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Digital Social Capital and Well-being: A Scoping Review and a Proposed Research Framework

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Social capital has been linked to well-being in offline settings for many years and the dramatic growth of Web 2.0 technologies offers immense potential for leveraging social capital for well-being. However, it is currently unclear how best to conduct research in this area in a clear and concise way. This scoping review looks at how digital social capital is being defined, measured and conceptualized in the literature relating to well-being in order to create guidelines for future research to increase consistency. Seven databases (PubMed, PsycINFO, EMBASE, CINAHL Cochrane, Eric and ACM) were searched from 2007 to 2020 using a comprehensive search strategy. Following preliminary searches to assess the relevance of search criteria, a search of the Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) terms ‘digital’, ‘social capital’ and ‘well-being’ was completed. Peer-reviewed journal papers were included if published in English and involve human participants and described a measure for well-being and social capital. The scoping process revealed 42 relevant papers. The findings showed that there is a clear link between digital social capital and well-being however, there is a lack on consistency within definitions used. The measurements used had a mild degree of consistency, however measures were adapted for use. Interestingly, it appears that it is unclear whether digital social capital is a cause or effect in relation to well-being and the causal pathways are often left undefined in the literature. This study offers a framework for future research in this area.