Building Social Capital in an Online Environment

Service organizations are a powerful tool proven to enhance a community's overall wellness. Studies demonstrate that a dense civic network and a prevalent gathering place can attribute to community success. Service organizations, such as Rotary International and the Lion's Club provide both of these (Whitham).

Current trends indicate that membership in these organizations is decreasing, largely due to a lack of interest among younger generations in traditional service club participation. Presumably in response to this trend and to the changing technological landscape, some clubs have adopted online models: virtual clubs that exist parallel to the traditional, face-to-face clubs, but do not require physical attendance at a meeting.

This presentation represents a review of existing research about online mechanisms to determine whether or not bonding and bridging social capital can be developed in these environments as effectively as it can through environments where there is personal, face-to-face interaction. Little research has been done on actual online Rotary or Lions Clubs, so the literature review herein also includes studies done about developing social capital in online classrooms and other forms of net-based engagement.