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Personal Networks

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1 Introduction

As a ground for this paper *Mobile lives* written by Anthony Elliott and John Urry is used. The academic society is quite sceptic about the value of this work; for example George Ritzer from the University of Maryland refers to unclear language style used and failures with meeting stated goals. Yet this book raises the question of networks and argues that in the last couple of decades the paradigm has shifted because it is more important who you know rather what you can do yourselves. The purpose of this paper is to discuss personal networks, social capital and the means of creating and maintaining them. LinkedIn and Facebook are brought into the discussion as the two most advanced auxiliary tools for building personal networks.

2 Personal Network

Everyone is the creator of his own ties and networks and has numerous connections regardless physical location. Even in the time of high mobility and tempo of life, connections can be maintained. A crucial point considering networks is social capital, which is a theoretical framework that broadly concerns the resources gathered through various communications with other individuals (Coleman 1988; Bourdieu 1985). Social capital, in other words, is a cost of opportunity to use operant (knowledge and skills) and operand (tangible) resources of the networks. Examples of these resources may be knowledge (information), personal relationships, or the ability to arrange groups.

According to Putnam (2000), social capital is divided into bridging and bonding capital. The first refers to “weak ties,” which are loose connections between people who may benefit from such connections in one way or another but not by means of emotional support (Granovetter 1982). Respectively, bonding social capital refers to tightly-knit, emotionally close relationships, such as family and close friends.

The two examples below illustrate the influence of weak ties both on the personal and professional worlds of an individual. The summer 2013, the author was going to the Netherlands. The cheapest way was through Germany and

required spending at least a night in Bremen. The Facebook was checked regarding where to stay and an acquaintance called Luckas, a former neighbor was found. There had been little communication since the neighbor moved back to Germany two years ago, but yet he offered a chance to stay at his place in Bremen for a couple of days and enjoy his hospitality in local pubs and clubs. An example of professional usage of weak ties might be the author's attempt to make a two-minute promotional video with budget of 50 euros. Luckily, friend of friend was professional operator in the beginning of his career. He created an excellent video.

Many interpersonal ties are connected only to the specific role that a person plays, not the entire individual. Hence, most ties are specialized, with various community members providing "emotional support, information, material aid, social identity and a sense of belonging" (Wellman et al 2005; Fischer 1982). One must sustain differentiated portfolios of ties in order to have access to a variety of required resources.

3 LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a public company founded in 2003; nowadays the company is profitable and holds a position in the top 10 of Alexa Traffic Rank. Its mission is "connect the world's professionals". In fact, 88 of the Fortune 100 have licensed the software to help find and track potential job candidates. The business model is quite diversified and ranges from traditional freemium subscriptions and advertising to B2B sales to recruiters. (LinkedIn 2012)

It is commonly assumed that LinkedIn remains a tool for job searching. Indeed, more important is the fact that it helps to maintain connections. Bob from marketing department might be a door to the desired company.

It can be stated that LinkedIn is a great tool to manage professional weak ties, while it remains a somewhat weak tool for maintaining social-oriented networks.

Thus, the next tool to discuss is Facebook, which is viewed here as a supplement to LinkedIn rather than a competitor.

3.1 Facebook

The empirical research of Ellison et al. (2007) shows a strong correlation between Facebook usage and the level of social capital evolution, mainly of the bridging type, weak-ties. Internet use alone did not determine social capital accumulation, but intensive use of Facebook did. Further research on the topic supports a positive relationship between Facebook use and social capital (Burke et al. 2011; Ellison et al. 2011).

So, there is no doubt, that Facebook is useful. But a very small percentage of users are aware of the complex algorithms behind their newsfeeds and posts for example. This paper examines consequences rather how it exactly works. For example, if the posts are related to financial theme, and have remote characteristics of qualitative content they will attract other professionals and people who are interested in the same topic. This works the same way for cat pictures. Hence, one practically applicable suggestion is to determine purpose of one's page and behave accordingly. The most popular and easy to do solution is creation of a second page for professional life.

4 Conclusion

Revolution in the technology of communication rather than in the technology of transportation resulted in networks became crucial for accessing and use of resources (Elliott & Urry 2010). In other words, person's connections are now primary to skills and competences. The issue of networks is tightly connected to social capital which can be divided into bridging and bonding social capital meaning weak ties and tightly knit ones. Wellman et al. (2005) argue that on an average an individual has 23 people in the personal community network and between 200 and 1500 weak-ties.

This paper does not pay much attention to the degree of importance of networks and social capital, supposing that it is somewhat obvious and axiomatic.

One might argue for the importance and primacy of offline interactions among individuals. To contrary it can be stated that communication online does not obligatorily remove individuals from their real world but rather supports relationships which are set up offline and keep people connected.

To conclude, online tools such as Facebook, LinkedIn and others supply users with a forceful context for creation, sustaining and usage of their social network resources. The former copes best with social networks, while the later's core aspect is professional networks.

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