Special Section on Recent Advances in Social Media: Preface

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Editorial

From humble newsgroup beginnings to the recent hubris of distorted democracy, social media has endured a multifarious and multifaceted journey into every aspect of contemporary life. Despite recent misgivings, the overarching outcomes and general sentiment towards social media continues to be pragmatic and positive. Platforms and applications with direct decision value for business (Culnan et al. 2010), government (Bertot et al. 2010), social empowerment (Carlson 2013; Rodriguez 2016), healthcare (Bandaragoda et al. 2018), and education (Gikas and Grant 2013), among many others, represent a rigorous evidence base of its significance.

In this context, it is pertinent to postulate that social media has successfully embedded itself as an increasingly indispensable medium of identity propagation, social networking, information dissemination and communication. It can be further argued that the scheme proposed by (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010) for classification of social media platforms (social presence, media richness, self-presentation and self-disclosure) has rapidly evolved into a de facto guideline for actual human behaviour and social interactions. This development represents an expanding window of opportunity to harvest precise insights on individual social media users and their group behaviours. Precise information can be utilised for good or exploited for bad.

This conundrum of equivocality motivates our special section. Diverging from the rush to harness decision value from behaviours and interactions, we posit the significance of research focused on the individual in social media. We received 16 submissions, out of which 6 articles were rigorously peer-reviewed for publication. These six articles represent a broad spectrum of recent advances permeating importance of the individual in social media; subjectivity of event perception, factors of social capital, influence of social broadcasting networks, impact on intimate relationships, knowledge sharing in higher education, and impartiality of social media discourse in regional Australia.

Article 1: An Extended Cognitive Situation Model for Capturing Subjective Dynamics of Events from Social Media (Yujie Wang, Damminda Alahakoon, and Daswin de Silva)

Cognitive situation models are representations of the psychology of understanding and comprehension from textual sources, such as social media. The collaborative nature of social media can lead to subjective interpretation of such content and discussions. This article proposes an extended cognitive situation model and a computational implementation that can continuously construct and update event-centric knowledge from social media data streams, accounting for subjectivity. Authors use a Twitter dataset to demonstrate and evaluate the proposed model.

Article 2: Which Factors Determine Our Online Social Capital? An Analysis Based on Structural Equation Modelling (Janine Hacker, Michael Grottke, and Carolin Durst)

This article addresses two research gaps in the association between online social networking and social capital; the absence of a valid and appropriate measure of online social capital and key characteristics of an individual's social network that influence online social capital. Structural equation modelling is utilised to analyse and evaluate data collected from 1000 Facebook users. Authors report varying degrees of influence across variables for online and offline social capital.

Article 3: Influence of Social Broadcasting Networks on News Consumption (Shailesh Palekar and Darshana Sedera)

Social media platforms have recently been classified and popularised as social broadcasting networks (SBN) of news and other information. This article explores the role and impact of SBN structure and influence of its users on two news consumption behaviours, switching and continuance. A qualitative study of 325 SBN users was conducted as empirical validation of individuality on these two behaviours. Authors indicate SBN serves a different purpose to traditional news media, with intermittent switching and continuance.

Article 4: Helpful or Harmful? Exploring the Impact of Social Media Usage on Intimate Relationships (Naomi Whiteside, Torgeir Aleti, Jason Pallant, and John Zeleznikow)

A number of recent studies have reported on the negative impact of social media usage on personal relationships. This article presents a thorough investigation of this association, using Facebook as a case study. A survey was conducted on 518 Australian Facebook users, exploring usage patterns, relationship satisfaction and household income. Authors report four prominent usage profiles with corresponding degree of usage and relationship satisfaction.

Article 5: Using Social Media to Enable Staff Knowledge Sharing in Higher Education Institutions (Aidan Duane and Niall Corcoran)

Organisational implementations of social media platforms continue to receive limited attention in current literature. A limitation addressed in this article, as it examines the role and impact of enterprise social networks in employee knowledge sharing, within a tertiary education setting. Authors adopt an action research approach to develop a conceptual model that is empirically evaluated via focus groups and interviews. Organisational structure and culture are reported as primary barriers to participation and knowledge sharing.

Article 6: Power to the People: Social Media Discourse on Regional Energy Issues in Australia (Kerri Morgan, Susan Bedingfield, and Marc Cheong)

Although touted as platforms of equality, social media can conceive bias towards overpowering personalities and group behaviours. This article presents a novel approach for investigating this bias, using text clustering and emergent communication patterns based on graph theory. Authors empirically evaluate the proposed approach using a collection of tweets in response to the closure of a coal-fired power station in regional Australia.

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