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Connection Complexity: A multidimensional framework for meaningful connection in social media

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Social networking sites offer the prospect of satisfying the fundamental need to belong (Maslow, 1943) with myriad opportunities to stay connected even when apart. However, research trends on social media over the last decade have indicated that while these platforms help reduce the cost of relationship maintenance (Tong & Walther, 2011), many communication channels and interactions may result in neutral or negative feelings of social wellbeing (Burke & Kraut, 2016; Manzi et al., 2018). *Connection Complexity* is a proposed interdisciplinary framework to help illustrate the affordances contributing to and disrupting connection in social media by extending the signal to noise construct from information theory (Shannon, 1948) and graph-theoretic concepts of strong ties and cost complexity (Easley & Kleinberg, 2010) to social phenomena. The framework draws on existing research to propose three dependent phases of the lifecycle of connection seeking behavior (i.e., "signal"), in digital spaces: trust, authentic self-expression, and belongingness (Ellison et al., 2014; Hancock & Luo, 2020). Factors such as *response* rate from strong ties determine the strength of this *signal*, and the strength of *noise* prevents or dilutes the response reception. We present this framework along with its potential application in order to optimize social media interface design principles to facilitate feelings of connectedness and belonging.