

Class Reading Assignment 2: Social Computing Theories

Course: CS 6474 / CS 4803 Social Computing

Grade: 6% of overall course grade (60 points total)

Due Date: the last class of instructional period on April 27

What to hand in: Submit as a single PDF on Canvas

Formatting Guidelines:

- Length: approximately 4 pages single-spaced, 1-inch margins
- Font: at least 11pt, readable serif or sans-serif

Grading Emphasis:

- Accurate use of concepts from readings and lectures
- Explicit connections to course material
- Mechanism-based explanations, not opinions
- Platform- and context-specific reasoning
- Clarity, structure, and coherence

Collaboration Policy:

This is an individual assignment. You may discuss high-level ideas with classmates, but all submitted work must be your own. You may not share written responses.

AI Use Policy:

You may use AI-based tools only for proofreading or improving clarity. You may not use AI tools to generate ideas, arguments, or structure. Responses should reflect your own reasoning and engagement with the readings and lectures.

This assignment builds directly on Weeks 3-4 lectures and discussions on social capital, social influence, self-presentation, and identity.

Part A. Definitions and applications of social capital

Q1 (15 points). Using Ellison et al. (2007) and Putnam (discussed in class), define Bonding, Bridging, and Maintained social capital. For *each*, give one concrete feature on a social computing platform of your choice that plausibly supports it and one that might undermine it.

Q2 (10 points). Ellison et al. find positive associations between Facebook use and social capital, especially for users with lower well-being. Yet contemporary discourse often frames social media as harmful, as discussed in the class. Reconcile these findings using platform design evolution (e.g., algorithmic curation, scale, visibility).

Part B. Self-presentation and identity curation

Q3 (10 points). Contrast Goffman's performance with Hogan's exhibition. Give one example from a platform discussed in class that is *clearly* performance-dominant and one that is exhibition-dominant, and justify why.

Q4 (25 points). Drawing on Donath's theory of identity and deception, the findings from the 4chan (/b/) study, and the phenomenon of adoption of anonymous identities discussed in class (e.g., Reddit throwaways, anonymous support communities), answer the following questions on the role of anonymity in online communities:

a) When and how does anonymity *strengthen* community function?

In your answer, consider mechanisms such as:

- Protection from stigma, social judgment, or real-world repercussions
- Enabling honesty, vulnerability, or norm-violating speech
- How communities replace identity with alternative signals (e.g., language, norms, repetition, timing)

Be explicit about *what kind of community function* is being strengthened (e.g., participation, support, creativity, information exchange).

b) When and why does anonymity *undermine* trust, credibility, or accountability?

In your answer, consider:

- Donath's distinction between assessment signals and conventional signals
- How low-cost identity signals enable deception, trolling, or misinformation
- Cases where anonymity destabilizes norms or makes credibility judgments difficult