NEWS SOURCES OF CITIZEN JOURNALISTS:
HOW DOES SOCIAL CAPITAL INFLUENCE CITIZEN JOURNALISTS
IN CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES?

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ABSTRACT

Online citizen journalism has been seen developing fast and with popularity with more advanced media platforms in recent years, yet what factors affect citizen journalists’ likelihood to produce public news remain murky. The effect of social capital on health, on politics, on internet, on educational achievement and many other aspects has been studied for diverse groups. This study sought to measure U.S. and Chinese citizen journalists’ social capital and their perceived ability to report public news as well as the influence of social capital on citizen journalists and compare how social capital worked for citizen journalists in the two countries. Social capital, longevity in community, strength of personal relationships, relying on personal social connections as news sources, professional media experience and social media use were measured and analyzed to address the hypothesis and answer research questions. Results showed that U.S. citizen journalists, who were proposed to have higher political openness in their society, perceived a higher level of likelihood that they will have the ability to report public news than Chinese citizen journalists. Longevity in community, professional media experience and level of social capital were all found to positively affect citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news and their level of social capital. Citizen journalists with stronger personal relationships were found to have higher level of social capital. Substantial differences of effects from independent variables on dependent variables were found between U.S. and Chinese citizen journalists.
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# CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................... ii  
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ....................................................................................... iii  
LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................. v  
LIST OF FIGURES .............................................................................................. vi  
1. INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................. 1  
2. LITERATURE REVIEW ................................................................................... 3  
3. METHODS ....................................................................................................... 26  
4. FINDINGS ....................................................................................................... 32  
5. CONCLUSION .................................................................................................. 45  
REFERENCES ...................................................................................................... 53  
APPENDIX 1: SURVEY ...................................................................................... 57  
APPENDIX 2: IRB APPROVAL .......................................................................... 69  
APPENDIX 3: IRB RENEWAL APPROVAL ...................................................... 72
LIST OF TABLES

1 Frequencies of percentage for the comparison of U.S and Chinese Journalists on perceived ability to report .................................................................34

2 Bivariate Correlations for Two Main Outcome Variables and Independent Variables ........................................................................................................36

3 Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables predicting both U.S. and Chinese Citizen Journalists’ perceived ability to report public news ........................................................................................................37

4 Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables predicting Citizen Journalists’ social capital ..............................................................38

5 Regression Analysis for Variables predicting each group of Citizen Journalists’ perceived ability to report public news .................................42

6 Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables predicting Citizen Journalists’ social capital ..........................................................44
LIST OF FIGURES

1 Model ..................................................................................................................21
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The problem area addressed in this paper is how social capital can be used as news resources to promote the influence of citizen journalism in terms of doing real public news reports by citizen journalists in China and America. Social capital can be conceptualized as reciprocity, resources, and trustworthiness obtained from building and maintaining different forms of social ties (e.g., families, friends, neighborhood, colleagues, etc.). Studies of social capital have discussed its use as resources in many fields, such as serving as resources for health and well-being, and serving to promote civic engagement.

Citizen journalists refer to everyday people who contribute to, disseminate and share news information, and make news reporting through different channels of media. Citizen journalism has gained more and more popularity with the development of online media platforms. There are plenty of studies in these two areas –social capital and citizen journalism. But only limited studies can be found when considering social capital as sources for citizen journalism practice, and it is rare to find analysis of Chinese citizen journalism. A recent study revealed that social capital in middle-sized communities could be improved by citizen journalism practice in the college classroom, and other potentially beneficial factors have been explored as well. However, the impact of social capital of citizen journalists on their news reporting remains unclear. Recent studies have shown that citizen journalism is a common phenomenon in both China and
America: but that it is unclear how much these individuals actually produce journalistic reporting. A number of untrained citizen journalists produce commentary, analysis, opinion and forward other articles on their own news websites instead of reporting real news. It is proposed in this study that one reason for this is many citizen journalists are hindered by their inferior access to news sources to produce original news.

The purpose of the paper is to analyze factors that help explain the likelihood of reporting on public issues. Surveys of both U.S. and Chinese citizen journalists were conducted. The factor of social capital was examined as a possible explanation, as are longevity in the community, strength of personal connections, use of social media and professional background. Predictors of social capital are also examined. Differences between Chinese and American citizen journalists were studied: especially, perceived ability to do public reporting and factors that explain level of public reporting.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Citizen Journalism in the U.S

Professional journalism is defined as news content published by various channel of news media outlets such as newspapers, television, radio and online news websites by professional journalists who are paid, trained, supervised and work within established editorial norms. Citizen journalism which is also referred to as grassroots journalism and participatory journalism, is defined as citizens who contribute to, disseminate and share news information, and make news reporting through different channels of media. Most of citizen journalists are not paid by news organization, are lack of professional training.

The number of citizen journalists is growing with the improvement of website technology. Everyone can create their own media products including news and commentary with the access to computer and mobiles. The number of online citizen journalism consumers is not estimated by available figures. However, according to the infographic blogging statistics in 2012, there are near 329 million people viewing blogs. The leading blog -blogger in U.S. has over 46 million unique visitors each month (Rampton, 2012). Blogs are an application and one of the most commonly used platforms by online citizen to distribute their news content. More than thousands of citizen news media organizations are sustained through blogs and websites in local communities. Blogs have enabled ordinary citizens to contribute news and information (J-Lab, 2014). The citizen
journalists publish news articles, share photos, audios, videos to blogs and online news sites and make comment on news and current events.

The advent of citizen journalism has had an impact on the development of the field of journalism. A study of Barnes (2012) pointed out that one of the greatest impact of citizen journalism is providing distinct perspectives, new topics and diverse contents for traditional news organizations. Citizen journalism is also used as a new kind of information resources for traditional journalists.

Additionally, a number of studies explored the impact of citizen journalism on its contribution to democracy. Citizen journalism bring some change in public life as it provides channels for people to expose government lies and mistakes as well as some influential corporations’ and organizations mistakes. It enables public to gather information and construct community knowledge and to have a direct stake in news production, so that they may engage more in the democratic process (Kaufhold, Valenzuela, & de Zuniga, 2010). Citizen journalism also be able to facilitate healthy democratic discussions among young people. (Ostman, 2012).

As a new kind of journalism, citizen journalism brought changes in traditional journalism and public social life. However, as a matter of fact, it is not clear the impact has been that great. Citizen journalism is confronted with development bottleneck. When compared articles written with traditional journalists, news content written by citizen journalists were rated as less relevant to news events and less credible.

According to Robinson and DeShano (2011), citizen journalists were found lack of authority in society. The recognition of citizen journalism among mainstream media and society is controversial on a small extent. On one hand, the mainstream media admit citizen journalists’ influence and competitive strength and sometimes take news information from citizen
journalists. On the other hand, the mainstream media treat them as unprofessional and unorganized. Citizen journalists are questioned by society and mainstream media about their credibility, accuracy, objectivity and professionalism. One freelancer interviewed in their study said: “he would never take material directly from a blog or comment without verification with a more authoritative figure because there are “no standards, no guidelines, no repercussions” (Robinson & DeShano, p.963 ). They also found that professional journalists’ perceived the importance their roles higher than those of citizen journalists. Robinson and DeShano quoted a local editor’s comment of online news contributor that “The journalists generally considered online contributors’ aims as incongruent with their own objectives. The phrase “‘citizen journalism’ is an oxymoron” (Robinson & DeShano, P.969).

Citizen journalists are unlike professional journalists in part because they have been found to have insufficient substance in their news content. An article by Carpenter reviewed 10 new citizen journalism sites and found many of them lacking in quality and substance for the public. The news and information published by citizen journalists relate more to their personal life and community, or the content primarily covers issues, events or people that affect relatively small place range (Carpenter, 2010). With such content it is difficult to cause lasting and widespread concern from the audience. The topics citizen journalists are interested in are also different from mainstream media. Citizen journalists are more favorable to report community events, commercial, arts or food events, express their ideas, opinions and comments instead of power, process, or formal fact (Robinson & DeShano, 2011). Whereas traditional news content is more about politics, international affairs, and events with wide concern.

Increasingly, traditional news media are cooperating with citizen journalists in publishing news and disseminating information. Robinson and DeShano stated in their study that “News
organizations were encouraging reporters to incorporate citizen journalism practices in their professional and private lives, including having their own blogs, creating social networking profiles, and keeping up to date with all the citizen journalism sites of their beats (Robinson & DeShano, p. 977). Some authoritative news organizations absorb citizen journalism by creating a web-based reporting function. For example, IReport.com, which is a user generated citizen news website owned by Cable News Network, successfully engages citizens to participate in news reports. In the meantime, CNN also takes advantage of citizens’ newsgathering capabilities, especially on breaking news. Many traditional news organizations are adopting citizen news content. More and more journalists are finding resources and audience from user-generated content. Major daily newspapers are rapidly inviting and subsequently sharing user-generated content (e.g. comments, photos, videos and articles) on their news sites.

Even though there is some evidence of cooperation between mainstream media and citizen journalism, the fact is that it is difficult for citizen journalists to get their stories accept by mainstream news and arouse more attention from society. One reason is that citizen journalists are hindered by limitation of their news access. According to what Reich found in his study, there are several principle limitations for citizen journalists’ news access: their human sources are modestly used; one-source stories contain a high portion of their news content; citizen journalists were reluctant to interact and negotiate with sources; and there is an absence of established long-term relations with most of their sources (Reich, 2008). In order to promote influence of citizen journalism, it is necessary for citizen journalists to overcome their own deficiency and take advantages of their social capital to get more news sources.
Citizen Journalism in China

Citizen journalism in China is almost based completely on the internet. China has more than 721 million internet users, more than any other country (InternetLiveStats, 2014). The growth of internet access and the web have tremendously increased the amount of the variety of sources and accessibility to more information. The growth of internet access promoted the timeliness of the news and expanded the domestic and international information sources of the news. Other complementary technologies, such as smart cell phones and tablets, amplify the impact of the internet.

China’s new online media are made up of three major parts: the state-owned news websites, the private operated commercial news websites and social media. The state-owned news websites which are called xin wen wang zhan, such as the Ren Ming site, Xinhua website and CCTV online websites, played the leadership role for online news media. The private owned commercial online media is called wangluomeiti, and there are also regional online media complexes, for example Sina, Sohu and Netease. These commercial online media are very popular in China and have an increasing influence in Chinese society. Social media is increasingly used as news information distribution platforms by people today. Most of the mentioned news online media forms have participation from citizen journalists. For example, RenMing site has a section called “Ren Ming Liao Ba,” which is used for citizens to discuss their opinion of news, including news from citizens. Sina news has a forum called “Ming Bo Re Tie” which is used to publish news and comments from famous blogs and online forums. Social media such as Sina weibo and Sohu microblogging frequently release news or news information from citizen users (Tong & Zuo, 2013).
According to Xin (2010), the most common forms of citizen journalism in China include individual blogs such as Sina and Souhu; microblogs such as Tencent Weblog and Sina Weblog; news websites that are mixed with professional journalist and citizen journalist such as the GongMingXinWen website, and a number of online local news websites; individual citizen journalist websites; individual offshoots of video sites, such as Youku and Ku6; online forums focused on citizen generated news; and some citizen journalism projects such as the Dazhanlan project.

Blogging, various forms micro-blogging such as Sina microblog, Wechat public account information feed subscription gained great popularity among Chinese urbanites. It is also the mostly used media channel platforms for most citizen journalists in China. A considerable number of Chinese journalists are using blogs now. Their blogs provide different views from official news products by contributing a great variety of information, analysis and comments. Some Chinese scholars discuss and publish their research on their blogs. Blogs, microblogs and Wechat (the most popular online instant chat apps in China) public account subscription are a popular platform for educators, government officials, students, and people from different aspects of life for official use and private use. It introduces new platforms for posting, viewing and cross-posting textual-visual-audio content via digital mobile communication networks (Hassid, 2012). Its social, cultural and political ramifications have been closely observed and documented. According to “Microblogging Development Report 2012-2013,” the number of Sina microblogging registered users reached 536 million, and Tencent Weibo reached 507 million. Microblogging has become one of the main activities of Chinese internet users. This marks weblogs as an important channel for people to voice the opinions about important events.
Chinese blogosphere is quite different from the blogosphere in Western democracies because of the special relationship between government and media, especially for the reason that there is heavy censorship and surveillance on the Chinese internet (Tong & Sparks, 2009). Blogs often challenge or attempt to correct conventional media reports that appear to mislead or contain inaccurate information (Murphy & Auter, 2012). One of the most prominent example of this function was called the “Zhou tiger” case. A farmer in Hunan province said he saw a tiger in the back mountain of his house and he took a picture of it. The government paid lots of attention to it and widely published the news because the appearance of a tiger reflected a good environment in that province. However, the tiger was found out by the netizens (people who use internet in China) to be a lie of the farmer. The whole thing was spread by bloggers.

More significantly, some people turn to blogs to appeal for justice or claim for human rights when they themselves or their families and friends are faced with problems. Blogs are an important platform for people to discuss politically sensitive topics and public discourse. Some issues gain attention of government officials and even the whole society. Sometimes the government has to take their advice and appeals into consideration when the government needs to make new policies or tackle social or international problems, for the reason that some blogs have aroused so much attention from society (Tong & Zuo, 2013).

Social Capital

In studying news sources of citizen journalists and the role of social capital in citizen reporters’ original news producing practices, the researcher can lean mostly on the literature on citizen journalism. However, in current mass media research, increasing academic attention aroused by mass communication scholars has linked traditional news media to Robert Putnam’s social capital conception.
**Definition of social capital**

A considerable number of scholars have proposed and defined the concept of social capital. The concept of social capital has been conceptualized as resources made available through social relations. Social capital pioneers (such as Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam) have created diverse definitions of social capital.

Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.” (p.249). In Bourdieu’s opinion, social capital can be conceptualized as extension of the traditional economic notion of monetary capital. Bourdieu’s approach regarded social capital as a kind of resource that belongs to individuals.

A widely accepted definition of social capital was given by Putnam. According to Putnam (2000) social capital “refers to connections among individuals-social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.” (p. 19). In his opinion, social capital is positively affected by associational networks that can strength interpersonal trust, cooperation, reciprocity and in further lay a social foundations for democratic society. Putnam defined networks refer to whom you know and how well you know them, norms refer to unwritten rules that members of a network abide by, and trust refers to expectation that others will act for collective interest. His perspectives have regarded social capital as features of social groups and networks.

Different components of social capital can be categorized as dimensions, levels, and types.
Two dimensions of social capital: sociability & societal capital

Sociability capital refers to the ability of individual’s social reactions’ to produce benefits or harms. It is based on the sociability in that individual’s ability and motivation to invest their effort, time, and other types of social relations. Studies of Bourdieu and social network scholars can be categorized as sociability capital research.

Societal capital refers to the collective level of outcomes influenced by dynamics of social interactions among individuals or groups. It focused on the good aspect of social network. It relates to the societal virtues such as norms, trust, reciprocity, and morality, which are embedded in or produced by social group, organizations, or systems more than to individual actors’ activities to access and utilize benefits.

Levels of social capital: individual level vs. associational level

At the individual level of analysis, social capital refers to the available resources of the individual. Advocates of Bourdieu’s approach say it is based on the norms. At the associational or community level, social capital refers to assets or resources of social groups and networks. At this level, social capital is an attribution of community and groups. Coleman’s (1988) conceptualization of social capital is focused on the community-level effects of social capital as it embodied in relations among persons.

Perspectives of social capital research: communitarian, networks

A communitarian perspective was represented by Putnam (1995) regarding social capital as a synonym with, more or less, formal social groups such as associations and civic groups. This perspective emphasizes the quantity of communicational networks – for example, the number of social groups and consistency of them. The main idea of communitarian perspectives is that social capital has positive effect on a community’s welfare.
The network perspective emphasizes qualitative aspects of communication networks such as strength, position and types (bonding vs bridging). The network perspective deal with not only positive but also negative outcomes emerged from social networks according to the diverse combinations of qualitative traits of social networks.

**Types of social capital: bonding, bridging and linking**

Scholars have developed diverse but inter-related types of social capital according to the characteristics of social networks. The nature of network ties can be distinguished according to the intensity of interactions; strong ties (frequent interactions) and weak ties (occasional interactions). Granovetter (1983) developed one type of social capital in terms of the strength of network. There could be strong ties and weak ties within social networks. Strong ties are related to homogeneous groups of people such as families, friends. Weak ties related to people whom you are not that familiar with, such as people you might know in a gym. Putnam developed bonding and bridging social capital in terms of the inclusiveness of networks.

Putnam (2002) suggests two types of social capital that can be assessed on an interpersonal level: bridging and bonding. The two types of social capital are especially important. This categorization is directly related to Granovetter's (1983) concept of strong and weak ties. According to Putnam (2000), bonding social capital involves rather strong ties between relatively homogeneous groups of people. This form of capital may involve family or close friends; it may be useful for emotional and substantive support and reinforces a special group identity. Bonding capital could contribute to inner group cohesion and virtue of groups, such as trust, norms, and morality. However it produces negative effects such as antipathy or distrust toward external groups.
In contrast, bridging social capital (inclusive of non-group others) is related to weak ties. It focused more on potential reciprocity and trust in different social groups. Bridging social capital is more outward-looking and relates to connecting people across different social divides. The main use of bridging social capital is getting information. Bridging networks are better links to external assets and are better for “information diffusion. Social groups function with both bonding and bridging social capital. A number of previous studies used bonding and bridging social capital. Berger (2011) conducted research that investigated the assumption that increased connectedness can strengthen African journalism educators’ work, and that in turn can help improve journalism on the continent to assess what factors appear to contribute to building a networked community of practice among African journalism educators. This study will try to figure out how social capital affect citizen journalists especially regarding bonding and bridging social capital.

Social capital theory says that there are some benefits and values in social networks and relationships. These benefits are created by their social connectedness. Social networks have value because they allow access to resources and valued social attributes such as trust, reciprocity, and community values. Social network can be exclusive and unfair because people tend to associate with others like themselves and share same characteristics. Woolcock and Narayan (2002) emphasized that the network perspective dealt not only positive but also negative outcomes from social networks according to the combinations of the qualitative traits of social networks. Development of trust and values is a process that takes place over time and feeds back into the development of social networks. Networks and trust are indicators of social capital and they are also factors that lead to the social capital.
The social capital literature has provided evidence on the impacts of social capital in various social domains such as cognition, health, social mobility, technological diffusion, organizational behavior, and entrepreneurship (Kaufhold, Valenzuela, & de Zuniga, 2010). Social capital theory is a powerful framework that can be used to understand how people, and the social networks that they are a part of, interact, and benefit from these interactions. Social capital can work at the individual level and at social level. It can help individuals and it can aid democracy, and it can interact with media in doing these things. Social capital may be a concept that can help us understand the changes that the Internet has undergone during recent years and how these changes may help people in their wellbeing.

**Social capital and media**

A study of Hess (2013) explored the use of social capital in journalistic practice for traditional media. Hess viewed social capital as “a specific resource of power/advantage that commercial news organizations can consciously invest in and develop for their own gain” (p.113). She found that social capital affected news outlets on facilitate or foster public and private social connections. In the meanwhile, traditional norms and professionalism of traditional media confronted the challenge posted by social capital (Hess, 2013).

Some studies have provided measurement of social capital and its relationship to news in the 21st century. Pierre Bourdieu (2005) concluded that social capital can be utilized as a resource of power or advantage to maintain or create different benefits. The entry point for this study is trying to examine how social capital could be applied as a resource for original news reporting of citizen journalists. The extent to which social capital affects news access of citizen reporters has yet to merit enough attention. The concept of social capital provides an explanation for how social interactions produce benefits not only for an individual but also for a social group.
or whole society. The social capital framework can be used to understand how people, and the social networks that they are a part of, interact with each other to aid peoples’ wellbeing. Social capital has proven to be positively related to achievement and wellbeing in diverse contexts such as educational fields, organizations or work places, political development and economics.

Previous studies have shown relationships between social capital and political participation. Researchers in various fields have studied the relationship between social capital and civic and political engagement, governmental performance, education performance. Early studies also applied social capital to analyzing the decline in civic and political participation. Existing social capital research has produced mixed results of the influence of media use and trust on political and civic engagement. Recent debates on the health of civil society has centered on the steady decline of social capital.

Since the mid-1990s, a growing body of scholarship has shed light on news media use and its impact on social capital. Studies have researched the relationships between use of the news media and a number of indicators of civic engagement such as levels of social trust (Bäck & Christensen, 2016), political participation (Giugni, Michel, & Gianni, 2013), and confidence in government (Ekici & Koydemir, 2013). Public relations researchers have also attempted to apply social capital as a way to enhance organizational communication practices.

With the development of media platforms, social network sites like facebook and twitter and some online games gained increasingly popularity and become a central role in social life. Recent studies paid much attention to online social capital. A study have examined the impact of social capital on establishing of new types of social ties and have analyzed the capacity of the Internet to enhance social capital and wellbeing. They found that social media use positively affected people’s online social capital (Sum, Mathews, Pourghasem, & Hughes, 2008). It can
assumed that the impact of online media use on citizen journalists’ online social capital could also be positively related. So what could be the impact of citizen journalists’ online social capital on their news reporting? And online social capital’s impact on their real life social capital remained unclear.

**Longevity in community**

Previous study has shown that the time people lived in a community is an important predictor of their social capital. Building and maintaining social capital takes time and resources. The length of time an individual or family had resided in a particular area is a significant aspect of being local. The more time one spends in an area, the more social connections they have created. The associational activities that are engaged will lead him or her to develop more trust and reciprocity. In the process, the individual becomes more aware of what is important at the community level mainly because of the network of connections he or she has.

For journalists, length of time can lead to increased connectedness, and this can strengthen their work, as well as their confidence that they can find helpful sources for this work, and that this in turn can help improve the content of their journalism.

**Strength of personal relationships**

Strength of personal relationships in the study is similar to the idea of diversification of social networks and depth of social networks. People can receive benefits and values through various social networks and relationships. People can use these benefits such as valuable information acquisition, financial gain, job creation, education diffusion, or other instrumental and emotional support depending on who one knows and how well one understands social relationships (Sum, Mathews, Pourghasem, & Hughes, 2008). “Social networks have value because they allow access to resources and valued social attributes such as trust, reciprocity, and
community values.” (Kadushin, 2012, p.164). The exchange of social and material resources, giving and receiving help can be acquired through personal social networks. Networks played an important role in construction of social capital. Conversely, social capital helped to build and maintain stronger networks. Previous studies showed that social networks are an important contributor to social capital. How personal relationships affect citizen journalists’ level of social capital is one of the questions to address in this study.

**Professional media experience**

Professional media experience in this study means professional journalism education and work experience in news organization. Kawamoto (2013) stated in his study “Enhancing citizen journalism with professional journalism education” that any forms of journalism education -- for example journalism education from professional journalism college, non-profit organizations or advocacy groups -- would be beneficial to citizen journalists’ reporting work to be more valuable and do better public service. This is because journalism education would not only enhance their ability to accumulate knowledge and skill, but it would also make them more aware of journalism ethics. A study by Lowrey and Becker (2004) examined the impact of pre-college and college journalism activities and experiences on occupational commitment to journalism work. They found that it did not directly predict occupational commitment; however, early educational involvement in journalism leads to more college involvement and internships, which lead to pursuit of journalism. Citizen journalists who do public service journalism are mostly motivated to do their reporting jobs by their belief that journalism has the power to enhance and invigorate democracy. Commitment to journalism work could be a motivation to do their job. Previous study of social capital found that education at school is an important contributor to social capital acquisition (Comer, 2015). Literature suggests therefore, that if citizen journalists had more
professional journalism background, it could lead them to more social capital, which could help them with their journalism work. How journalism education affects citizen journalists’ news reporting and their level of social capital is assessed in this study.

Experience in news organizations have an important impact on journalists’ perceptions of their occupation. A study by O’Conner and Dillingham (2014) of online investor forums found that personal experience leads to social capital, which can positively affect quantity and quality of discussion and information exchange in online forums. This suggests that it may be when personal experience is applied in an online citizen journalism context, citizen journalists can use their personal journalism experience as a way to gain and keep news sources. Professional media work experiences and journalism education could also help citizen journalists build and maintain professional networks related to journalism and further build their professional social capital.

**Social media use and social capital**

Social network sites have gained great popularity. Recently, more and more research has studied SNSs’ impact on people’s social behavior and its relationship with social capital. Kelly (2016) explored how social media use intersects with social capital, and found that social media used to express care and concerns for others played an important role in establishing and maintaining relationships, so that it positively affect people’s social capital outcomes. Hooghe and Oser (2015) suggested that even though the time spent on internet-based activities subtract from in-person interaction -- which is claimed to play a crucial role in generating social capital -- internet based activity still positively affected the development of social capital. However, a study by Chang and Hsiao (2013) tested the time people spend on social networks and its relationship with social capital. Their findings revealed that social capital in real life and SNSs
social capital were different. People who spent less time on SNSs perceived real life social
capital is more important than SNSs social capital. The study of social media use by citizen
journalists and its impact on their social capital and news reporting remains unclear, and is
examined in this study.

Models, Hypotheses and Research Questions

More than 1,000 citizen news media organizations are sustained through blogs and
websites in local communities, which have enabled ordinary citizens to contribute news and
information (Carpenter 2010). However, the news and information published by some citizen
journalists relate more to their personal life and community. Such information conveys little
public value. In turn it can negatively contribute to the quality of citizen journalism sites. On the
other hand, previous studies show evidence that citizen reporters have limited access to new
sources. Some citizen journalists have access to gathering more news information, which allows
them to do more real news reporting. Social capital can positively contribute to the process of
information seeking, and this could increase the quality of news reports of citizen journalists.

The positive consequence of social capital -- including mutual support, cooperation, trust,
and institutional effectiveness -- can be maximized. Citizen journalists who have been in a
community longer or are “well connected” in a community would have more success getting
local sources and local officials (like people in the local government) to talk with them and give
them information.

According to social capital scholarship, some individuals and communities have more
social capital than others. It follows that some citizen journalists have more social capital than
others, so that it will take less time and effort for those with more social capital to gather news
information and the level of real news reporting should be higher than those who have less social capital. The atmosphere of mutual trust and appreciation created by social capital will make citizen journalists feel that it is acceptable and appropriate to do more real public news reporting.

In recent mass communication research, scholars have paid attention to the relationship between social capital and mass communication. This study attempts to propose relationships between social capital and level of public interest news reporting by citizen journalists. Social capital could increase the accessibility of sources to citizen journalists. This study also attempts to compare and contrast how citizen journalists in America and China utilize their social capital differently to help their news reports.

This study uses the conception of social capital and other factors that can lead to citizen journalists having more news sources. Factors include: political openness, personal relationships, and personal experiences (like longevity in community and professional education/experience). These should affect the likelihood of citizen journalists producing original public news.

The independent variables are political openness, and several individual level factors: time spent in a community, degree of professional journalist experience, online social media use, and strength of social relationships. Political openness is defined as the degree to which a government is willing to open its activities to the public, to develop public information platforms, and to allow a range of issues to be reported. It is proposed that these factors together will indicate the perceived likelihood that citizen journalists will produce original public news, shown as the dependent variable in the illustrated model below. Individual-level factors also indicate level of social capital. Social capital is both an independent variable (predicting production of public news) and a dependent variable in this study.
Hypotheses and research questions

The transparency and openness of the political environment is one kind of structural social capital. Access to political information can be controlled by public authorities. With an open political environment, authorities will actively release information of their activities, so that citizen journalists can take part in the routine of source-controlled exchanges, such as press conference, press releases, and updates. Political activities form a large portion of the mainstream news. A previous content analysis of the news sources of citizen journalists found that government agencies were one of the most commonly used identified news information sources. Official sources and press releases occupied one of the three categories of citizen journalists’ news reporting (Bal & Baruh, 2015). If the citizen reporters have the access to get political information and attend these activities, they will report more public news, especially original political news. Public news is more commonly produced by public media. Public media typically have a certain dependency on the government, and these media typically offer
information about the government and publish official information in a systematic way (Rodríguez-Martínez, Figueras-Maz, Mauri-de & Alsius, 2013). Public news produced by citizen journalists in this research is defined as news information that can draw public interest, news information meant to benefit a community, and news that use official sources. America is relatively a more democratic country than China. The level of openness of government and politics to journalists is higher than China. The political environment will affect the citizen journalists’ work. So how it affects their jobs in terms of public openness could affect their access to sources for the production of public news. The following hypothesis is proposed.

H1: In a more politically open environment, citizen journalists are more likely to perceive that they have the ability to report public news than they are in an environment that is less open politically.

Second, the time a citizen journalist spends in a community could have impact on strength and depth of social connection and shared culture and issues in a community. The more time one spends in a community, the more likely one could form a stronger social connection in that community, the more shared culture and shared issues one could have. Longevity in the community leads to stronger social connections with their personal contacts. This means citizen reporters who have lived a longer time in their community will maintain more human sources, so that it will lead to both stronger social capital and better access to news information. Based on that, the second hypothesis is proposed:

H2a: Degree of longevity in the community for citizen journalists will positively affect their perceived ability to report public news.

H2b: Degree of longevity in the community for citizen journalists will positively affect their perceived level of social capital.
Third, according to Carpenter (2008), online citizen journalists were more likely to cite sources from average people, non-institutional representatives such as experts, scientists and academics, and anonymous non-officials such as museum visitors, movie goers and witnesses. “They [citizen journalists] rely on people with relevant expertise to assimilate and evaluate information for them.” (Carpenter, 2008). The sources from average people, non-institutional representatives and anonymous non-officials can be obtained from citizen journalist’s personal relationships. More relationships and more substantive relationships – in other words, greater “strength of relationship” – might enhance their effectiveness in both gathering and synthesizing information. Strength of social relationship also leads to greater social capital. So these hypotheses are proposed.

H3a: The stronger the personal relationships that citizen journalists have, the greater will be their perceived ability to report public news.

H3b: The stronger the personal relationships that citizen journalists have, the greater will be their perceived level of social capital.

Fourth, the background of citizen journalists could affect the likelihood of citizen journalists to produce original news stories. Study showed that some citizen journalists use their personal journalism experience (working as professional journalist, having a journalism education) as a way to gain and keep news sources. If the citizen journalist had professional journalist education and experience, he or she would benefit from previous sources such as news informers, as well as from professional colleagues and knowledge of the field’s technology. Professional education and experience will lead to journalists that are more knowledgeable about finding sources and reporting and writing news, which will help them find sources and give them more confidence in their reporting. Also, journalism experience means the citizen journalist
likely has a denser network of professional relationships, which can lead to greater amount of social capital. Therefore, I proposed the fourth pairs of hypotheses.

**H4a:** The higher the level of professional media experience, the greater will be the perceived ability to report public news.

**H4b:** The higher the level of professional media experience, the greater will be the perceived level of social capital.

Social network sites such as Twitter and Facebook, Blogs and YouTube have provided new opportunities for citizen journalists to produce news and increase the number of viewers. More frequent social media use should also correlate with stronger social networks and greater amount of social capital. Based on the literature review, I proposed the following hypotheses.

**H5a:** The higher the degree of citizen journalists’ social media use, the greater will be their perceived ability to report public news.

**H5b:** The higher the degree of citizen journalists’ social media use, the higher will be their perceived level of social capital.

According to Putnam, social capital is defined as norms of reciprocity acquired from well-organized associations and social relationships. Under such environments, harmony and dense social networks in a community can lead to higher level of social capital (Putnam, 2000). Therefore, the longevity in a community, personal relationships, professional journalism experience, and the degree of social media use are closely related to citizen journalists’ social capital. Also, the degree to which citizen journalists perceive that their communities are high in social capital will increase perception of ability to report on public news using official sources. This is because increased social capital means increased social trust, as well as faith that useful source connections can be made and kept. Based on that, H6 is proposed.
H6: The higher the level of citizen journalists’ perceived social capital, the greater will be their perceived ability to report public news.

Personal relationship plays an important role in Chinese society. People rely on their personal relationships in finding jobs, doing business, even get promoted. Personal relationships are one of the most important kinds of social capital in China society. Relations-based institutions are common to see. People gain perceptions of the importance and the motives of using personal relationships for business and work since they were young. People rely on personal relationships not only for cultural reasons but also to cope with deficient legal and political institutions (Bickenbach and Liu, 2010). Personal relationships play a relatively less important role in America than China. So what are the differences between the two countries’ citizen journalists when producing news reports that use personal relationships as news sources?

RQ1: Do Chinese citizen journalists rely on personal connections as news sources more than U.S. citizen journalists?

The situation of political openness, the use of personal relationships, use of social media and citizen journalists’ professional media experiences are obviously different between U.S. and China. These factors are proposed in hypotheses. It is proposed that they could affect social capital of citizen journalists and their perceived ability to report public news. But how do these factors work differently for citizen journalists of U.S. vs. China? Based on this, RQ2 is asked.

RQ2: How do predictors of perceived ability to report public news and social capital compare between U.S. and Chinese citizen journalists?
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The method used in this paper is survey. A survey is best for assessing how citizen journalists perceive their ability to report public news and for assessing their perceived level of social capital. Measures are based on the respondents’ answers about perceptions and not based on the contents of their news work. Research questions and hypotheses about perceived social capital and citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news was addressed by conducting a survey study of citizen journalists both in China and America. Participants completed online questionnaires. Two questionnaires were designed for citizen journalists from the two different countries. The questionnaire for Chinese citizen journalists was translated from English to Chinese. Online questionnaires were posted on the survey program Qualtrics. The survey was administered online from January to April 2016. The link of the questionnaire was sent to the participants by email.

The Sample

550 citizen journalists in America was chosen from citizen journalism news websites listed by the Knight Community News Network, which contains approximately 1400 websites and list of citizen journalism websites from SOURCEWATCH. This sample was supplemented by the listing of citizen journalists on the website LION Publishers. 550 Chinese citizen journalists were chosen for the survey. No comprehensive list of citizen news sites exists for Chinese citizen journalists and so the 550 Chinese citizen journalists were found using Sina Blog, citizen
the journalists of cnhan.com, xici.net and a list of citizen journalists who participated in the Dazhalan Project which was a prominent example of activism by citizen journalists: The project protects a historic area in Beijing named Dazhalan from being torn down. Citizen journalists who participated with professional news websites and video shoot-off of news in Youku and Ku6 were also contacted. Contact information was obtained from these sources. All the U.S. and Chinese citizen journalists chosen for this survey published at least 10 articles in the most recent one year on their websites or blogs. So they would be more likely to be comfortable and familiar enough with citizen journalism to answer the questions.

The survey was pre-tested with four U.S. citizen journalists and four Chinese citizen journalists. Only minor wording changes were suggested from these pre-tests. The study was approved by IRB before the survey was conducted, and then a link to the survey was emailed to the selected citizen journalists.

177 responses were collected from both the U.S. and Chinese citizen journalists. After removing duplicates, spam and cases with blank responses, a total of 134 usable responses were collected: 67 responses for a response rate of 12% were received from the U.S. citizen journalists; a total of 67 usable responses for a rate of 12% were received from Chinese citizen journalists.

**Measurement**

Specific survey questions were designed to measure each variable in the hypothesis. A number of demographic questions were also asked (see questionnaire in Appendix A).

**Dependent variable measures**

Citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public interest news
According to previous scholarship, public-interest journalism has two elements. First, public interest news functions as a watchdog for the public. The second element is that public interest journalism should find information, filter information, explain and analysis information. Based on these norms, this study defines public interest news produced by citizen journalism as news information that reports on public officials, functions as a watchdog and informs about public issues, to the benefit of a community. In this study, official sources will be classified by use of the categories provided by Carpenter (2008). A study by Carpenter categorized official sources as people who are representative of an organization, including government, business and non-profit (Carpenter, 2008).

Citizen journalists’ perceived ability to produce public interest news that use official sources was measured by thirteen survey statements of how difficult it might be to report on issues, events or people in their community (because of obstacles, constraints or access problem, etc.). Measures include: I can report without difficulty on problems, community-wide events or projects, government officials, government projects, government problems, government policies, and business in my community; I can quote, without difficulty, government officials, business owners, people from volunteer organizations and experts on issues,. Respondents were asked to rate how much they agree with these statements by using a 5-point Likert-type scale with 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly agree. Measures were summed and averaged ($M=3.44, SD=.85$), and the Cronbach’s alpha was .97, which indicates a high level of internal consistency for the scale items. A $t$-test was conducted to test possible difference between U.S. citizen journalists and Chinese citizen journalists on perceived ability to report public news.

*Perceived social capital*
Perceived social capital was measured by a scale developed and validated by Narayan and Cassidy (2001). The scale includes the items: “how much you trust certain groups of people (everyday people, political leaders, business owners) in your community”, “I feel free to borrow or exchange things with people in community”, “people in community will regularly help one another with small tasks such”, “you can’t be too careful in dealing with people in your community or most people in your community can be trusted”, “most of the time people in community are just looking out for themselves or they are trying to be helpful” and “most people in community would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance, or they would they try to be fair.” Respondents were asked to rate these statements using a 5-pont Likert scale from low level to high level. Measures were summed and averaged ($M=2.74$, $SD=.55$, $\alpha =.83$). Social capital was also applied as an independent variable of citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public interest news.

**Independent variables**

Independent variables included political openness, longevity in the community for citizen journalists, strength of personal relationships, degree of professional experience, degree of social media use, relying on personal social connections as news sources and perceived level of social capital of citizen journalists (also a dependent variable). Most of items applied in this survey were adapted from previous studies. The categories of official sources were adopted from Carpenter (2008).

**Political openness**

It is expected that U.S. will be more politically open than China, and so political openness was a dichotomous measure, comparing journalists’ responses from China with responses from the U.S.
Longevity in community

Longevity in community was measured by a single question asking citizen journalists how many years they have lived in the community that they presently live in ($M=12.45$, $SD=13.32$).

Strength of personal relationships

In this study personal relationships means social connections of citizen journalist including their family, friends, co-worker and neighbors in community. This variable was measured through (1) four survey items, asking how close they would say they are to their family, friends, co-workers and neighbors in community (1= never contact, 5= very close); (2) four survey items asking about frequency of speaking face to face with these same social groups and speaking over the phone with the same social groups, using a 7-point Likert scale with 1= Never, 2= less than once a month, 3= once a month, 4= 2-3 times a month, 5= once a week, 6= multiple times a week, 7= daily; and (3) the question of numbers of individuals that citizen journalists interact with on daily basis was also asked. Because these measurement scales had different response scales, measures were translated into standardized values (Z scores). They were then summed into a single “Strength of Personal Relationship” measure ($\alpha=.73$).

Dependence on personal connections as news sources

This variable was measured by how many social connections citizen journalists have and how frequently they get news from interacting with these social connections. Four measures were summed and averaged – “How many of these social acquaintances (family, friends, co-workers, neighbors) have provided information that is useful for producing news stories?” ($M=2.47$, $SD=1.83$). A $t$-test was conducted to test difference between U.S. citizen journalists and Chinese citizen journalists on having personal connections as news sources.
**Professional experience of citizen journalists**

Professional experience mean experiences related to journalism including journalism education and journalism practical experience. This was measured by questions asking how many years respondents have worked in professional news outlet ($M=4.66, SD=8.35$) and how many years they studied journalism in school ($M=.65, SD=1.25$). These measures were standardized and then summed for an index of depth of professional experience.

**Social media use**

The questions designed to measure social media use used different social media networks in the survey for the two countries, as people in China do not use most of the U.S. social media. A question was asked about frequency of use Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Google+, Tumblr and Instagram for U.S. citizen journalists. A question was asked about frequency of use QQ Zone, Wechat, Weibo and Sina blog for Chinese citizen journalists, using a 5-point Likert-type scale with 1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3= Occasionally, 4=Frequently and 5=Very frequently. These were summed as an index measure of social media use ($M=2.74, SD=.55$).

The final questions on the survey asked about demographics, including information on gender, age, education and employment status.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Hypotheses and research questions were tested using \( t \)-tests (H1 and RQ1) and hierarchical multiple regression (H2 through H6). Because the survey response rate was low, it was determined that parametric statistics could not be used in the traditional sense, due to the likelihood of non-response error. However, significance statistics are reported in the Findings chapter as a conventional way to define results that are meaningful. The term “significant” will be used in this chapter to mean meaningful or noteworthy.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that in a more politically open environment, citizen journalists are more likely to perceive that they have the ability to report public news than they are in an environment that is less open politically. To test Hypothesis 1, an independent samples \( t \)-test was conducted to determine if a difference existed between U.S citizen journalists and Chinese citizen journalists in the likelihood level of perceived ability to report public news. It was proposed that US citizen journalists would experience a higher level of political openness in their work than would Chinese citizen journalists. The 13 measures of the perceived ability to report (each on a 1-5 scale) were summed and averaged. The results of a \( t \)-test showed that there was a significant difference between perceived ability to report public interest news of U.S citizen journalists (\( n=67, M=3.86, SD=.72 \)) and Chinese citizen journalists (\( n=67, M=3.00, SD=.75 \)). U.S. citizen journalists perceived a higher level of likelihood that they will have the ability to report public news than Chinese citizen journalists, \( t (132) = 6.75, p = .00, p < .01 \).
Table 1 shows the frequencies of percentages for comparison of U.S. and Chinese citizen journalists on questions of perceived ability to report public interest news. As can be seen, U.S. citizen journalists consistently perceived less difficulty in reporting on public issues than Chinese citizen journalists. A notable difference is on the agreement of reporting news that explain political issues to people. About 80% of U.S. journalists agree with that while only 14% of Chinese journalists do. Close to 80% of U.S. citizen journalists agreed or strongly agreed that they can report problems and community wide events or projects in community without difficulty while only about 20% of Chinese journalists agreed with this. 45% of U.S journalists strongly agreed or agreed that they can report on government officials while only 21% Chinese journalists do. About 65% U.S. citizen journalists strongly agreed or agreed that they can report on government projects, government problems and government policies in their community while 22% of Chinese journalists agreed so, and 65% U.S. journalists strongly agreed or agreed that they can report news that government officials may not like but the public needs to know while 18% of Chinese journalists agreed so. These substantial differences are consistent with the idea that the openness of politics in society corresponds positively with citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news.
Table 1 Frequencies of percentage for the comparison of U.S. and Chinese journalists on perceived ability to report.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of public issue reporting</th>
<th>U.S. Citizen Journalists (valid percent of agree and strongly agree, combined, N=67)</th>
<th>Chinese Citizen journalists (valid percent of agree and strongly agree, combined, N=67)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problems in Community</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-wide events or projects</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government officials</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government projects</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government problems</td>
<td>62.7</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government policies</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business in community</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quote government officials</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quote business owners</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quote from people from volunteer organizations</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quote from experts</td>
<td>79.1</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain political issues</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News that government may not like but people need to know</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to examine the relationships between citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news and various potential predictors, including: longevity in community, strength of personal relationships, professional media experience, social media use and level of social capital. These relationships were proposed in H2a, H3a, H4a, H5a and H6. The goal of determining how well longevity in community, strength of personal relationships, professional media experience, and social media use to predict citizen journalists’ social capital was accomplished by conducting multiple regression analysis. These relationships were proposed in H2b, H3b, H4b and H5b. The adjusted R-square coefficient for the model that includes all variables predicting perceived ability to report public news is at a moderate level, at .26 (Table 3). The adjusted R-square coefficient for the model predicting level of social capital is moderately low, at .18 (Table 4). Both coefficients suggest there are other important predictors that are not being tested in this study.

Before conducting regression analysis, a bivariate correlation analysis was conducted to test for the possibility of multicollinearity. Assumption of normality was also tested for variables. Correlations also provide a first look at the relationships between all variables, without controls. The bivariate correlation matrix for all variables is presented in Table 2. US and Chinese journalists were aggregated for this correlation analysis. It can be seen from the Table 2 that Pearson’s r data analysis revealed a positive correlation between citizen journalists’ perceived social capital and their perceived ability to report news, $r (134) = .39, p < .01$. There is a positive correlation between longevity in community and citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news, $r (134) = .39, p < .01$. The correlation between citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news and professional media experience is moderately positive, $r (134) = .30, p < .01$. Pearson’s r analysis results indicated a moderate negative correlation
between citizen journalists’ social media use and their perceived ability to report news, \( r (134) = -.33, p < .01 \). As can be seen from Table 2, longevity in the community of citizen journalists is positively and significantly correlated with their perceived social capital level, \( r (134) = .31, p < .01 \). Result revealed a positive correlation between strength of personal relationships and social capital, \( r (134) = .36, p < .01 \). There is a moderate negative correlation between citizen journalists’ social media use and their perceived level of social capital, \( r (134) = -.20, p < .05 \).

### Table 2 Bivariate Correlations for Two Main Outcome Variable and Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Perceived ability to report news</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Perceived social capital</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Longevity in community</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Strength personal relationships</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Professional media experience</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Social media use</td>
<td>-.33**</td>
<td>-.20*</td>
<td>-.36**</td>
<td>-.17*</td>
<td>-.34**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05  **p < .01  N = 134

H2a proposed a relationship between longevity in the community and citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news. US and Chinese journalists were aggregated in the analyses for H2 through H6. Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to assess relationship suggested in H2a. Results of hierarchical regression analysis of all variables are shown in Table 3. As can be seen in Model 2 in Table 3, longevity in the community of citizen
journalists is positively and significantly correlated with their perceived ability to report public
news, after controlling for all other predictor variables. The multiple regression result showed a
significant relationship between longevity and perceived ability to report public news ($\beta =
.22^{**}, p < .01$). As expected, citizen journalists who lived a longer time in the community were
more likely to perceive they had better ability to report public news.\(^1\)

Table 3 Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting both U.S. and
Chinese citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>$SE B$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longevity in community</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of personal relationship</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional media experience</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. and China social media use</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All social capital measures</td>
<td></td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj $R^2$</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05  **p<.01  N = 134

H2b proposed relationship between longevity in the community and the perceived level
of citizen journalists’ social capital. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the

\(^1\) A multiple regression was conducted in which demographic variables of age, gender, education
and employment status were entered in a separate block, but differences in results were
negligible. Therefore, these results were not reported in the findings.
relationship suggested in H2b. Results of regression analysis of all variables are shown in Table 4. As can be seen in Table 4, longevity in the community of citizen journalists is positively and significantly correlated with their social capital level. The years lived in community had significant positive regression weight ($\beta = .21, p < .05$), indicating citizen journalists with longer time in community were expected to have a higher level of social capital, after controlling for other predictor variables in the model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$SE B$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Longevity in community</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of personal relationship</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.29**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional media experience</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. and China social media use</td>
<td>-.38</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R^2$...

Hypothesis 3a, which proposed that citizen journalists with stronger personal relationships would lead them to more likely perceive they have ability to report public news, was not supported. As seen in Table 3, Regression results did not show a significant relationship between strength of personal relationships with citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news.
H3b proposed a relationship between strength of personal relationships and the perceived level of citizen journalists’ social capital. Strength of personal relationships of citizen journalists is positively and significantly correlated with their social capital level. The multiple regression result (Table 4) showed a significant relationship between strength of personal relationships and citizen journalists’ social capital level ($\beta = .29, p < .01$). These findings indicate that those citizen journalists with stronger personal relationships were expected to have higher level of perceived social capital.

H4a suggested a relationship between citizen journalists’ professional media experience and their perceived ability to report public news. Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted using the predictor professional media experience (Table 3). Results revealed that professional media experience was a significant, but not strong, predictor of citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news ($\beta = .18, P < .05$). These findings indicate that those citizen journalists who had more professional media experience and more media education were expected to be more likely to perceive somewhat they have the ability to report public news.

H4b proposed that the greater the degree of citizen journalists’ professional media experience, the greater will be their level of perceived social capital. A multiple regression was conducted to assess the ability of professional media experience to predict level of social capital (Table 4). Regression results showed that professional media experience was not a significant predictor of citizen journalists’ level of social capital.

Hypothesis 5a, which proposed that more social media use would lead citizen journalists to be more likely to perceive they have ability to report public news, was not supported. As seen in Table 3, Regression results did not show a significant relationship between social media use
with citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news. Social media use was not a significant predictor of citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news.

H5b proposed a relationship between social media use and the level of citizen journalists’ perceived social capital. As can be seen in Table 4, social media use of citizen journalists is negatively correlated with their social capital level. Yet, the multiple regression result indicates that there is no significant relationship between social media use and citizen journalists’ social capital level.

Hypothesis 6 proposed that citizen journalists’ perceived social capital would lead to positive attitude about their perceived ability to report public interest news. As can be seen in Table 3, hierarchical regression results showed that perceived social capital was a significant predictor of citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news, after controlling for the other variables in the Model 2. Results revealed that social capital was positively related to the degree to which citizen journalists perceive they have ability to report public news (\( \beta = .311, p < .01 \)). Results also showed a significant increase in R-square between Model 1 and Model 2, suggest that social capital is an important addition to the overall model.

RQ1 suggested a difference of relying on personal connections as news sources between Chinese citizen journalists and U.S. citizen journalists. RQ1 asked if Chinese citizen journalists rely on personal connections as news sources more than U.S. citizen journalists. An independent t-test was conducted to if there is a difference existed between U.S and Chinese citizen journalists. There was no significant difference between personal connections as news sources of U.S. citizen journalists \((n = 67, M=10.36, SD = 8.56)\) and Chinese citizen journalists \((n=67, M=9.39, SD = 5.80)\), \( t (132) = .767, p = .445, p > .0 \).
RQ2 asked how do predictors of citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news and citizen journalists’ perceived social capital compare between U.S. and Chinese journalists. In order to find answers to the research question, four separate multiple regressions were conducted, two for U.S. journalists (predicting ability to report and predicting social capital) and two for Chinese journalists (ability to report and social capital). Results of hierarchical regression analyses of all variables predicting ability to report public news are shown in Table 5. Results showed that longevity in community, strength of personal relationships and social media uses were not significant predictors of either U.S. or Chinese citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news. As can be seen in Table 5, professional media experience as a predictor of perceived ability to report public news for the Chinese citizen journalists was positively significant (β = .28, p < .05). However professional media experience as a predictor of perceived ability to report public news of U.S. citizen journalists did not contribute to the multiple regression model indicating that professional media experience is not a significant predictor of U.S journalists’ perceived ability to report public news.

Social capital as a predictor of citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news is positively significant for both U.S citizen journalists (β = .52, p < .01) and Chinese citizen journalists (β = .29, p < .05). However, the relative importance of this predictor differs strongly between the two groups. Regression results indicate that social capital may promote Chinese citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news to a moderate degree but promote U.S. citizen journalists to a much higher degree. It is noted that low sample size for each analysis (N=67) makes it difficult to detect effects with confidence.
Table 5 Regression analysis for variables predicting each group of citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>U.S. Citizen Journalists (N=67)</th>
<th>Chinese Citizen Journalists (N=67)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(B)</td>
<td>(SE\ B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longevity in community</td>
<td>.137</td>
<td>.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of personal relationship</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional media experience</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean of social media use</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital measures</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R^2)</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj (R^2)</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\*p<.05  **p<.01  N = 134
Results of regression analysis of all variables predicting social capital are shown in Table 6. As can be seen, for the results of the four variables -- longevity in community, strength of personal relationships, professional media experience and social media uses as predictors of social capital -- results showed that all the four variables were not a significant predictor of Chinese citizen journalists. However, for the U.S. citizen journalists, longevity in community ($\beta = .25, p < .05$) and strength of personal relationships ($\beta = .38, p < .01$) are positively associated with their social capital level, while social media use ($\beta = -.21, p < .05$) is negatively associated with their social capital, to a moderate degree.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>U.S. Citizen Journalists</th>
<th>Chinese Citizen Journalists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longevity in community</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of personal relationship</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional media experience</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean of social media use</td>
<td>-1.28</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( R^2 \)                      \( .32 \)                  \( .04 \)
\( \text{Adj } R^2 \)            \( .28 \)                  \( -.03 \)

*p<.05  **p<.01  N = 134
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Online citizen journalism has been developing fast and with popularity, with more advanced media platforms in recent years. Yet, what factors affect citizen journalists’ likelihood to produce public news has remained murky. The effect of social capital on health, on politics, on internet, on educational achievement and many other aspects has been studied for diverse groups. However, social capital of citizen journalists and its effect on the news reporting of citizen journalists is worth more study. This study sought to measure U.S. and Chinese citizen journalists’ social capital and their perceived ability to report public news as well as the influence of social capital on citizen journalists’ reporting ability, and compare how these factors and their predictors worked for citizen journalists in the two countries. Social capital, longevity in community, strength of personal relationships, relying on personal social connections as news sources, professional media experience and social media use were measured and analyzed to address the hypotheses and answer research questions.

Findings show that, at least for this small sample, political openness in a country increases formal access to news sources that will promote the likelihood that citizen journalists will produce original public news. As for the individual factors of citizen journalists, longevity in community directly promotes citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news and also promotes this via its impact on social capital. Professional media experiences have a positive impact on citizen journalists’ likelihood to produce original news by contributing to level of
social capital. The time citizen journalists lived in community and their strength of personal social connections are indicators of higher social capital, which in turn promotes citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news. There is no doubt that social capital is very important for both U.S. and Chinese citizen journalists’ ability to do more original public news reporting. Citizen journalists with higher level of social capital will perceive greater ability to report public news.

As predicted, the study revealed that openness of politics in society corresponds positively with citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news. U.S. citizen journalists, who reportedly experience a higher level of political openness, have a higher confidence level in public news reporting than Chinese citizen journalists, especially when reports are related to political issues. According to self-reports, U.S. citizen journalists were more likely to be able to report news content that was more controversial or difficult than were Chinese citizen journalists such as news that explains political issues to people, reports government problems, policies, and reports news that government officials may not like but the public need to know. In the meantime, Chinese citizen journalists were less likely to feel comfortable getting direct quotes from people, especially government officials, than were US journalists. The results fit the proposed idea that political openness does affect the likelihood of citizen journalists to produce original public news, as it affects formal access to news sources, which results in less perceived ability to report news. Somewhat surprisingly, Chinese citizen journalists were also much less comfortable reporting community events than U.S. citizen journalists. It makes sense that Chinese citizen journalists reportedly experience less ability to report news than U.S. journalists because they had less access to government information and they felt less comfortable quoting government officials. But they also have very large differences
with U.S citizen journalists on agreement for the ability to report public news. This may result in some problems among citizen journalists that news and information published by citizen journalists are lacking in quality and content and more related to their personal life. This lack of quality may also help explain their lack of access to officials. Conceivably, citizen journalists in China who have less intention to be used as political propaganda could make it more difficult for the government to control online information flows and they could also expose more sensitive topics that the government forbids to reporters. But the results indicated that citizen journalists in China did not seem to have enough confidence that they have the ability to make this kind of impact.

Longevity in community for all citizen journalists (US and Chinese) promotes their perceived ability to report public news as well as their level of social capital. Citizen journalists who lived a longer time in the community have a higher likelihood to produce public news. It takes time and resources to build and maintain social capital for citizen journalists and higher level of social capital will in turn make it easier for citizen journalists to access sources they need. It worked well as a predictor for U.S. citizen journalists’ social capital. However, longevity in community seems less important for Chinese citizen journalists than U.S. citizen journalists for both news reporting and social capital. Time lived in community did not have too much impact on Chinese citizen journalists’ level of social capital. Social capital is a resource possessed by individuals as well as by collectives, and time spent in community by individual Chinese journalists did not enhance their sense of collectivity and trust at the social level. Future study exploring explanation for Chinese citizen journalists’ social capital may explore other factors that have more impact.
The higher strength of personal relationships that all citizen journalists have promotes their level of social capital. It did not have too much impact on their perceived ability to report news. It may be that strength of relationships works on perceived ability to report through level of social capital. In other words, perceiving a high level of social capital (and feel stronger social trust) may make citizen journalists more confident reporting on public issues or reporting on officials. So, only in the case that personal connections increases social capital will personal connections influence reporting. Results revealed there were no too much difference between U.S. citizen journalists and Chinese citizen journalists for relying on personal connections as news sources. This was somewhat surprising as personal connections of Chinese play such an important role in their work and life. But these findings echoed a previous study that ordinary citizens rarely serve as news sources (Reich, 2015). So, if citizen journalists’ personal connections are composed of ordinary citizens, it will be not easy for them to use personal relationships as news source.

Professional media experience and media education promoted citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news to a moderate degree. It did not have too much relationship with their social capital. Compared to U.S. citizen journalists, media experience and education had more impact on Chinese citizen journalists. It probably indicates that those Chinese citizens without media experience and education will be less likely to be able to do the work of citizen journalism, while this experience is less critical to US journalists’ ability to get access to officials or report on public matters. And U.S. citizens overall, regardless of journalism experience, may have stronger civic awareness, and U.S. citizen journalists also probably were composed of social groups from more diversified social fields. In the future,
researchers may explore the citizenship background of citizen journalists, as this could be an important factor in the study of citizen journalists in different countries.

No strong relationship was found between social media use and citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news, and no relationship with social capital was found in this study, for all journalists together. However, previous study has showed that social media platforms played an important role in establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships, and this could help tap into social resources and grow social capital. The result partly contradicts Hooghe and Oser’s (2015) study, which found that internet-based activity had positive impact on development of social capital. Generally, the literature reviewed in the study suggested that social media can be used to search news and information, provide opportunities for citizen journalists to produce news and increase readers or viewers, and can be used to share links of their news reporting on their social networks.

But results of this study indicate that less use of social media by U.S. citizen journalists leads to higher perceived ability to report public news. This finding is consistent with the argument in Chang and Hsiao (2013), which states that more friends from SNSs will be gained with more time spent on SNSs, which resulted in spending more time on SNSs. People’s perceived social capital of real life and SNSs was not significantly affected by the time they spend on SNSs. They found that social capital in real life is perceived to be more important than SNSs social capital by people who spend less time on SNSs.

Perhaps citizen journalists who are too dependent on social media to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships or who spend too much time on their computers, cell phones will result in spending less time physically out in the community talking and interacting with actual people and feel less confident about actual reporting on issues by talking with officials.
Excessive use of social media could result in spending less time with actual people in community while the time a citizen journalists spend in a community is important for building strength and depth of social connections and shared culture and issues in community. Or maybe it is because citizen journalists will mostly use their social networks for personal use or entertainment use instead of using social networks to collecting and disseminating news information. More study is needed to investigate relationships with social media use and citizen journalists’ social capital and how to use social media to promote impact of their news reporting.

**Theoretical Implications**

Social capital was applied in evaluating citizen journalists’ likelihood to report more original public news and provided a number of variables including structural social capital, political openness and individual level factors of social capital: longevity in community, strength of personal connections, professional media experience and social media use. These variables played an important role in the evaluation of citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news.

Social capital literature suggested that there are benefits and values such as information acquisition merit from social networks and relationships. Social capital is a kind of resource that belongs to individuals. Networks and trust are indicators of social capital as well as a progress lead to higher level of social capital. On the other hand, building and maintaining social capital takes time and resources. Longevity in community and strength of personal relationships are important indicators and contributors for citizen journalists’ perceived ability to write public news. Most of the predictors affect perceived ability to report public news by affecting social capital, then social capital affects perceived ability to report.
Results of this study indicate that social capital seems to be more important to U.S. citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news than Chinese. The factors explored in this study—longevity in community, personal relationships and social media use were more important to U.S. journalists’ social capital. It may be because that community construction in the U.S. developed earlier and better than China. Or U.S. community provided better common interest and atmosphere of mutual trust and appreciation. It may also be that the measures used for social capital do not work as well for Chinese society or culture.

Limitations

The study was limited to the available respondents, and results are representative only of the relatively small sample. The survey response rate is relatively low, given the high number of citizen journalists, and so non-response error could be a problem. The sample of a total number of 134 citizen journalists from U.S and China is not very representative of the actual population of citizen journalists. This also makes it difficult to test if results are statistically significant. The regression analyses for each of the two groups of citizen journalists had especially small samples (N=67), and this means it is difficult to detect effects with confidence.

Another possible limitation is that the survey questions about social capital may be more relevant to US journalism or US culture than to Chinese journalism and culture. Does social capital as it is defined here relate well to Chinese journalists? Could there be better measures of social capital for studies of China and Chinese media? The study sought to find out the benefit of social capital to citizen journalists, and measures of social capital here mainly tested the trustworthiness among people. In fact, there are a lot of other ways to measure social capital. The data for two other potentially important predictors of social capital—political orientation and political efficacy—were not gathered in this study. The results showed that three of the four
measures (longevity in community, strength of personal relationships, social media use) worked to predict social capital for the U.S. citizen journalists. But none of the four measurement worked to predict Chinese citizen journalists’. So differences in conceptualizing and measuring social capital across different groups of people from different cultures need to be further explored.

This study only measured the effect of five factors: social capital, longevity in community, strength of personal relationships, professional media experience and social media use on citizen journalists’ perceived ability to report public news. But, likely, there are many other factors and types of relationships that have impact on ability to report public news. The relatively low R-square coefficients suggest this conclusion. The study measured and compared citizen journalists’ likelihood to produce public news according to their perceived ability to report instead of citizen journalists’ actual news reporting. A comparison of their actual news reporting would be helpful to study in the future.
REFERENCES


Quinn, K. (2016). Contextual social capital: linking the contexts of social media use to its outcomes. *Information, Communication & Society, 19*(5), 582-600


APPENDIX 1: SURVEY

ABOUT THE STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a research study that examines how online journalists’ and writers’ social and professional situations have an impact on the content they produce. The study, "News Sources of Citizen Journalists: How Does Social Capital Influence Citizen Journalists in China and the United States," is being conducted by Li Yang, a graduate student in the Journalism Department at the University of Alabama. The research is supervised by Dr. Wilson Lowrey in the Journalism Department.

I am interested in knowing more about the social situations within which you write and choose information sources. The study will shed light on new forms of public news in a changing digital environment.

HOW WERE YOU CHOSEN TO PARTICIPATE? Your site was listed in a public website that aggregates blogs and citizen news websites, and your contact information was available from public sources. Approximately 1,000 people are being asked to participate in the study, which involves taking a 10-minute-long online survey.

WILL YOUR INFORMATION BE CONFIDENTIAL? Your identity and the information you provide will be kept entirely confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to the lead investigator (myself) and my faculty advisor. Your IP address will not be tracked.

WHAT IF YOU DECLINE? Taking part in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may refuse at any time. If you start the study, you can stop at any time, and you do not have to answer any
question that makes you uncomfortable. There will be no effect on your relations with the University of Alabama. If you withdraw from the study your information will be deleted from the computer file immediately. Participating in this study will not cost you anything aside from your time. The risks to you are minimal. There are also no direct benefits to participating - you will not be compensated.

OTHER QUESTIONS? If you have any questions at any time, please feel free to ask. You may contact the researcher, the faculty advisor, the Institutional Review Board (the "IRB") or the compliance officer at the information below.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

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Graduate student
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Tuscaloosa, AL 35487
E-mail: lyang30@crimson.ua.edu
Phone: 205-886-1146

Dr. Wilson Lowrey – faculty advisor
Associate Professor
Department of Journalism
The University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487
Email: wlowrey@bama.ua.edu
Phone: (205) 348-8608

If you have questions about your rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html or email the Research Compliance office at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu. After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online at the outreach website or you may ask the investigator for a copy of it and mail it to the University Office for Research Compliance, Box 870127, 358 Rose Administration Building, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127.
Clicking the "Next" button below takes you to the online survey and also indicates that you have read this consent form, have had a chance to ask questions, and agree to take part.

The first set of questions asks about your background.

How many years have you lived in your community?

O  Number of years: __________

O  I have lived in my community for less than one year.

Have you worked in a professional news organization?

O  No

O  Yes

If yes, how many years? __________

Did you study journalism in college?

O  No

O  Yes

If yes, how many years did you study journalism?

O  Number of years: __________

O  I studied journalism in college for less than one year
The next set of questions asks about your social relationships.

How closely would you say you are connected with the following social groups? Responses will vary from person to person, but please do your best to assess each group in a general way. (Slide the circles left or right on the scales below to indicate how closely connected you are)

Family ______ (1 very close-2-3-4-5 never contact)
Friends_______ (1 very close-2-3-4-5 never contact)
Co-workers_______ (1 very close-2-3-4-5 never contact)
Neighbors in community_______ (1 very close-2-3-4-5 never contact)

How frequently would you say you speak face-to-face with people in the following social groups? (1. daily, 2. multiple times a week, 3. once a week, 4. once a month, 5. less than once a month)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Multiple times a week</th>
<th>Once a week</th>
<th>2-3 Times a Month</th>
<th>Once a Month</th>
<th>Less than Once a Month</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-workers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbors in community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How frequently would you say you speak over the phone with people in the following social groups?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Multiple times a week</th>
<th>Once a Week</th>
<th>2-3 Times a Month</th>
<th>Once a Month</th>
<th>Less than Once a Month</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-workers</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbors in community</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On average, how many social acquaintances (family, friends, co-workers and acquaintances) would you say you interact with on a daily basis?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of social acquaintances on a daily basis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-workers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbors in community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How many of these social acquaintances have provided information that is useful for producing news stories? (“Useful information for news” includes information for stories or posts about government, business, public activities, crimes, accidents, etc.)

Number of acquaintances who can provide useful information:

- Family
- Friends
- Co-workers
- Neighbors in community

The next set of questions asks about your use of social networks or social media.

How frequently do you use the following kinds of social media?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Very Frequently</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linked In</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tumblr</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On average, how much time per day do you use the following social media?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media</th>
<th>Don’t use at all</th>
<th>Less than 15min.</th>
<th>15-30 min</th>
<th>30 min-1 hour</th>
<th>1-2 hours</th>
<th>2-4 hours</th>
<th>More than 4 hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Google+</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tumblr</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following questions ask about how much you trust certain groups of people in your home community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>To a small extent</th>
<th>Neither small nor great extent</th>
<th>To a great extent</th>
<th>To a very great extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everyday people in my community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political leaders in my community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business owners in my community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

63
I feel free to borrow or exchange things with people in my community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I know that people in my community will regularly help one another with small tasks (such as repair work, grocery shopping, or aid if one of us is sick)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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Generally speaking, would you say that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people in your community, or that most people in your community can be trusted? (1 = You can’t be too careful, 5 = Most people can be trusted.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 (You can’t be too careful)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5 (Most people can be trusted)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

Would you say that most of the time people in your community are just looking out for themselves, or that they are trying to be helpful? (1 = They are just looking out for themselves, 5 = They would try to be helpful)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 (They are just looking out for themselves)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5 (They would try to be helpful)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

Do you think that most people in your community would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance, or would they try to be fair? (1 = Would take advantage of you, 5 = Would try to be fair)
The following questions ask how difficult it might be to report on issues, events or people in your community (because of obstacles, constraints or access problems, etc.).

I can report on problems in my community, without difficulty.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

I can report on community-wide events or projects in my community, without difficulty.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

I can report on government officials in my community, without difficulty.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

I can report on government projects in my community, without difficulty.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

I can report on government problems in my community, without difficulty.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</table>

I can report on government policies in my community, without difficulty.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</table>
I can report on businesses in my community, without difficulty.

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neither Agree nor Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree

I can quote government officials in my community, without difficulty.

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neither Agree nor Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree

I can quote business owners in my community, without difficulty.

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neither Agree nor Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree

I can quote people from volunteer organizations, without difficulty.

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neither Agree nor Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree

I can quote experts on issues, without difficulty.

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neither Agree nor Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree

I can report news that explains political issues to people, without difficulty.

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neither Agree nor Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree
I can report news that government officials may not like but the public needs to know, without difficulty.

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

What is your age?

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

- Primary school
- High school
- Trade/technical/vocational training
- Bachelor’s degree
- Master’s degree
- Doctoral Degree
- Professional degree (M.D., J.D.)

What is your employment status? Are you currently…..?

- Employed for wages
☐ Self-employed

☐ Out of work, looking for work

☐ Out of work, not looking for work

☐ Homemaker

☐ Student

☐ Military

☐ Retired
APPENDIX 2: IRB APPROVAL

May 11, 2015

Li Yang
Dept. of Journalism
CCIS
Box 870172


Dear Li Yang:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. You have also been granted the requested waiver of written documentation of informed consent. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

Your application will expire on May 10, 2016. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Request for Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped information sheets to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Stuart Usdin, PhD.
Chair, Non-Medical Institutional Review Board
Appendix IIA: Participant information sheet
Research study: social capital of citizen journalist

You are being asked to participate in a research study that examines how online journalists' and writers' social and professional situations may have an impact on the content they produce. The study is titled, "News Sources of Citizen Journalists: How Does Social Capital Influence Citizen Journalists in China and the United States. The study is being conducted by Li Yang, a graduate student in the Journalism Department at the College of Communication and Information Sciences at UA. The research is being supervised by Dr. Wilson Lowrey in the Department of Journalism.

I am interested in knowing more about the social situations within which you produce your writings and your choices of information sources. The study is important because society needs to know more about new forms of public news in a changing digital environment. You have been asked to participate in this study because your site was listed in a public website that aggregates blogs and citizen news websites. Approximately 1,000 people are being approached to participate in the study. The study involves taking a single online survey on the computer, and it may be taken anywhere with Internet access and a browser. The online survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Please keep the following in mind as you decide whether or not to take part in the study:

• Taking part in this study is voluntary. It is your free choice. You can refuse to be in it at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. There will be no effect on your relations with the University of Alabama.
• If you withdraw from the study your information will be destroyed by deleting your data from the computer file immediately.
• Your contact information were taken from publicly available sources.
• Your identity and the information you provide will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to the lead investigator (myself) and my faculty advisor.
• Your IP address will not be tracked as a part of this research.
• Participating in this study will not cost you anything aside from your time.
• The risks to you are minimal. If any question makes you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer it.
• There are no direct benefits to participating – you will not be compensated. We hope that understanding more about citizen news sites will improve public discussion in society.
• Survey questions are designed to measure your feelings and opinions. There are no right or wrong answers.

If you have any questions at any time, please feel free to ask. If you have questions later today or at a later date, you may contact the researcher, the faculty advisor, IRB or the compliance officer.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board ("the IRB") is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being
carried out as planned. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study right now, please ask them. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study later on, please contact the investigator at the information below.

Li Yang – student researcher
Graduate student
Department of Journalism
The University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487
E-mail: lyang30@crimson.ua.edu
Phone: 205-886-1146

Dr. Wilson Lowrey – faculty advisor
Associate Professor
Department of Journalism
The University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487
Email: wlowrey@bama.ua.edu
Phone: (205) 348-8608

If you have questions about your rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html or email the Research Compliance office at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online at the outreach website or you may ask the investigator for a copy of it and mail it to the University Office for Research Compliance, Box 870127, 358 Rose Administration Building, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127.

Clicking the link below that takes you to the online survey and also indicates that you have read this consent form, have had a chance to ask questions, and agree to take part in it.
APPENDIX 3: IRB RENEWAL APPROVAL

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
Office of the Vice President for
Research & Economic Development
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

May 2, 2016

Li Yang
Department of Journalism
College of Communication & Information Sciences
The University of Alabama
Box 870172


Dear Ms. Yang:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research. Your renewal application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. You have also been granted the requested waiver of written documentation of informed consent. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on May 1, 2017. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Study Closure Form.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Stuart Usdan, PhD.
Chair, Non-Medical Institutional Review Board
The University of Alabama