater the likelihood that the person would change careers (Higgins, 2001). Social capital networks broadened the range of career possibilities that an individual considered and increased advice and information on career advancement opportunities. Additionally, the social network increased the individual's confidence, a necessary trait in the job search process, through positive psychological support (Higgins, 2001). However, studies have indicated that women endured greater challenges than men in building social capital (Burt, 1998; Lin, 2000).

How individuals maintain their social capital can also influence its effectiveness (Burt, 1992). The advent of electronic communications has altered the accepted norms for business communications. Within the past decade, new web and mobile platforms for social networking have also emerged. A number of different social media platforms offer varying goals and

interaction purposes. Facebook, along with its subsidiary Instagram, offers individuals and organizations pages and profiles to connect with people and their world around them (Facebook, 2016) while Twitter promotes community, conversation and inspiration for viewers' interests (Twitter, 2016). Facebook boasts 1.59 billion monthly active users, while Twitter connects 320 million monthly active users as of December 31, 2015. Each of these platforms also offer online space to advertise businesses and services.

Beyond the socializing and marketing aspect, some online platforms have been specifically designed to better one's future and help find jobs. LinkedIn allows individuals to connect online in a professional atmosphere and offers to pave the way to future jobs, meet new clients, or connect to career contacts (LinkedIn, 2016). LinkedIn has become more popular in recent years as people have become employed through this social media platform. Recent company data revealed that 100 million active users access LinkedIn on a monthly basis (Weber, 2015).

Over the past decade, social media use amongst men and women has nearly equalized (Perrin, 2015). Initially, women accounted for a larger percentage of users. However, most recent tallies indicated that women and men's use of social media has become nearly equal. Women account for a larger percentage of users on Facebook and Instagram, while men account for a slightly larger percentage of users on Twitter and LinkedIn. Whether women were able to use those online social networking connections to their advantage with career change remained unanswered.

This study sought to analyze the impact of women's use of online social capital tools to make desired career changes in business. The study investigated whether women's use of social media for professional networking was associated with their reported career change success. Additionally, the study evaluated whether women viewed social media as an accepted platform for career networking.

Literature Review

Social capital is a critical element of success for businesspersons in today's knowledge economy. Organizational leaders are challenged to manage workers' talents, skills, and ideas (Dess, Lumpkin, Eisner, & McNamara, 2014). A central element of competitive advantage lies in the tying together of knowledgeable, talented individuals through social connections, or social capital (Dess et al., 2014). Social capital can play a key role in career success, as it provides the advantages of information, skill sets, and power (Cross, Thomas, & Light, 2009).

Online tools for developing and maintaining social capital offer individuals varying degrees of connectivity with those in and around their social networks. Electronic communications, such as email and text messages, allow individuals to communicate and share information with established contacts. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, allow individuals to broadcast communications to expanded circles of contacts and their related contacts. Both electronic

communications and social media offer the opportunity to connect with others without limitations of geographical proximity.

As outlined in the following literature, women have not enjoyed the same advantages as men in developing and maintaining their social capital. Social capital is not universally accessible to all, particularly women. Additionally, the nature of women's use of online social capital methods has shown marked differences from that of men's.

Social capital that connects previously segregated groups has been associated with greater career success (Burt, 1992). Diverse social network connections were associated with higher rates of promotion and salary increases (Burt, 1992). Additionally, managers whose positions brought them into contact with contacts outside their organization were found to have more acceptance of their innovative business proposals, while those in closed groups had their ideas dismissed (Burt, 2004). Further, Burt's (2004) research indicated that managers were more confident in acting on their ideas when they had diverse social connections.

According to Burt's (1992) research, social capital has been measured by an individual's number of connections, length of established connections, and frequency of contact. Models of career change have identified social constructs as integral individuals' decisions to change careers (Rhodes & Doering, 1983). Voluntary career changes were closely tied to job dissatisfaction, driven by lack of person-organization or person-environment fit, two socially constructed concepts (Rhodes & Doering, 1983).

Higgins (2001) offered insights on social capital's influence on career change, indicating that the greater the diversity of an individual's social capital network, the greater the likelihood that the person would change careers. Higgins (2001) found that a diverse social network provided advice and information on career advancement opportunities, as well as broadened the range of career possibilities that an individual considered. Further, as the number of different career alternatives presented through an individual's social network increased, the likelihood of career change increased (Higgins, 2001). The positive psychological support offered by the social network also increased individuals' confidence in seeking new job opportunities (Higgins, 2001).

Lin (2000) argued that not only the quality, but also the quantity, of network connections impacts career outcomes. Lin (2000) suggested that men belonged to larger social networks centered on economic institutions that provided information related to job opportunities. In contrast, women belonged to smaller networks focused on community and domestic issues (Lin, 2000). Similarly, Still's (2006) research showed that women had family-based social networks, due in part to their culturally prescribed greater investment in childcare. Lin (2000) proposed that several other factors distinguished women and men's social networks. Women had fewer contacts in other fields, failed to

integrate into men's networks, and gained male contacts through family ties (Lin, 2000). In contrast, men associated with contacts in higher positions and had fewer network contacts who were neighbors, friends, or family (Lin, 2000). Lin's (2000) assessment was that women were unable to connect to the right social ties.

One fundamental social capital element lacking for women was the ability to connect with contacts in higher organizational ranks. Women lacked available resources to develop an adaptive strategy for career change via self-definition (Ibarra, 1999). Those who adapted to a new role most successfully had access to an observable role model (Ibarra, 1999). Since corporations have had fewer women in top organizational positions (Catalyst, 2014), women have held a disadvantage in developing new professional self-images. Women's perceived value within corporations has been affected by organizational structure in terms of both availability of power through network contacts and social diversity of the employee base (Kanter, 1993). Additionally, individuals' self-image and behaviors have been shaped by their social connections within organizations (Ibarra, 2004).

Further evidence of the difference between women and men in developing and maintaining social capital was shown in their use of online platforms in the digital society. Since the early 1990's, business professionals have had the opportunity to develop social capital via online communications, or email. Since the early 2000's, business people have connected within the digital society by means of social networking sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook.

A larger percentage of women use mobile devices for social media, use social media more than once per day and consume news via social media (Hillsberg, 2014). Monthly active user statistics for Facebook and Twitter have indicated that women comprised the majority of users with fifty-eight and sixty-four percent, respectively (Hampton, Goulet, Rainie, & Purcell, 2011). Site statistics indicated that women share photos and news via social media more often than males (Hillsberg, 2014). Further, the Hampton et al. (2011) study indicated that only ten percent of Facebook users' connections were coworkers. Nielsen (2012) social media studies reported that men use social media more for professional contacts. Sixteen percent of men's social media contacts were considered professional, while only versus only ten percent of women's contacts were professional (Nielsen, 2012). This data suggested that even in the digital society women's network ties were centered more on family and friends.

Positioned especially for business professionals, LinkedIn offers its more than 100 million active monthly users value by connecting to other professionals (Schein, 2014). The primary goals of most users have been to seek employment or other business opportunities (Schein, 2014). Unfortunately, user statistics have suggested that women have not taken advantage of the professional networking opportunities in the digital age.

Pew researchers determined that women comprised only thirty-seven percent of the users on LinkedIn (Hampton et al., 2011).

Similar to social capital development, online networking platforms - particularly social media - have been shown to contribute significantly to individuals' perceived value (Keller, 2013). Given women's limited use of social media as a professional networking channel (Hampton et al., 2011), women in business could be missing opportunities to develop their value through online networks. Further investigation was needed to determine the impact of online social networking for women's satisfaction with career change.

Methods

As this study sought to analyze the impact of women's use of online social capital tools to make desired career changes in business, the research questions focused on whether women utilized online networking and whether they were satisfied with their ability to make desired career changes. The study investigated whether women working in business fields used social media for professional networking. The study also evaluated whether women viewed social media as an accepted platform for career networking.

The overarching research questions were:
To what degree does online social capital impact women's ability to make desired career changes in business?
To what degree do workingwomen view online social networking platforms as a viable means to develop and maintain social capital?
From the research questions, the following hypotheses were developed:

Hypothesis 1: Utilizing online connectivity for developing social capital is positively related to a women's satisfaction with career change.
Hypothesis 2: Women view online social networking platforms as acceptable tools for developing and maintaining professional networking contacts.

To test the hypotheses, a two-phase approach was taken. In order to test the positive relationship between utilizing online social capital and women's satisfaction with career change (Hypothesis 1), a quantitative study was conducted. In a second phase to investigate women's perceptions of online social networking platforms as viable means of developing and maintaining social capital (Hypothesis 2), qualitative interviews were conducted.

Population and Sample

The population for the first phase of the study consisted of women working in for-profit businesses and business-related fields in southwestern New York state and northwestern Pennsylvania. This geographic region was selected for the study in order to minimize variability of economic, market, or employment conditions. Companies that were willing to invite their employees and contacts to participate in the study were identified. Qualified participants were screened for gender and

experience with a for-profit entity within the past ten years. The ten-year time period was set to establish a technological and sociological frame set for the study.

The participants in the study operated within a number of industries including manufacturing, oil and gas production, financial services, and professional services. Their organizations ranged in size from small – under 200 employees – to large - over 2,000 employees. Organizations were both public and privately held.

The population for the second phase of the study was also comprised of women working in for-profit businesses and business-related fields in northwestern Pennsylvania and southwestern New York state. Qualified participants were screened for frequency of social media use and age. The need to interview women who used social media for networking arose as a result of limitations identified in phase one of the study. Age was included as a criterion considered to control for generational trends with social media.

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedure

The instrumentation for phase one of the study was a Qualtrics online survey. The invitation to complete the survey was sent via email from human resource managers. The online survey instrument contains thirty-five closed-ended multiple-choice questions. Opening questions on the survey qualified participants for gender and willingness to participate. Eight questions addressed categorical issues of demographics and employment status. Twelve questions utilized Likert scales to measure participants' level of agreement with concepts, while the remaining questions utilized equal-interval continuous scales to measure participants' perceptions and behaviors. An online survey was determined to be most appropriate to collect responses from women in a variety of professional organizational positions. Additional advantages to utilizing an online survey included the ease of use for the participant and the direct migration of response data into the SPSS statistical software. Since phase one solicited quantitative responses, an unaided online survey is appropriate for scaled and ranking questions.

The instrumentation for phase two of the study was a list of fifteen questions asked of participants by researchers conducting the interviews. The invitation to participate was sent via email to women working in business who were known to be active on social media. Qualifying questions screened the participant for frequent use of social media and for age brackets. Ten women in each of the age brackets – twenties, thirties, forties, and over fifty – were selected to participate in phase two of the study. Since phase two sought qualitative responses, the smaller sample size was deemed appropriate.

Variables

For both phases of the study, the dependent variable was defined as successful career change by women. Successful career change was measured by respondents' satisfaction with their ability to make desired career changes. Their satisfaction was assessed based on respondents' perceived satisfaction with their 1) salary; 2) availability of new work opportunities; 3) work structure, including their work schedule, flexibility, and location; and 4) support from their supervisors and coworkers.

The primary independent variable in this study was defined as the participant's social capital. Four factors of social capital were measured: 1) diversity; 2) size; 3) upward reach; and 4) connectivity. Diversity of social capital related to the types of persons and relationships within a social network (Burt, 1992). Size of social capital was measured by the range of contacts in the network, while upward reach of social capital was measured by the organizational and social rank of persons in a social network (Ibarra, 1992). Connectivity of social capital referred to participants' use of online tools to develop and maintain their social capital network.

Six control variables were established for the study: the participants' 1) age; 2) organizational level; 3) field of work; 4) employer size; 5) education; and 6) personal brand value. Personal brand value was measured by participants' behaviors in marketing their career aspirations (Keller, 2013).

Data Analysis Plan

The survey data from phase one was analyzed using SPSS version 21. Using SPSS's table views, the data was reviewed to confirm that all variables transferred properly with coding in place. For all statistical testing, the level of significance of .05 was established. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, mean, median, and standard deviations for all variables contained in the dataset. Observations for the dependent variable, successful career change, were analyzed using responses to questions asking participants to indicate their satisfaction with career outcomes related to career change. Four areas of satisfaction measured included both objective and subjective measures: salary, new opportunities, work structure, and supervisors and coworkers. Participants were asked to indicate the length of time since the respondent's last career change. The data for career repositioning was analyzed against the data for the independent variable, social capital. The social capital measurements provided continuously scaled data. Perceptions of success were measured on continuous scales.

The data from phase two was analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2011. Researchers entered participants' answers into a spreadsheet in order to analyze frequencies and trends in the participant responses. Sorting participants by age allowed the researchers to evaluate responses by participants' age and compare for variances. Participants were asked to rate their satisfaction with making desired career changes. The mean of this score was compared to the mean found in phase one of the study. Trends in participants' responses to questions about their use of online networking tools were summarized by age groups. In turn, those trends were compared to group means for career change satisfaction.

Limitations

The most significant limitation of this study was that participants self-reported their perceptions of career changes, obstacles, and opportunities. Some self-selection bias could limit the study if only women who felt strongly about career issues chose to participate in the study. Since the study was limited to women working within small cities in two East Coast states, the findings may not be generalizable to metropolitan or other employment clusters within the United States. Additionally, the study was limited to the timeframe in which participants responded to the survey. Questions in regard to participants' network contacts or communication methods could vary over time, causing the participants to respond to questions based on their most recent activities rather than their typical behaviors.

Results

For phase one of the study, the survey data was first analyzed by reviewing the frequency of responses for control variables, to ensure that the distribution of respondents was not skewed. An overview of the sample data for usage of connectivity tools is available in figure 1. Secondly, the initial data testing process was to conduct an analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the variables. The ANOVAs included testing a) between the independent variables and the dependent variable, b) between the control variables and the dependent variable, and 3) between the control variables and the independent variables. If an ANOVA indicated a statistically significant relationship between variables, a post hoc test was run to determine the differences between group responses and the strength of the relationship between variables. Last, linear regression models were run on the independent variable to confirm the strength of association with the dependent variable (ability to make desired career changes). Control variables were tested in the regression series as well. A 95% confidence interval was accepted as the significance level for all analyses in the study.
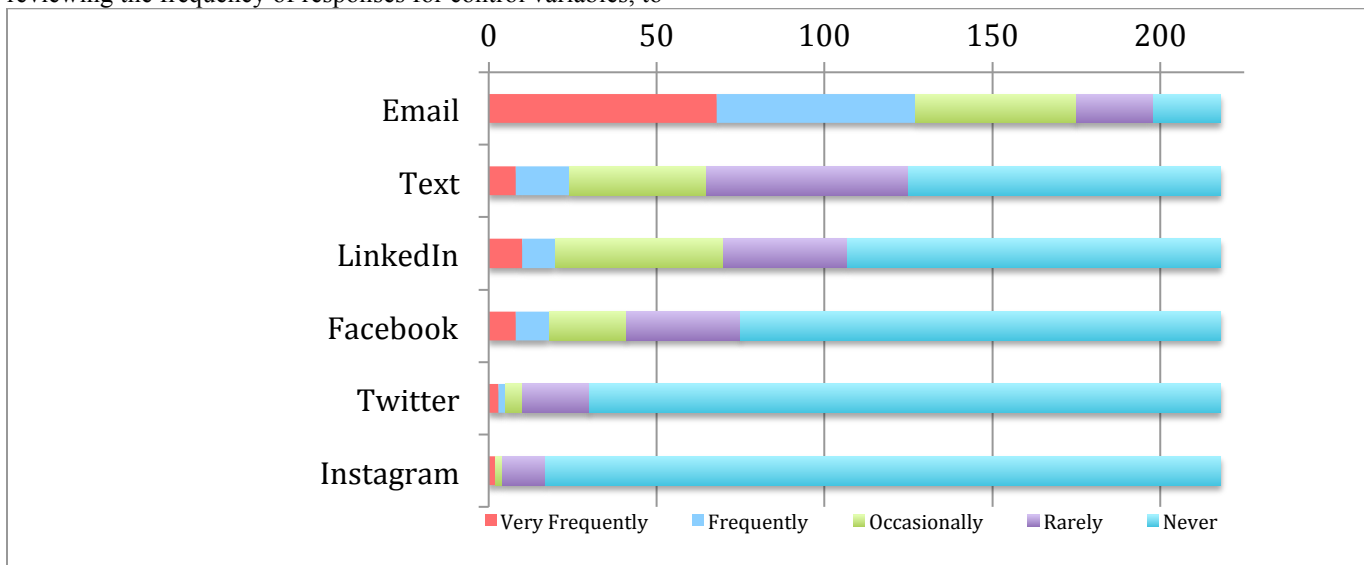
Figure 1. Connectivity of work-related social capital network. This figure illustrates participants' use of listed methods for professional networking (n=218).

Results for Hypothesis 1: Utilizing online connectivity for developing social capital is positively related to a women's satisfaction with career change.

Frequency of participants' use of traditional and online methods for developing social capital was measured in two questions. The first question asked, "How do you typically communicate when discussing career issues – face-to-face, phone, email, text message, LinkedIn, Facebook." The second question asked, "How often do you use these online tools for your professional networking – email, text messaging, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram." The ANOVA for these responses was run against the dependent variable measure: "Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following: Over the course of my career, I have been able to make my desired career changes."

For the analysis of ability to make desired career changes, a statistically significant relationship was found in only one ANOVA for all of the elements of both questions. Statistically significant results were found in the ANOVA for the second question in regard to the frequency of use of email for professional networking. The ANOVA showed a significant association between use of email for career networking and women's ability to make desired career changes at the $p < .05$ level for the conditions [$F(4, 213) = 4.54$, $p < .05$]. Post hoc tests were then run to find the variance amongst groups in the responses. The post hoc value was on the dependent variable question's scale of one to four (where ability to make desired changes, 1=very true, 2=true, 3=somewhat untrue, 4=not at all true), so that a negative post hoc mean difference indicated that the respondent found her ability to make desired career changes under that condition to be more true.

The post hoc test for this question, in regard to the use of email for professional networking, indicated that respondents who very frequently used email for professional networking rated their ability to make desired career changes higher than nearly all other groups. As indicated in Table 6 ANOVA Post Hoc Tests, frequent users of email for professional networking indicated higher ability to make desired career changes by -.379 than women who frequently used email, by -.490 than women who occasionally used email, and by -.524 than women who never used email for professional networking.

The ANOVA findings lent preliminary support to a possible association between email connectivity behaviors for professional networking and women's ability to make desired career changes.

The regression analysis showed one connectivity behavior – use of email – to have significance with ability to make desired career changes. Use of email for career-related networking was shown to have a weak positive relationship with ability to make desired career changes. The results are outlined in Table 1 and Table 2 Summary of Regression Analyses: Dependent Variable = Ability to Make Desired Career Changes.
Analysis of Control Variables:

Table 1
ANOVA Post Hoc Tests

				Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Use of Email	Tamhane	Very Frequently	Frequently	-0.379	0.131	0.045
		Very Frequently	Occasionally	-0.49	0.138	0.006
		Very Frequently	Never	-0.524	0.171	0.047

Note: The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.
Independent Variable: Use of Email for career networking
Dependent Variable: Ability to make desired career changes

The ANOVA analyzing the statistical significance of control variables showed significance in field of work as well as age. Respondents working in communications/public relations used Facebook for career networking more than those in engineering by a measure of -1.346 on the 1-4 (often, sometimes, rarely, never) scale. Analysis of variance in connectivity by age groups found statistical significance in the methods typically used for professional networking. Face-to-face, email, text messaging, and Facebook use varied amongst the age groups. Post hoc tests revealed that respondents in the youngest (20-30 year-old) age group were more likely to utilize each of the four listed methods than respondents in older age groups. Those in the 30-40 year-old group were also more likely to use face-to-face as a typical networking method than those in the 41-50 year-old age group. The question used a four-point scale, where respondents indicated the tool was used typically 1=often, 2=sometimes, 3=rarely, and 4=never. The 20-30 year-old age group was -.504 more typically using email than those in the 41-50 year-old age group. The 20-30 year-old age group was more typically using text messaging than those in the 41-50 year-old and over-50 age groups by -.500 and -.786 respectively. The 20-30 year-old age group was -.491 more typically using Facebook than those in the over-50 year-old age group.

For phase two of the study, the interview responses were analyzed by reviewing the frequency of responses to determine trends. Each age grouping was evaluated in order to determine whether participants' ages were associated with differing trends in responses.
Results for Hypothesis 2: Women view online social networking platforms as acceptable tools for developing and maintaining professional networking contacts.

Most participants in the phase two follow-up study of social media users indicated positive feelings in regard to their ability to make desired career changes. Participants in the youngest age bracket of social media users – the 20-to-30 age group – indicated more frequently that they spent considerable effort and time marketing themselves. Participants in the other three age brackets indicated that they spent only a small amount or no time marketing themselves.

Participants in the younger age group also indicated nearly unanimously that the only online connectivity tools they considered to be professional networking tools were email and LinkedIn. Participants in their 40's or 50's indicated that they used a greater variety of online tools for professional networking, citing Facebook and Twitter as utilized tools. Among all ages of the women participating, those who were self-employed indicated most frequently a greater use of the social media tools for professional networking.

Table 2

Summary of Regression Analyses: Dependent Variable = Ability to Make Desired Career Changes

	Model 2 - Diversity			Model 2 - Size			Model 2 - Up-Reach			Model 2 - Up-Reach			Model 2 - Up-Reach			Model 2-Connectivity			Model 2-Hrs on Family		
	B	SE	*p*	B	SE	*p*	B	SE	*p*	B	SE	*p*	B	SE	*p*	B	SE	*p*	B	SE	*p*
Control Variables																					
Organization Level	0.175	0.056	.021*	0.212	0.058	0.007*	0.057	0.160	0.039*	0.056	0.202	0.008*	0.056	0.191	0.012*	0.056	0.18	0.018*	0.057	0.21	0.006*
Personal Brand Value	-0.009	0.034	0.902	-0.042	0.035	0.579	-0.025	0.034	0.739	0.034	-0.053	0.465	0.034	-0.030	0.682	0.034	-0.031	0.676	0.034	-0.053	0.047*
Education Level	-0.044	0.048	0.567	-0.054	0.050	0.490	0.05	-0.109	0.169	0.049	-0.083	0.281	0.050	-0.114	0.145	0.049	-0.051	0.507	0.049	-0.067	0.386
Age	0.100	0.052	0.178	0.119	0.053	0.112	0.052	0.101	0.181	0.054	0.078	0.311	0.053	0.074	0.329	0.052	0.094	0.211	0.052	0.114	0.134
Work Function	-0.052	0.021	0.470	-0.076	0.022	0.308	0.021	-0.096	0.195	0.021	-0.08	0.274	0.021	-0.064	0.378	0.021	-0.066	0.365	0.021	-0.082	0.268
Employer Size	-0.078	0.048	0.304	-0.052	0.050	0.506	0.049	-0.064	0.400	0.049	-0.064	0.397	0.049	-0.038	0.619	0.048	-0.07	0.359	0.049	-0.06	0.438
Independent Variables																					
Advice from Colleagues Outside Organization	0.229	0.058	0.002*																		
Relative Size of Network				0.057	0.058	0.445															
At least 1 Mentor							0.191	0.040	0.012*												
Equal Opp for Mentor										0.181	0.041	0.014*									
Supervisor Support of Career Goals													0.209	0.047	.005*						
Use of Email for Networking																0.193	0.043	.009*			
Hours Devoted to Family																			-0.107	0.056	0.135
Intercept		1.606			1.789			1.948			1.866			1.87			1.784			2.225	
R2		0.093			0.050			0.078			0.077			0.085			0.080			0.056	
N		218			218			218			218			218			218			218	

Notes: Dependent Variable is Ability to Make Desired Career Changes; *p<.05; B=Standardized Beta.

Discussion

Phase one of the study offered an important finding for women seeking career change in regard to their online behaviors associated with their development of career related social capital. Of all the online connectivity behaviors associated with developing and maintaining professional social network contacts, email was the only online tool that was found to have significance on ability to make desired career changes. However, important to note is that the use of most online tools was very infrequent amongst participants. More than 80% of participants indicated that they regularly use email for professional social networking. Conversely, nearly 70% of women indicated that they rarely or never use LinkedIn. Likewise, 70% of participants never use text messaging for networking.

Some variance in the use of online networking tools was associated with the educational level of participants. Women with master's degrees were more likely than those of any other educational level to use the social networking tool LinkedIn.

Women who indicated that they spent more time marketing themselves were more likely to frequently use online tools. These participants use text messaging, LinkedIn, and Facebook as typical networking tools, and more frequently utilize text messaging, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter as a channel for professional networking. Those who spent more time marketing themselves were more likely to use text messaging, LinkedIn, and Facebook.

Some variance was also found in the use of online connectivity tools for professional networking across work functions and age groups. Women working in public relations fields indicated greater use of the online social networking tool Facebook for career networking than those in engineering. However, no significant variances were found for the use of other tools. The use of the social media tool Facebook by those in public relations could be due to the nature of their field in trying to communicate across multiple media channels. Still, the finding leaves question regarding how adept women in more technical fields are with contemporary communications tools.

The results indicated that younger women were more likely to utilize email, text messaging, and Facebook for professional networking than respondents in older age groups. This finding could suggest that women in younger generations may have different expectations for professional networking than the women with more working experience in business fields. Younger businesswomen may need to be made aware that all women in business may not utilize the same connectivity tools that they are accustomed to using. Additionally, experienced professional women in business fields may not appreciate being approached by younger women for career networking via online connectivity methods. The younger generations may face career networking challenges if they rely too heavily on these online tools that many women in business seem not to be currently using.

Phase two of the study

Following upon phase one's indication that women were not using social media to develop and maintain social capital, phase two was conducted to further clarify online professional networking amongst women who use social media regularly. The study sought to investigate whether women who use social media considered it a viable means of developing and maintaining professional network contacts.

The follow up study was initiated to speak to women who use social media to determine whether its use influenced their ability to market themselves, make necessary connections, and craft desired career changes. All participants in the study indicated that they were less likely to consider tools other than Email and LinkedIn as professional networking tools. They viewed the other online tools – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and text messaging – as vehicles for personal communications.

Comparing women of different age groups showed some variance in their perceptions of social media tools as viable for professional networking. Women in the forty-to-fifty age bracket used a greater variety of online tools for professional networking – citing Facebook and Twitter as used tools. Women in the twenty-to-thirty age range indicated that although they used Facebook and Twitter, they did not consider them tools to connect with professional contacts.

Additionally, another factor arose in the qualitative study. Women who identified themselves as self-employed indicated a greater usage of all social media tools for professional networking. Self-employed women saw less of a distinction between their personal and professional networking online.

This study's findings that women with higher educational levels – Masters degrees – used LinkedIn more often for networking could be related to their graduate programs of study, typically MBA programs. Business faculty may encourage students to use LinkedIn as a tool in order to develop connections and brand themselves online.

The findings related to field of work for business women in the study would seem to indicate a direct correlation to the content of participants' work. Women working within public relations indicated a higher use of social media tools for professional networking. Adopting their work skills to their own career networking would not be challenging. Raising the awareness of the connections available through social media amongst businesswomen in less public-focused functions may serve to help those women make career connections more readily.

This study provides a better understanding of women's use of online networking within business fields and how online connections may impact their ability to make desired career changes. The limited use of social media platforms by the participants in this study could indicate that women perceive those tools as less professionally valuable. Alternately, the limited use of online tools could suggest that women perceive the broadcast aspects of social media as less applicable to

developing social capital connections, as compared to the more directed means of communication. The more prevalent use of email for networking by women in this study implies the preference for direct communication channels as well.

This study indicates that women of all age ranges should be made aware of the limitations of social media for developing and maintaining professional network contacts. Women should be reminded that direct communications with contacts should be promoted as the preferred method for networking. Women should also be reminded of the value of professional networking, as they attempt to plan changes throughout their careers.

Going forward, researchers should continually monitor and assess the usage of professional networking by women, not just in business, but all fields. Researchers should include current and trending online tools as part of their assessment of professional networking. As online tools wane or become mainstream, career change implications could be impacted for women in many disciplines.

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