

# Care or Hurt? Exploring Emotional Blackmail on Social Media based on Social Capital Theory

Completed Research Paper

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## Abstract

*The effect of social media on users' well-being is inevitable. Some phenomena that occur when people interact (e.g. emotional blackmailing, bullying), have adapted themselves to the virtual environment. Despite numerous studies about the negative effects of social media, there have not been any studies that addressed the problem of emotional blackmail on social media. This study explores emotional blackmail, particularly by using social capital theory, to investigate how each dimension of social capital affects emotional blackmail and how emotional blackmail affects users' well-being and perceived stress. A survey conducted on 127 international students in Taiwan reveals that social media consumption is associated with higher emotional blackmail. Furthermore, each dimension of social capital is associated with decreased emotional blackmail and increase users' perceived stress. More importantly, emotional blackmail is also found to reduce users' well-being. This study contributes to the body of information systems research by investigating the unfavorable effects of social media usage.*

**Keywords:** Emotional blackmail, social capital theory, social media, subjective well-being

## 1. Introduction

Technology has caused information to travel faster and thus changed the way people communicate and interact. It has created a platform known as social media. A platform which allow users to interact with numerous people instantly and easily, simply by tapping on devices like computer, smartphones, and tabs.

Social media consists of billions of people from around the globe (e.g. Facebook with more than 2 billion users [Statista, 2019]). That is why there are people who have thousands of Facebook friends and millions of Instagram followers. Because of social media, people can share their ideas, opinions, and perspectives to lots of people in a very comfortable way. It has promoted the freedom of speech of individuals and made communication easier than before.

As communication shifted from face to face to social media, the phenomena that previously occurred between people in direct communication is also evolving and adapting themselves into the virtual environment. Some of the examples are blackmailing, envying, etc. Emotional blackmail is a form of manipulation in which people who are close to somebody, can be friends, family, or partners, use fear, obligation, or guilt to threaten and get others to do what they desire (Forward, 1997).

Emotional blackmail has become a serious issue because it puts important relationships in jeopardy. The intense and frequent communication enabled by social media also promotes an easier environment for emotional blackmail to grow. However, the lack of research regarding this topic suggests that there should be more attention and studies directed to emotional blackmail.

Previous research has studied types of customer emotional blackmail perceived by frontline service employees (Chen, 2009). Chen (2009) found out that there are five types of customer emotional blackmail, which are Guanxi (relationship)-using consumer, demanding consumer, fair-treatment-requesting consumer, time-pressure-using consumer, and threat using consumer. Liu (2010) has also found out a significant negative relationship between employees' perception of emotional blackmail and their well-being.

An interaction between two or more people that forms a relationship will result in the creation of some values. These values allow the relationship/network to work or function properly and are known as social capitals. Social capital has been used to explain the improvement management (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998), performance (Dess and Shaw, 2001), evolution of communities (Lionel et al., 2008), and others. Its theory has become one of the most studied theory in sociology field.

Adler and Kwon (2002) stated social capital has gained increasing attention from researchers in sociology, political science, economics, and organizational science. Social capital theory states that the network of relationships constitutes a valuable resource for the conduct of social affairs, and provides the members of the network with "the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word" (Bourdieu, 1986: 249). Social capital is the assets or resources that people embedded in their relationship or networks (Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998). Wolcock (1998) defined social capital as "*the information, trust, and norms of reciprocity inherent in one's social network.*"

Putnam (1995) has observed that social capital is not a unidimensional concept, and thence Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) defined that social capital has three different dimensions; structural dimension, relational dimension, and cognitive dimension. Structural dimension includes network ties and network configuration, relational dimension refers to assets found in the relationships such as trust and obligations, while cognitive dimension reflects the common understanding between people in the network, it consists of shared codes and languages.

In this study, social capital theory is employed to explain the emotional blackmail phenomenon that occurs in social media. Forward (1997) states that emotional blackmail occurs mostly in close relationships (strong ties). As a comparison, from the point of view of social capital theory, close relationships (strong ties) are characterized by solidarity and rich 'resources' (Granovetter, 1973; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). To elaborate the effect of these 'resources' on emotional blackmail, this study utilizes three dimensions of social capital as predictors toward emotional blackmail. Specifically, we elaborate the role of shared language (cognitive capital), interpersonal trust (relational capital), and social tie (structural capital) in affecting emotional blackmail.

This study also includes two of the outcome variables for emotional blackmail which are stress level and subjective well-being. Though the effect of emotional blackmail to subjective well-being has been studied before (Liu, 2010), the context of the study was in an organization with the samples of employees. There has not been further study that supports or elaborates more on this relationship, particularly in different context.

In addition, to the best of our knowledge, there have not been any studies that explore the antecedents and outcomes of the emotional blackmail in one study simultaneously. We also try to explain emotional blackmail by using social capital theory. The studies about social capital theory at first mainly focused on the positive impact of social capital to organizations (Dess and Shaw, 2001; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998).

This study aims to explore this phenomenon for international students that settled in Taiwan. International students are chosen due to some reasons. First, they are geographically far from their families and initial ties so that they ought to use social media platforms in order to communicate with them. Second, students between 18-29 represent the majority of social media users (Statista, 2017).

Third, the language in Taiwan, which is traditional Mandarin, is different from other non-Chinese speaking countries. This condition is likely to result in frequent interaction between international students and their relatives or friends in their home countries, or ended up confined to their own national groups (Bulthuis, 1986).

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Emotional Blackmail**

Proposed by Forward in 1997, the principle of emotional blackmail lies on the usage of some tools to manipulate and control other people to do what blackmailers desire/want. Emotional blackmail occurs both in all kinds of human relationship, and within all social settings (Chen, 2010). The weapons that blackmailers utilize are known as FOG (fear, obligation, and guilt). This FOG is what obscures the manipulations and causes people to fail to see what is happening to them (Forward, 1997).

Emotional blackmail can have many forms but it follows one formula: “If you do not do what I want you to do, there will be a consequence”. Some examples of emotional blackmail in daily lives are: “If you do not reply my message fast, you do not love me”, “If you go out with her again, I will leave you forever”, and “Because all you did to me, I was broke and I had to take the money.”

When emotional blackmailing happens and the victim gives in to the manipulation, the victim usually focuses on the blackmailer’s needs at the expense of his/her needs. After the victim gives in to the demand, the victim is then living under the illusion that the relationship is safe. However, as noted by Forward (1997), it is actually an avoidance of conflict, confrontation, and the chance of a healthy relationship.

The occurrence of emotional blackmail is usually in close/intimate relationship, however, it does not mean that the relationship is completely destroyed and should be ended as soon as possible. In contrary, it simply means that there should be a correction of the behaviors that trouble the relationship so that the relationship can be put on a more solid foundation (Forward, 1997).

Although there are few empirical studies that focus on emotional blackmail, Chen (2009) has shown that there is an increase in the amount of customers who use emotions as a weapon to manipulate frontline service employees. Furthermore, the manipulation occurs not only between frontline service employees and customers, but also other relationships, as Chen (2009) quoted “emotional blackmail occurs every day and everywhere in the world.”

### **2.2 Social Capital Theory**

Social capital exists within an individual’s or group’s network of social relations. As its name, “capital” represents resources and assets. However, these resources and assets will only exist once an individual engages in social network (Hossam, 2009). Another researcher, Kriesi (2007) considers social capital as a special resource as it favors actions of actors that are members in particular social structure. Besides as a set of social resources, it can also be expanded broadly to include the norms and values associated with social relationships (Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998).

As introduced earlier in the introduction chapter, another research by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) classified social capital into three different dimensions; structural dimension, relational dimension, and cognitive dimension. Structural dimension refers to the pattern of connections between actors, that is whom they reach and how they reach them (Burt, 1992). In contrast, relational dimension focuses more on personal relationships that people have, such as respect and friendship, that influence their behavior (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). The third dimension, cognitive dimension, refers to shared representations, interpretations, and meanings among members (Cicourel, 1973).

Granovetter (1973) classified network ties into two kinds of ties, strong and weak ties. He defined tie strength as a result of three factors: (1) frequency of contact, (2) reciprocity, and (3) friendship. Strong tie, as a result, are often communicating, have affective, friendly, and may include reciprocal favors. Weak ties, on the other hand, do not communicate frequently, and do not necessarily have affective content. Strong ties have been associated with solidarity, while weak ties have been associated with information diffusion of innovation (Krackhardt, 1994).

Research about social ties in online environments (Haythornthwaite, 2002) suggested that online ties are not different to offline ties that they are built by interaction, exchange, and emotional support. Haythornthwaite further stated that social support, online information exchange, work interaction, and play are some examples of how to maintain the tie in an online environment.

Unlike the structural dimension (relationship tie) that concerns about the properties and pattern of a relationship, trust (relational dimension) is a behavioral aspect of a relationship. Trust is developed through history of interactions and can influence the behavior of the actors. Among many types of trusts in different environments and fields of study, this study adopts a psychological view of interpersonal trust since it is perceived as the most related and suitable trust in social media context. Rotter (1967) defines interpersonal trust as “an expectancy held by an individual or group that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual or group can be relied upon”.

As for the third dimension, shared language is adopted in this study. Chua (2002) stated how a shared language influences the conditions for the sharing and development of knowledge. First, shared language is the means by which people communicate, interact, state questions, and give opinions. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) emphasized the importance of shared language in order to gain access and information from others. Second, research shows that language affects perception (Pondy and Mitroff, 1979). Third, a shared language increases knowledge sharing and combining which also enhances relationship tie. Boland and Tenkasi (1995) demonstrated how the existence of a shared vocabulary enables the combining of information.

### **2.3 Social Media Consumption**

In this study, social media consumption is conceptualized as the daily time spent on social media platform and the number of social media platforms that a user uses. As a survey by Sveldlov (2012) found that 79% of online adults in Europe were users of social media. As in America, 86% of online adults were users of social media. In addition, *socialnomics.net*, in 2011 reported that using social media has become the most popular things on the web.

There have been many researches that study the effect of social media consumption. Apaolaza (2013) measured the usage time of social media and associated it with satisfaction and loneliness. Pantic (2012) measured the time spent on social media and explored the relationship between time spent and depression. The effect of social media consumption on individual is undeniable.

### **2.4 Subjective Well-Being and Perceived Stress**

Diener, in 1984, defined subjective well-being to consist of high life satisfaction, high positive feelings, and low negative feelings. Life satisfaction refers to the judgment of whether life is enjoyable/pleasant, positive and negative feelings refer to someone's positive/negative affective experiences. Diener et al. (1999) argues that research on subjective well-being should take into account the interaction between internal factors (e.g. temperaments, personalities) and external environment.

The growth of number of studies on subjective well-being throughout the decades shows the value of individual, the importance of subjecting views in evaluating life, and that better well-being will lead to economic prosperity (Diener, 1999). Liu (2010) found out that subjective well-being on emotional and mental level is positively and significantly related to employees' effectiveness.

Stress is defined as a self-perceived negative or unpleasant impact. Some symptoms of the stress are anxiety and depression. Stress is normal as a psychological reaction to some condition. However, it can cause negative consequence such as emotional exhaustion (Smith and Fawcett, 2006). Deary et al. (1996) also found that stress is not constructive as it creates a more emotion coping. People often feel stressed when they are entering new working area and when they are exposed to unfamiliar circumstances (Chang and Hancock, 2003) or when their resources and abilities are not enough to cope with the obstacles that they face (Folkman, 2013).

### **2.5 Trust in Social Media**

Xu et al. (2014) stated that there are three types of trust that are important for optimal system outcomes in social-technical systems, they are: interpersonal trust, institutional trust, and technological

trust (a person's trust with a technology or device [Muir, 1987]). Research in information systems found that trust in technology is a predictor toward users' intention to use new technology (Gefenet al., 2003). Some scholars (Ghazizadeh et al., 2012; Pavlou, 2003) also tried to integrate trust in technology with technology acceptance model a user's trust to intention to adopt technologies.

## **2.6 Control Variable: Age**

In addition to the increasing trend and time of social media usage (Statista, 2017), a survey by PewInternet in 2009 that was conducted in America showed that there was a gap of Internet usage between users in different ages' ranges. The survey showed that majority of internet users were those who were between 12-29 (93%). As a comparison, adults older than 65 only accounted for 38%. We therefore included age as control variable.

## **3. Hypotheses Development**

### **3.1 Relationship between Trust in Social Media and Social Media Consumption**

Gefen (2003) explored the effect of trust in technology and found that it is a predictor toward users' intention to use new technology. When users trust a social media platform, users rely on the belief that the platform will not misuse their information, and that the platform will keep their commitment (Zhou, 2012). In addition, another research has integrated trust in technology with technology acceptance model in predicting user's intention to adopt technologies (Pavlov, 2003). Based on those previous researches, we hypothesize that users who trust social media platforms will spend more time in using social media and use more kinds of social media platforms. Specifically, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1: Trust in social media will increase social media consumption.

### **3.2 Relationship between Interpersonal Trust (Relational Dimension) and Emotional Blackmail**

Trust is one of the most desired and fundamental qualities of an ideal relationship (Hendrick and Hendrick, 1983; Montague, 2010). The degree of trust varies in accordance to the stage of the relationship and the interpretations of trust will also progress from a more straightforward acceptance of behavioral evidence to the attribution of interpersonal motives (Rempel, 1985). Trust reflects somebody's positive expectation toward another party's future behavior (Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, 1995).

Trust has been found to play an important role in an interpersonal relationship (Schlenker, 1973). In another field such as marketing, trust between two parties, such as buyer and seller, is also very prominent in building long-term relationships (Doney, 1997). Trust has also been studied to affect commitment (Dwyer, 1987), long-term orientation (Ganesan, 1994), and propensity to stay in relationship (Anderson and Weitz, 1989). Based on those previous studies, we hypothesize that trust will negatively affect the degree of emotional blackmail.

Hypothesis 2: Interpersonal trust will decrease emotional blackmail.

### **3.3 Relationship between Shared Language (Cognitive Dimension) and Emotional Blackmail**

A common understanding of cognitive dimension is that it reflects common understandings between related parties. It consists of shared language, narratives, and codes that characterize how intimate a relationship is. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) stated that this dimension refers to the "resources providing shared representations, interpretations, and systems of meaning among parties". While Coleman (1990) names this dimension as "public good aspect of social capital" which from an organizational view includes vision and values shared among members in an organization.

Some characteristics of an intimate relationship (strong ties) are stronger common identity, reciprocal trust across the network, and defined shared interests and goals (Chirumalla, 2012). People who share a similar language and value are easier to get intimate and build their relationship. Based on those arguments, we proposed that:

Hypothesis 3: Shared language will decrease emotional blackmail.

### 3.4 Relationship between Social Media Consumption and Emotional Blackmail

Studies regarding the relationship between social media consumption and individual's psychology are divided into two groups. Some researchers found that social network (social media) consumption are related to positive outcomes such as satisfaction, happiness, affect, etc (Apaolaza et al., 2013; Kim and Lee, 2011). While some researchers found that (social media) consumption are related negative phenomena such as rumination, depression, physical symptoms, etc (Feinstein et al., 2013; Pantic et al., 2012).

In this study, social media consumption reveals the amount of time and the number of social media platforms that a user uses. We propose that the longer users spend time in social media and the more social media platforms that users use, the more users are exposed to their social media friends, and the greater the degree of emotional blackmails they will perceive on social media. In other words, high intensity of communication on social media may promote greater chance to experience emotional blackmail.

Hypothesis 4: Social media consumption will increase emotional blackmail.

### 3.5 Moderating Role of Strong Ties (Structural Dimension)

Granovetter (1973) defined social tie as a "combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services that characterize the tie". Researches have suggested that stronger ties have been associated with higher knowledge sharing and exchanging (Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998) Strong ties are also associated with stronger trust and trustworthiness. (Krackhardt, 1992).

Strong ties have been studied to have greater motivation to be assistance and are more frequently available (Granovetter, 1973). Strong ties build a strong trust that provides comfort when facing uncertainty and crisis. Krackhardt (1992) argues that in order for a tie to become strong (*philos*), three conditions that have to be met between the ties are frequent interaction, affection, and history of interaction over a period of time.

Haythornthwaite (2002) found that strong ties are more likely to have intensive communication and make effort in maintaining the relationship. Strong ties also involve higher level of intimacy, self-disclosure, emotional exchange, reciprocity, and frequent interaction (Wellman and Berkowitz, 1998). Based on the arguments above, we argue that people who are in a strong tie relationship, although are frequently using social media platforms to communicate, will perceive low degree of emotional blackmail.

Chirumalla (2012) states that an intimate relationship (strong ties) also share a common identity, have higher trust, and a common/shared language. Nelson (1989) argues that strong ties between groups are not only contacts in general, but also with low conflict levels. We further posit that strong tie will strengthen the negative effect of trust and shared language to emotional blackmail. Specifically, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 5: Individuals with strong ties will have higher negative effect of interpersonal trust to emotional blackmail compared to individuals with weak ties.

Hypothesis 6: Individuals with strong ties will have higher negative effect of shared language to emotional blackmail compared to individuals with weak ties.

Hypothesis 7: Individuals with strong ties will have lower positive effect of social media consumption to emotional blackmail compared to individuals with weak ties.

### 3.6 Relationship between Emotional Blackmail and Perceived Stress

People normally feel stressed when they face demands or obstacles that exceed their abilities and resources (Folkman, 2013). The utilization of emotional blackmail's tools, known as FOG (Fear, Obligation, and Guilt), by blackmailers to the victims will bring intense stress both to the relationships and the victims. In the case of emotional blackmail, the victims are likely to feel most of the stress because the demands are placed on their shoulders. Based on the arguments above, we propose that:

Hypothesis 8: Emotional blackmail will increase perceived stress.

### 3.7 Relationship between Emotional Blackmail and Subjective Well-Being

Subjective well-being refers to an individual's assessment of how one is satisfied with one's life. According to Diener (1984), an individual is considered to be satisfied and happy in life if he/she is highly pleasant about his/her current condition, have positive feelings most of the time, and very low negative feelings. On the contrary, emotional blackmailers bring fear, obligation, and guilt to the victims to get the victims to fulfill their demands. Emotional blackmail thus does not promote any criteria favorable to good subjective well-being.

Liu (2010) explored emotional blackmail phenomenon in an organization and its association with employees' perception of their well-being and found out that employees who perceived themselves being blackmailed, reported low subjective well-being. The current research takes the environment of social media instead of organization, so the relationship between emotional blackmail and subjective well-being may still vary. Despite the fact that organizational environment is more formal and stricter than social media environment, we still posit that emotional blackmail will affect subjective well-being negatively.

Hypothesis 9: Emotional blackmail will decrease subjective well-being.

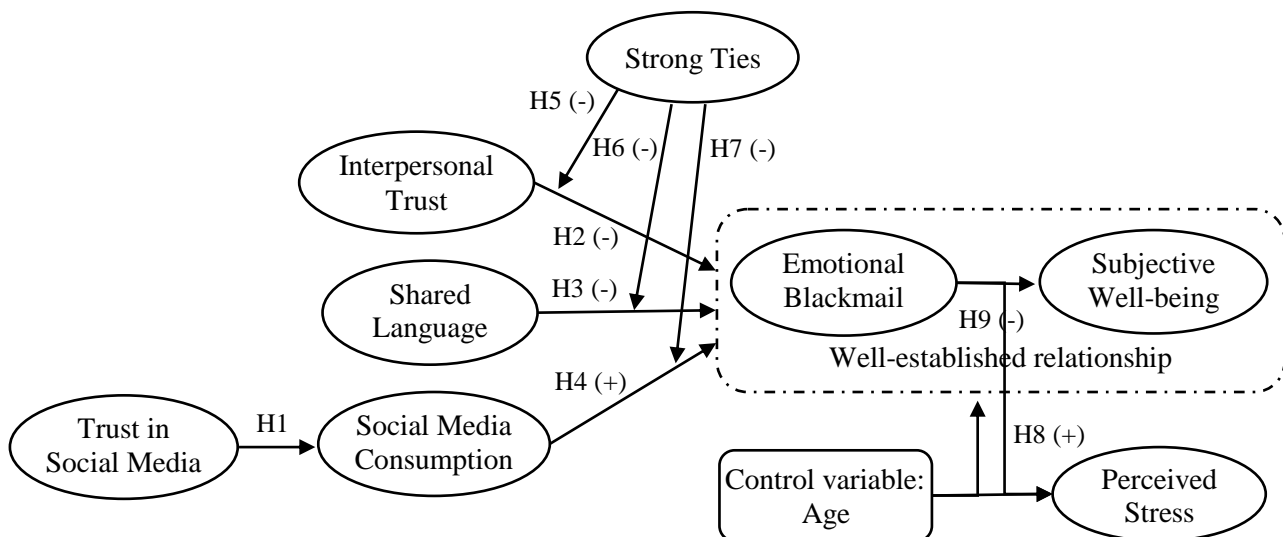


Figure 1. Conceptual Research Framework

## 4. Research Method

### 4.1 Data Collection Procedure and Sample Characteristics

This study mainly explores how social media consumption, trust, and shared language influence emotional blackmail and also the moderating role of strong ties. Since this study is taking the environment of social media, an online questionnaire was developed from the measures that were already validated in previous studies. The target of the survey was international students that settled in Taiwan and communicate using social media in daily lives.

A total of 155 responses were finally collected for main survey and resulted in 127 usable responses. Responses with seriously incomplete data and irrelevant social media platforms were removed from the data set. Of the 127 respondents, 79 respondents (62.2%) were female, and 48 (37.8%) were male. Most of the respondents were master/graduate students (48.8%) and their ages were mostly at 20s.

Our samples also revealed that social media usage is so common nowadays that most of them (104 respondents) started using social media at 10-19 year old (81.9 %). Majority of respondents also showed that they were active users of social media as almost 40% of respondents reported that they spent more than two hours on social media daily. Table 1 presents the demographic report.

**Table 1. Demographics**

Category	Level	Percentage
Gender	Male/Female	37.8/62.2
Age	< 20 year old	7.1
	20 – 29 year old	82.7
	>30 year old	11.2
Age when started using social media	< 10 year old	1.6
	10 -19 year old	81.9
	>20 year old	16.6
Time spend on social media daily	< 1 hour	40.1
	1 – 2 hour(s)	20.5
	> 2 hours	39.4

#### 4.2 Statistical Techniques and Analytic Strategies

Prior to the analysis of conceptual model, all descriptive statistics and preliminary analysis such as mean, standard deviation, variance, factor analysis, correlation analysis were conducted by using SPSS software package version 23. The conceptual model (Figure 1) was tested by using PLS product indicator approach with SmartPLS 2.0 software. As stated by Gefen et al. (2000), PLS technique is a relatively robust to deviations from a multivariate distribution and less sensitive to sample size. PLS technique also enables the analysis of both measurement and structural model in one analysis.

The items of the constructs that were used in this study were obtained from previous studies. These constructs have shown great internal consistency and validity. Where needed, modification was done so that the constructs could fit the context of this study. Of the nine variables, two variables that required particular treatments were social media consumption and emotional blackmail.

Social media consumption was measured by two items which were the time spent on social media daily and the number of social media platforms that users used. These two items were standardized to be the indicators of social media consumption. As for emotional blackmail variable, the construct consists of three dimensions (Blame, Remorse, and Threaten). After the analysis of measurement model and the validity and reliability tests, three factor scores were obtained from each of the dimension and those factor scores were used as indicators for the emotional blackmail in path analysis.

#### 4.3 Measures and Constructs Validation

##### 4.3.1 Measures

The table below shows the summary of constructs that are measured in this study.

**Table 2. Summary of Constructs**

Construct	Definition	Adopted from
Strong ties	The degree of contact and accessibility of one with other people	Chow & Chan (2008)
Shared language	The degree to which one shares common characteristics and ways in communicating with other people	Aslam (2013)
Interpersonal trust	The degree of one's willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of other people	Chow & Chan (2008)
Trust in social media	The degree of one's reliance and belief in using social media	Cabanillas et al. (2006)
Emotional blackmail	The degree to which one perceives himself to be controlled by threats, blames, and remorse from others	Liu (2010)
Perceived stress	The degree of one's perceived discomfort and distress	Montowildo (1986)
Subjective well-being	The degree of one's perceived cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life	Brown (2009)
Social media consumption	The time spent in using social media and the number of social media that one uses	Krasnova et al. (2015)



The constructs validation in this study was examined by the Partial Least Square methodology, specifically by using SmartPLS 2.0 (Ringle et al., 2005). Two validation criteria are employed in this study, they are convergent and discriminant validity. Convergent validity demonstrates the extent in which the items of a scale are measuring the underlying latent variable. While discriminant validity is demonstrated when scales that are not supposed to be related, are unrelated.

In accordance to the criteria by Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Anderson and Gerbing (1988), all items should load significantly (minimum of 0.5) on their respective constructs and no items should load higher on other constructs than on its own. Furthermore, composite reliabilities of constructs, which shows the internal consistency of the indicators measuring a given factor should exceed a minimum value of 0.70. Next, the AVEs (Average Variance Extracted) of constructs should be higher than 0.50, and the square root of a construct's AVE should be higher than any correlation between the construct and other constructs. After those criteria were assessed, our constructs demonstrate strong convergent and discriminant validity. The complete reliability and validity testing is summarized in Appendix.

#### 4.4 Hypotheses Testing

In examining the path significance in this study, a three steps approach was conducted (Frazier et al., 2004). The first step involved an analysis of control variable. The second step involved an analysis of independent variable, the moderator, and the control variable. The third step involved an analysis of independent variables, dependent variables, the moderator, interactions effect of the moderator and independent variables, and the control variable.

The result of Structural Equation Modelling is reported in table 3 and table 4. Table 3 and 4 show the standardized path coefficients ( $\beta$ ) and the significances of path differences. Bootstrapping procedure was conducted and it resulted in a creation of 1000 samples to replace the original sample set. The results of bootstrapping procedure indicated that 8 out of 9 path differences were significant at the minimum .05 level. On the other hand, 1 out of 9 path differences was not significant. Table 5 shows the summary of hypotheses' testing.

**Table 3. Results of Hypotheses Testing for Hypotheses 1, 8, and 9**

Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Beta Coefficient	R <sup>2</sup>	Result
Hypothesis 1	Trust in Social Media	Social Media Consumption	.26*	.07	Supported
Hypothesis 8	Emotional Blackmail	Perceived Stress	.50*	.25	Supported
Hypothesis 9	Emotional Blackmail	Subjective Well-Being	-.36*	.13	Supported

\*:  $p < .05$  with one-tailed test

**Table 4. Standardized Coefficients, R-Square, Significance of Paths, and F-Tests Results**

Independent Variable	Emotional Blackmail		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Age	-.1*	.00	.02
Social Media Consumption (SMC)		.10*	.16*
Shared Language (SLAN)		-.19*	-.17*
Interpersonal Trust (ITRU)		-.17*	-.22*
Strong Ties (STIE)		-.19*	-.20*
STIE*SMA			-.18*

STIE*SLAN				-0.33*
STIE*STRU				.04
R <sup>2</sup>	.01	.22	.35	
$\Delta R^2$		.21	.13	
$f^2$		.05	.07	

\*:  $p < .05$  with one-tailed test;  $f^2$  of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 implies small, moderate, and large interaction effects respectively.

**Table 5. Summary of Hypotheses Testing**

No.	Hypothesis	Result
1	H1: Trust in social media will increase social media consumption.	Supported
2	H2: Interpersonal trust will decrease emotional blackmail.	Supported
3	H3: Shared language will decrease emotional blackmail.	Supported
4	H4: Social media consumption will increase emotional blackmail.	Supported
5	H5: Strong tie will enhance the effect of shared language to emotional blackmail.	Not Supported
6	H6: Strong tie will enhance the effect of trust to emotional blackmail.	Supported
7	H7: Strong tie will decrease the effect of social media consumption to emotional blackmail.	Supported
8	H8: Emotional blackmail will increase perceived stress.	Supported
9	H9: Emotional blackmail will decrease subjective well-being.	Supported

## 5. Discussion and Implications

### 5.1 Discussion

The emergence of social media platform requires significant attention and study. Despite of that, there has not been any study about emotional blackmail on social media. The study of emotional blackmail is necessary because this phenomenon occurs between people' relationships and can bring harm to the relationships. In order to address that problem, this study was conducted. This study adopts social capital theory to explore emotional blackmail and includes two outcomes of emotional blackmail.

Specifically, this study proves that interpersonal trust in social media leads to frequent usage of social media, and thus increases the degree of emotional blackmail. While for the social capital theory, this study shows how three different dimensions of social capital affect emotional blackmail. This study shows the importance of a shared language in a community and trust in a relationship. This study found that shared language and trust in a relationship are able to minimize and reduce the effect of emotional blackmail.

Moreover, strong ties, a concept that is derived from the structural dimension, significantly reduce the effect of social media consumption to emotional blackmail. Strong ties are also found to support shared language (cognitive dimension) in hindering/decreasing the degree of emotional blackmail. This study contributes to social capital theory by showing that strong ties have a particularly important role in a relationship, even in a social media environment.

Two outcome variables that are explored in this study, perceived stress and subjective well-being, signifies the importance of this study for individuals. Two of the outcome variables are psychological variables showing wellness of individual psychological condition. Emotional blackmail was found to increase individuals' perceived stress and at the same time decrease individual's subjective well-being.

## 5.2 Implications

In accordance with the data taken from *statista.com*, the average time a user spends daily on social media has already exceeded 2 hours in 2017, compared to 2012 which was only 1.5 hour. This data raised our attention and awareness of how social media platforms may affect our being, particularly, our psychological and emotional being. This research takes the environment of social media and studies the effect of emotional blackmail to individuals. The findings from this study provide some implications and suggestions, particularly for social media users.

During the usage of social media, users are communicating and are exposed to different kind of people and contents, with various kinds of relationship. Our results show that a shared language is associated with low degree of emotional blackmail. In fact, a shared language is important for knowledge and information sharing (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Thus, we may conclude that when a user is looking for information, particularly the reliable information, the safest and most comfortable source is other users who share the same language and narrative.

Similarly, our results show that interpersonal trust is also associated with low degree of emotional blackmail. Based on the findings, we may conclude that, if users invest their resources (time, action, etc.) to build trust in their relationship, users are expected to receive reciprocal favorable actions and low degree of emotional blackmail. The findings lend support to Nelson (1989) which associated relationship with trust to a low level of conflict.

Our study also found that the interaction between users and their strong ties significantly reduces the degree of emotional blackmail. Therefore, if social media platforms are used to build and strengthen the social ties that users already have, users are likely to have low degree of emotional blackmail.

## 5.3 Limitations and Future Research

There are some limitations from this study that should be noted. First, the respondents of this study were only international students in Taiwan with relatively few samples (127 usable responses). There are some characteristics that the international students have that will affect the result of this study. One of which is that since they are geographically separated from their families and friends, their perceptions of relationships might be different from people who are geographically close to their families and friends. Future research should use samples that are not geographically separated (locals).

Second, this study only used strong ties as a moderator. As Granovetter (1973) stated, strong ties and weak ties have different characteristics and roles. One example is that strong ties are good for motivation and support, while weak ties are good sources of information. Future research can study the effect of both strong and weak ties and how they differ in affecting emotional blackmail.

Third, the social media platform was not specified in this study. Although social media platforms generally provide the same function (to interact, communicate, and gain information), there are some basic differences between each platform. One example is that *Instagram* mainly functions as photo sharing application, while *Facebook* provides games for users in addition to basic functions such as chatting and posting feeds, other applications such as Whatsapp and Line also have different characteristics and uniqueness. Thus, future research can focus on a specific social media platform.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1

Constructs' Mean, Standard Deviation, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Constructs	Mean	Std. Deviation	Composite Reliability	AVE
Subjective Well-Being	5.01	1.42	.94	.69
Interpersonal Trust	5.17	1.33	.87	.69
Strong Tie	5.25	1.22	.91	.78
Shared Language	5.37	1.13	.88	.71
Trust in Social Media	4.43	1.49	.93	.79
Perceived Stress	2.87	1.63	.95	.82
Emotional Blackmail (Blame)	2.94	1.33	.88	.65
Emotional Blackmail (Remorse/Guilt)	2.78	1.39	.87	.78
Emotional Blackmail (Threaten)	2.28	1.18	.88	.65
Social Media Consumption	3.23	.96	.74	.59

### Appendix 2

Constructs' Correlations and Squared Root of AVE

	STRE	SWB	ITRU	STIE	SLAN	SMTRU	EB1	EB2	EB3	SMC
STRE	<b>.906</b>									
SWB	-.780**	<b>.833</b>								
ITRU	-.134	-.019	<b>.830</b>							
STIE	-.105	.029	.440**	<b>.882</b>						
SLAN	-.070	.021	.475**	.617**	<b>.844</b>					
SMTRU	-.055	.013	.090	.337**	.287**	<b>.891</b>				
EB1: Blame	.334**	-.249**	-.297**	-.300**	-.292**	-.106	<b>.807</b>			
EB2: Remorse/Guilt	.308**	-.199*	-.287**	-.337**	-.249**	-.163	.362**	<b>.881</b>		
EB3: Threaten	.477**	-.338**	-.285**	-.283**	-.363**	-.248**	.473**	.428**	<b>.806</b>	
SMC	.190*	-.142	-.173	.010	-.043	.246**	.182*	.046	.093	<b>.771</b>

Note: STRE: Perceived Stress; SWB: Subjective Well-being; ITRU: Interpersonal Trust; STIE: Strong Tie  
SLAN: Shared Language; SMTRU: Trust in Social Media; SMC: Social Media Consumption

\*\* :  $p < .01$  (2-tailed); \* :  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).; The bold diagonal line shows the square root of AVE.