

The Long-term Effects of Expanding Social Capital via Social Media

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Abstract

Even though social media use is prevalent worldwide, there is little empirical evidence on the impact of social media access on people's long-term networks and social capital. In this paper, we use Facebook's sequential rollout to 1,200 U.S. colleges from 2004-2006 to estimate the returns to social capital accumulation during college. We find exposure to Facebook changed the trajectory of people's social networks: 10-15 years after graduation they have larger online social networks, are more closely connected to peers from the same college, in a way that mimics the demographic patterns they were exposed to in college. Using social media access as a proxy to the returns to social capital accumulation, we find access is associated with moving further from hometowns to neighborhoods with more economic opportunity.

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