

An Exploratory Study on Motivations and Outcomes of Academic Achievement Capitalization on Social Media

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Abstract. Capitalization, the process of sharing positive events to savor and relive positive moments, brings intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits to the sharer. In students' academic lives, academic achievements represent significant positive events that offer opportunities for capitalization. With the rise of social media, capitalizing on academic achievements has transitioned from traditional face-to-face interactions to digital platforms, where students increasingly share and celebrate their achievements. Given the significance of capitalization for well-being and the scarcity of research in this area, this study seeks to advance the understanding of the significance of capitalization within the context of a student's academic achievements and social media. Specifically, it aims to explore the practice of academic achievement capitalization on social media by examining the reasons for using these platforms, the motivations driving this practice, and the associated outcomes. Utilizing a qualitative exploratory research design, one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten college students who frequently capitalize on their academic achievements. Content analysis of the interviews revealed that social media features are instrumental in facilitating the capitalization of academic achievements. Moreover, the study identified five key motivations driving this behavior: seeking validation, self-presentation, inspiring others, seeking support, and emotional expression. Consistent with existing research on capitalization, students experience predominantly positive outcomes, both interpersonal and intrapersonal, from sharing their academic achievements on social media, highlighting how digital platforms and capitalization help maximize the positive impact of these experiences. The findings provide an understanding of how and why students celebrate and showcase their academic achievements on social media, emphasizing how the capitalization of these achievements and the social media responses they receive influence their personal and social well-being.

Keywords: Academic achievements; Capitalization; Positive events; Social media.

1.0 Introduction

Young adulthood is a critical period characterized by significant transitions and challenges, such as pursuing higher education, beginning careers, and forming personal identities (Eronen, 2000). Alongside these challenges, young adults experience various positive events (Arnett, 2000), vital in alleviating negative mental health (Eronen, 2000; Langston, 1994). These positive experiences not only help counterbalance mental health challenges but also offer opportunities for further enhancing well-being through a process known as capitalization.

Capitalization is sharing positive experiences with others, such as family, friends, romantic partners, and other social networks (Langston, 1994). This process can trigger what Fredrickson (2001) describes as "broadening and

building," wherein the act of sharing positive events leads to the expansion of positive emotions and the enhancement of personal and social resources (Gable & Reis, 2010). Empirical evidence has documented the benefits of capitalization, highlighting its positive effects on both intrapersonal and interpersonal domains. Interpersonal capitalization enhances positive affect, well-being, life satisfaction, and happiness (Langston, 1994; Gable et al., 2004; Lambert et al., 2013; Bierstetel, 2021). Interpersonally, sharing positive experiences strengthens relationships, promotes prosocial behavior, and deepens social bonds (Gable & Reis, 2010; Reis et al., 2010; Bierstetel, 2021). However, the extent to which these benefits are gained depends on the nature of the responses received from others. An active constructive response – characterized by engagement, enthusiasm, and support – is critical for maximizing the positive effects of capitalization (Gable et al., 2004). Conversely, negative or dismissive feedback can negate these potential benefits.

Initially, research on capitalization primarily focused on face-to-face interactions. However, the rise of digital platforms has significantly transformed social communication. Social media, in particular, has emerged as a pivotal medium for capitalization, offering new avenues for sharing positive experiences (Schreurs & Vandenbosch, 2021a; Bierstetel, 2021). The interpersonal nature of capitalization naturally extends to social media, as it enables users to share personal experiences and engage with their social networks interactively (Dawot & Ibrahim, 2014). Research suggests that young people share approximately one-third of their positive life events on social media (Choi & Toma, 2022, as cited by Noon et al., 2023). For instance, platforms like Facebook serve as popular venues for sharing positive news, with the expectation of receiving validation and support from one's online community (Blight et al., 2015).

Moreover, recent studies have highlighted how individuals use social media to showcase personal achievements and successes, thereby engaging in digital capitalization. For example, Schreurs and Vandenbosch (2021a) and Bierstetel (2021) found that users frequently share content related to their successes, such as those in school, on social media. Additionally, sharing positive events on social media has been found to positively influence the well-being of young adults (Bierstetel, 2021). This shift to online platforms underscores the evolving nature of capitalization in the digital age, where social media plays a pivotal role in disseminating and celebrating positive experiences.

While previous research on capitalization has examined face-to-face interactions, fewer studies have explored the phenomenon in social media contexts. However, these studies often take a broad approach, addressing various positive events collectively and relying on quantitative methods. This study aims to address these gaps by focusing specifically on a particular type of positive event that students celebrate on social media – academic achievements. Zheng and Mustapha (2022) offer a comprehensive definition of academic achievement, defining it as the culmination of school-related efforts and encompassing elements such as learned effort, schoolwork, academic learning, and educational attainment. Through this focused lens, the present study offers a contextualized understanding of the motivations and outcomes of capitalization in the context of academic achievements, recognizing that the benefits of capitalization may vary across different contexts (Watkins, 2021).

Existing research on capitalization highlights its positive impact on well-being, mainly through the supportive responses generated by sharing positive experiences. Building on this, the study will explore how social media networks influence the sharing of academic achievements and their effects on students' well-being. The findings can inform strategies and advocacies to encourage the capitalization of achievements, promote healthier online interactions, and cultivate a more supportive, inclusive digital environment. Considering the significant role social media plays in students' daily lives, examining how these platforms enhance or potentially diminish the celebration of academic achievements on social media is crucial.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative exploratory research design to explore and provide an in-depth understanding of academic achievement capitalization, focusing on the experiences and perspectives of the participants. Exploratory research is commonly undertaken to investigate undefined problems, offering clarity and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Olawale et al., 2023). This design is guided by research questions, making it ideal for addressing gaps in areas with limited prior exploration. Given the lack of exploration of capitalization

in online settings concerning significant positive events such as academic achievements, the exploratory design was well-suited for addressing these gaps. This approach utilized semi-structured interviews to explore college students' experiences with social media to capitalize on academic achievements and the associated motivations and outcomes of such capitalization.

2.2 Research Participants

The study's participants comprised ten (10) college students enrolled in Metro Manila, Philippines institutions. These individuals are selected through purposive sampling, a technique used to identify and select participants who can provide rich and relevant information about the research problem and central phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2014). The researchers based the selection criteria on the participants' frequency of sharing academic achievements on social media, determined by a pre-screening questionnaire.

2.3 Research Instrument

The study employed a pre-screening questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide as research instruments. The pre-screening questionnaire is used in conjunction with the purposive sampling approach, consisting of items on demographic profiles, frequency of sharing academic achievements on social media, and specific media use. The semi-structured interview guide included questions designed to thoroughly address the research questions, ensuring comprehensive and insightful responses. Two licensed guidance counselors from the Philippine Normal University-Manila validated both instruments, ensuring their reliability and appropriateness for the study. Some interview questions were: (1) What is the difference between sharing your academic achievements in person and sharing them on social media? (2) What drives you to share your academic achievements on social media? Moreover, (3) How does sharing your academic achievements on social media, specifically the feedback you receive (comment section, share, reactions), affect you positively or negatively?

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection procedure commenced with distributing the pre-screening questionnaire via social media platforms, using publication materials that included a Google Form link to invite potential participants to complete the questionnaire. Ten participants were selected from the pre-screening questionnaire respondents based on the frequency of their academic achievement posts on social media. These ten participants always and often share their academic achievements on social media. Ten (10) interviews were primarily conducted online, with one held in person, using a validated semi-structured interview guide. The interview process lasted between 12 and 20 minutes, allowing participants sufficient time to reflect thoroughly on their experiences and perceptions. All data collected were treated with the utmost confidentiality and were manually analyzed using content analysis.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

In exploring the use of social media for academic achievement capitalization, along with the associated motivations and outcomes, informed consent, confidentiality, and the distress protocol, as proposed by Teresita Rungduin under the PNU Policy Brief Series, Volume 5, Issue 1, 2021, were adhered to throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained before the study, detailing the overall purpose, design features, and any potential risks and benefits of participation. To protect participants' identities, the researchers maintained confidentiality by using anonymized identifiers in the manuscript and codebook (e.g., Participant 1). During the interviews, the researcher followed a distress protocol to manage any potential distress experienced by participants. However, the distress protocol was not utilized during the ten interviews, as the participants perceived or experienced no distress.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Reasons for Using Social Media as a Platform to Capitalize on Academic Achievements: Features of Social Media

Social media has varying designs and features for the user's purpose and desired functionalities (Dawot & Ibrahim, 2014). In the case of academic achievement capitalization, college students turn to social media because its features enable them to meet particular needs and functionalities. These findings align with the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which proposes that users actively engage with media to satisfy particular needs, including cognitive (information updates), affective (enjoyment), interpersonal relationships, self-presentation,

and self-actualization (Shao, 2009; Bossen & Kottasz, 2020; Febrian & Husna, 2023). The following sub-categories highlight the social media features that fulfill college students' goals in academic achievement capitalization.

Broader Audiences

Social media's ability to reach a wider audience is one of the features highlighted by college students, as it allows them to share their academic achievements with a more extensive network than in-person interactions permit. This includes distant relatives, friends, former classmates, and other social connections. This is consistent with Whiting and Williams (2013), who found that the convenience of connecting with social networks was one of the driving factors behind people's use of social media platforms. Additionally, this category aligns with one of the motivations in social media capitalization highlighted in the study by Bierstetel (2021). As expressed by Participant 1,

"I choose to share my academic achievements on social media primarily because our relatives live far away. I want to tell them how I am doing well academically and update them on my academic status and other events in my life."

Feedback section

College students noted the feedback section feature of social media that allows them to receive generally positive feedback from their posts about their academic achievements, thereby significantly contributing to the success of their capitalization attempts. This positive feedback notably impacts them, motivating and inspiring their academic pursuits. This favorable reception of positive feedback aligns with the findings of Metzler and Scheithauer (2017), who found that positive feedback is notably common when individuals share positive content on social media platforms. Bierstetel (2021) found that people who share positive experiences on Facebook and feel their friends respond well tend to report higher life satisfaction and positive emotions. As stated by Participant 1,

"I feel so inspired to do more because of the positive comments about my academic achievements, right? That is great about having a comment section on social media."

User-generated Content and Personal Profile

Social media users can curate their profiles to reflect their identity by posting content (McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase, 2016; Viştelar, 2019). Hence, user-generated content and personal profile features are some of the features highlighted by college students. Accordingly, social media offers the opportunity to share content related to their academic achievements, which, in turn, becomes part of their online personal profile and helps construct an image of being an academic achiever student. As expressed by Participant 8,

"Social media is where I express the certificates I gain and achieve because that is where I build my image."

Post-Sharing

The post-sharing feature of social media is also emphasized. Accordingly, universities and classroom-based awards are often posted on social media, and the sharing functionality of social media enables college students to access these achievements and easily share them with their social networks. Participant 3 said,

"That is also where the university posts now, unlike before when it was done in a classroom set-up, so they just share it online."

Content Revisitation

According to two college students interviewed, content revisitation is one of the reasons for using social media to capitalize on academic achievements. This feature allows users to revisit posts about their accomplishments and the feedback received at any time. Although not explicitly mentioned by the participants, examples include Facebook Memories, and social media feeds that retain posted content. These memory functions on various social media platforms, which prompt users with reminders of past activities (e.g., one year ago, two years ago, etc.), facilitate the ongoing re-experiencing of past events, thereby augmenting their salience and accessibility (Bierstetel, 2021). Participants 1 and 2 said,

"I share it so that when I look back, I am motivated to study." "Also, in social media, you can look back at your awards."

3.2 Motivations for Capitalizing Academic Achievements on Social Media

Seek Validation

Social media has enhanced self-esteem and validation-seeking behavior (Dhingra & Parashar, 2022). For instance, platforms such as Facebook serve as channels for sharing positive experiences in hopes of receiving validation and ways of seeking support (Blight et al., 2015). Similarly, college students capitalize on their academic achievements on social media to gain approval and recognition from their social networks and determine whether they deserve academic achievements and whether their academic efforts are worth it. Participant 4 said,

"Let us also include that your hard work gets validated, that, of course, people also see in social media the different phases of your efforts; it is like they validate that your hard work is worth it."

Self-Presentation

Individuals who capitalize on positive events aim to enhance their status in the eyes of others (Langston, 1994). This aligns with various social-psychological theories suggesting that individuals strive to establish and maintain positive esteem among significant others (Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Murray et al., 2006, as cited by Reis et al., 2010). For college students, social media is a platform to curate and present themselves as 'academic achievers' to their networks. By posting academic achievements, students seek to construct an image of academic excellence, which helps them demonstrate their academic capabilities and build a positive scholarly reputation. The presence of positive content on social media may be explained by theoretical and empirical evidence indicating that individuals generally seek to preserve and enhance a favorable self-image in the eyes of others (Goffman, 1959; Leary, 2007; Vranken, 2023). Individuals often selectively highlight their favorable aspects to influence how others perceive them (Goffman, 1959; Vranken, 2023). Within the context of social media, this inherent tendency toward positive self-presentation is evident. Participant 1 said,

"I want to prove more about myself that I am not just a beautiful girl but also an academic achiever. I am not being boastful, but people think I am just beautiful, and I do not want that kind of impression. I want to be seen as both smart and beautiful, at least somehow."

Inspire others

Watkins (2021) pointed out that sharing positive events fosters inspiration. College students are capitalizing on their academic achievements to inspire their social networks to strive for academic excellence and give their best, just as they do. This motivation stems from their experiences of being inspired by a social network of others who share their academic achievements on social media. People share online not only because they get positive feedback in person and find online platforms convenient but also to spread positivity, inspire others, and connect with people they do not often see or talk to (Bierstetel, 2021). Participant 9 said,

"We also want to motivate others, not just ourselves. By sharing, we motivate other people, saying, 'If I can do this, you can do it too.'"

Seek Support

Social media reaches broader audiences and is commonplace for positive feedback for shared positive events (Metzler & Scheithauer, 2017). Hence, another motivating factor driving college students to capitalize on their academic achievements on these platforms is the desire to maximize their audience to seek support and influence their well-being. They anticipate receiving congratulatory, validating, and motivating feedback from their social networks, which elicits positive emotions. When social media is utilized in capitalization, it can help fulfill needs in social support and enhance subjective well-being (Bierstetel, 2021). Positive social sharing may encourage connection, contributing to feelings of belonging and emotional health. Participant 4 said,

"Many people appreciate my hard work by posting my achievements on social media."

Emotional Expression

The social sharing of emotions theory posits that emotions, though initially internal and private, are subsequently communicated to others by the individual experiencing them (Rime et al., 1991). Similarly, college students perceive capitalizing on their academic achievements in social media as an avenue to express their emotions, particularly feelings of pride and fulfillment. Given that the user-generated content feature of social media (Shao,

2009; Dawot & Ibrahim, 2014; Vişlar, 2019) enables self-expression, they utilize this platform to its maximum potential for such expression. Participant 8 said,

"And also, when I share on social media, there is a sense of fulfillment that I have completed this– that I received this, because it is difficult, like when you finish it, I want to express that I have accomplished it."

3.3 Intrapersonal Outcomes of Academic Achievement Capitalization on Social Media

Intrapersonal outcomes are those experienced within the individual. The following are the intrapersonal outcomes of academic achievement capitalization of college students on social media.

Positive Affect

As college students share their academic achievements on social media, they experience positive affectivity from the positive feedback they receive, such as congratulations, affirmations, and motivational messages. This aligns with various experimental and quantitative studies on capitalization, which consistently find that sharing positive experiences amplifies positive affect (Langston, 1994; Gable et al., 2004; Reis et al., 2010; Lambert et al., 2013; Bierstetel, 2021). In addition, the broaden-and-build theory, which posits that positive emotions broaden an individual's thought-action repertoires, may support the existing category. The theory sustains the idea that positive affect exerts a profound influence by enhancing cognitive processes and behaviors and facilitating the development of social resources (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001; Gentzler et al., 2013). Participant 4 said,

"Whenever I read positive comments from them, it makes me want to do better and use it as motivation to be more consistent in receiving academic achievements."

Motivation

The positive effect students experience is closely linked to increased motivation. The positive feedback they receive, such as compliments and recognition, encourages them to strive for even higher academic goals. This connection reflects research showing that positive reinforcement or feedback enables individuals to set more ambitious goals, ultimately leading to improved performance (Krenn et al., 2013; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Participant 1 said,

"It is motivating to do better when you see many people leaving positive comments for you."

Validation

College students garnered validation from their academic achievement capitalization attempts on social media, receiving recognition for their accomplishments and the value of their academic efforts. This aligns with the findings of Gable & Reis (2010), which state that capitalization fosters feelings of being understood, validated, and cared for. Moreover, responses from capitalization amplify feelings of worthiness, a sense of belonging, and a lower frequency of being labeled boastful (Bierstetel, 2021). Participant 6 said,

"I would feel that everything is worth it because I am getting appraisals or validation."

Enhances Self-Esteem

The validation students receive also plays a pivotal role in boosting their self-esteem. Positive feedback enhances their confidence in their abilities, encouraging them to embrace challenges and aim for more remarkable academic achievements. This outcome mirrors previous studies showing how sharing positive experiences helps cultivate self-esteem (Gable & Reis, 2010; Reis et al., 2010) and promotes well-being (Bierstetel, 2021). When students see others believing in their potential, it reinforces their belief in themselves, creating a relationship between validation, self-esteem, and the motivation to achieve more. As Participant 3 expressed,

"It boosts my self-esteem or self-confidence because if they believe you can do it, why am I still doubtful?"

Pressure

The final intrapersonal outcome involves college students experiencing pressure when sharing their academic achievements on social media. This outcome is intriguing because, ideally, the outcomes should serve as resources that positively impact those engaging in capitalization, especially when the feedback is active-constructive (Gable,

2004; Gable & Reis, 2010; Rimé et al., 2020). However, in the context of academic achievement capitalization on social media, there is an internal sense of pressure experienced, even in the presence of positive feedback. Consequently, feelings of shame arise, leading capitalizers to exhibit reluctance in posting when their achievements do not align with the level of accomplishments they have previously shared. This outcome mirrors the broader dynamics of contemporary society, where an accelerating pace, heightened competitiveness, and mounting pressure have become defining features. As a result, individuals feel compelled to continuously achieve to gain and maintain recognition (Rosa, 2010, as cited by Krogh, 2022). Participant 10 said,

"It imposes pressure, and there is that feeling that you cannot afford to fail because they have already seen your success."

3.4 Interpersonal Outcomes of Academic Achievement Capitalization on Social Media

Interpersonal outcomes are those experiences related to social relationships. The following are the interpersonal findings of academic achievement capitalization on social media.

Strengthening of Existing Relationships

The interpersonal outcomes resulting from capitalization are rooted in strengthening relationships through positive and active interactions between the capitalizers and the recipients (Gable, 2004; Gable & Reis, 2010; Donato et al., 2013; Rimé et al., 2020). In the context of academic achievements capitalization on social media, the findings align with existing studies, indicating that interactions within the social media community, such as exchanging congratulatory messages, contribute to strengthening relationships with those social network members personally known by the capitalizers. Interestingly, it also functions as a means to assess the current status of friendships; for instance, when a friend from afar comments, it signifies that the friendship is still alive; this low-effort interaction and the ubiquity of social media allows people to strengthen bonds and relationships without having to meet face-to-face (Décieux et al., 2019). Participant 1 said,

"It further strengthens relationships, especially with friends, because you know that they are happy with your achievements and that there are people who support you. Moreover, from the support they give or show, I feel more motivated to study because I know that I have a support system that always has my back."

Builds New Relationships

Capitalization is primarily studied within romantic relationships, where existing relationships are already established. However, in academic achievement capitalization on social media, new relationships can form with social network members who interact with these posts, even if they are not personally acquainted with the individuals sharing the achievements. Décieux et al. (2019) stated that with the ubiquity of social media and more individuals sharing their lives, experiences, and achievements on social media, people know more about a person's life and be informed about their essential milestones, thus making an effortless way to communicate with each other and to build new relationships. Moreover, these online interactions often extend to in-person interactions. Participant 8 noted,

"Little conversations start in the comments, and from there, friendships develop."

4.0 Conclusion

The experiences and perspectives of college students offer an understanding of their engagement in academic achievement capitalization on social media. Their involvement in sharing academic achievements is driven by motivations such as seeking validation, presenting themselves as achievers, inspiring others, receiving supportive feedback, and expressing fulfillment and pride. Social media enables the fulfillment of these motivations through positive feedback on social media, making sharing academic achievements a meaningful way to extend benefits beyond the initial joy of receiving achievement. This practice fosters positive emotions, boosts self-esteem, and provides validation, creating a motivational cycle that encourages students to maintain and enhance academic performance. Thus, the emotional uplift from the feedback on their posts offers both intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits, promoting personal well-being and strengthening social connections.

However, beneath this cycle of positivity lies a subtle pressure—the expectation to sustain high academic performance. While supportive feedback is uplifting, it may also create unspoken expectations, driving students

to continually meet the standards they have set for themselves. Students may need to compete in surpassing or maintaining their previous achievements. Therefore, the foundation of validation and motivation from social networks may also generate heightened competitiveness and stress, leading them to live up to the image they have cultivated online. Therefore, these challenges highlight the importance of integrating mental health interventions to help students navigate the tension between motivation and the pressure to perform.

In conclusion, the study's findings conclude that sharing academic achievements on social media is a beneficial practice that enhances the positive impact of receiving academic recognition. This practice serves as an effective way for students to celebrate and savor their achievements. Given that feedback on these posts significantly enhances both personal and social benefits, it is essential to cultivate an online environment that encourages supportive recognition of academic accomplishments. Promoting this environment helps students fully experience the positive effects of sharing their achievements. It may also alleviate their pressure, ultimately enriching their academic experience and well-being.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

Angeline A. Paumar – study conceptualization, data collection, analysis and interpretation, editing and writing, supervising, revisions **Francine Faith A. Villanueva** – editing and writing, revisions **Thea Angela R. Romero** – editing and writing, revisions **Evelyn C. Bagaporo** – study conceptualizations and revisions.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest in the study.

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