Creativity has been widely recognized as critical to the economic success of organizations for over 60 years. An emerging area of research on creativity recognizes creativity as a complex, social process that is dependent upon many factors, including those of an environmental nature. In support of this perspective, a growing amount of research has investigated the effect of social networks on individual creativity. This relationship is based on the premise that an individual’s social network affects access to diverse information, which in turn, is critical for creativity. The previous studies on this relationship, however, have been conducted in a limited number of environments, most of which have been knowledge-intensive in nature. As such, this study was conducted in a fast-food restaurant environment to determine whether the relationship between social networks and creativity is the same as in other, previously studied environments. Therefore, data was collected for a sample of 247 employees of an organization consisting of seven fast-food franchise restaurants. An ordinary least squares regression model was developed to investigate the relationship between creativity and the commonly studied social network variables: number of weak ties, number of strong ties, clustering, and centrality. The social network variables accounted for 17.3% of the overall variance in creativity, establishing that a relationship does exist between social networks and creativity in the fast-food restaurant environment. This relationship, however, was not as expected.

It is possible that this difference is a result of the differences between high and low knowledge-intensive working environments. The lack of support for weak ties as a significant positive predictor of creativity in conjunction with limited opportunities for significant creative achievement suggests that access to diverse information may be less important for creativity in the fast-food restaurant environment than in other environments. The findings that strong ties and centrality are significant, positive predictors of creativity, however, appear to indicate that the ability to implement a creative idea, however minor it may be, is more important in the fast-food restaurant environment than the generation of that idea in the first place. As such, this research contributes to the understanding of the relationship between creativity and social networks in an environment not yet studied, where millions of individuals work every day.

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The public is welcome to attend.