

# **Online Social Network Sites and the Concept of Social Capital**

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The last decade has truly been the decade of the online social network site. With the rise of such mega-sites as Facebook, which now boasts more than 350 million active users around the world (Facebook Press Room, 2009), online social network use has not only become a fixture in the lives of most Internet users, it has become an important tool for building and maintaining social capital (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Ellison et al., 2007). This paper summarizes what we know about the ways in which social network sites contribute to their users' abilities to accumulate social capital, and harness the benefits of their relationships. Consistent themes across the research include the importance of using actual identities rather than attempting to preserve anonymity, the role of offline relationships in developing online social capital, and the distinction between bridging and bonding social capital. Emerging work further examines suites of behaviors on social network sites that appear to facilitate social capital formation. The paper concludes with new questions for future research raised by the growing pervasiveness of social network sites and the incorporation of social network site features into virtually all forms of Internet-supported interactions.