

Chapter 5 – Social networks and participatory culture

- **Participatory culture** – culture in which citizens consume and produce media usually through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube
 - “prosumers”

Networking for fun and profit

- Computer era reduced costs to produce media
 - Shared media works by professional and non-professionals
 - Uploading millions of songs, photos, videos, blogs every minute
 - Shared experience

Nature of networks

- Humans are social creatures – kinship, friendship, neighbourhood, community
- The first electronic networks (telegraph and telephone) provided important enhancements to these social networks by **speeding up and extending the reach of our connections** to one another
- Communications networks are a central factor in social theories about new media
- Networked electronic communication – ability to directly contact anyone
- **Social network** – face-to-face or electronic relations between people for formal and informal purposes

Networking amid politics and terrorism

- Anonymous (loose collection of online hackers), Occupy movement (global campaign to protest inequality and injustice), Tea Party (US-based right-wing political group)
 - “organization without organization”
 - Having a shared goal

Social network analysis

- Academic study of social networks
 - Actors
 - Ties between actors
 - Network structure (patterns of ties)
 - Major influences (culture)
 - How do these affect the formation and durability of networks?
- “social environment can be expressed as patterns or regularities in relationships among interacting units” (Wasserman and Faust)
- 4 key elements of social network analysis
 - Actors and their actions are interdependent – formed through relationships to others
 - Relational ties (linkages) are channels for the flow of resources, which may be material (capital, commodities, etc) or immaterial (power, influence, information, etc)
 - Network models view the network structural environment as providing opportunities for, or presenting constraints upon, individual behavior
 - Network models conceptualize structure (social, economic, political, etc) as lasting patterns of relations among actors
- 7 core concepts
 - Actor: discrete unit of decision-making and action – may be an individual, a corporation, government agency, association, trade union, or a university

- Relational ties: establishment of links between actors – mutual admiration, shared membership of associations, regular meetings, other forms of communication, movement of actors between places, formal relationships of authority, biological relationships based on kinship
- Dyad: information used to establish a relational tie between 2 actors – a pair
- Triad – relationships between 3 actors
- Subgroup – dyadic relationship -> triad
- Group
- Relation: interaction and relationships among members of the group
- **Actor network theory** – an approach to the study of networks and society that pays attention to both human and non-human actors (technology or organizations)
 - Eg. Participants on Facebook and the software and servers
- Interpersonal networks – eg. Bloggers providing a “blogroll” of other bloggers they consider to have opinions that are worth looking at

Networks and the economics of social production

- **Social production** – creation of goods and services, including information, in a social or collaborative fashion
- 2 features necessary for effective social production
 - **Modularity** – the properties of a project that determine “the extent to which it can be broken down into smaller components, or modules, that can be independently produced before they are assembled into a whole”
 - **Granularity** – size of modules in terms of the time and effort that an individual must invest in producing them

Participatory media cultures

- Thompson (1995) and McQuail (2005): key features of earlier models of mass communication
 - Large-scale production and distribution of information and content to large audience
 - Producers/distributors and receivers of media content are separate actors
 - Asymmetrical power relationship between producers/distributors and receivers of media, with receivers having little scope to respond to a largely one-way communication flow
 - Impersonal relationships between producers/distributors and receivers/consumers of media
 - Standardized content – media content with the broadest appeal
- New media and ICTs enabling democratic participation
 - Peer-to-peer communication as distinct from top-down communication
 - Access, share, and verify info from a wide range of sources
 - No government control or regulation
 - Online communities unconstrained by geography
 - Disseminate, debate, on current issues – challenge professional and official positions
 - Political disintermediation – communication that is not filtered by political organizations, spin doctors, or news media

Participatory media

- Alternative media: de-professionalization, de-institutionalization, de-capitalization

Participatory media and Web 2.0

- Digital photographers
 - Share works online
 - Receive feedback
- **Pro-am revolution** – “professional amateurs” producing media content that rivals professional media in terms of quality
- **Pro-ams** – “innovative, committed and networked amateurs working to professional standards”
 - user modification of The Sims computer game
 - Linux open-source software contributors
 - Music sampling, rap music
- When pro-ams are networked together
 - Huge impact on politics, economics, culture, development

Blogs as participatory media and social software

- **Blogs** – user-generated websites where entries are made by either individuals or groups
 - Informal journal style
 - Reverse chronological order
 - Interactive and networked
- Vlogs – video-based blog
- Photo-based blog – “photoblog”

Participatory media, social software, and social capital

- **Social capital** – assets one possesses in the form of relationships with others
- 3 types of social capital
 - **Bonding social capital** – strong social bonds between individuals eg. Family, local community, ethnic community
 - **Bridging social capital** – weaker, less dense but more cross-cutting ties eg. Business associates, links across ethnic groups, links between families and communities
 - **Linking social capital** – connections between those with differing levels of power or social status eg. Political elites and the public, policy-makers and local communities, individuals from different social classes

Downsides of networks, social media, and participatory media culture

- Servers crash
- Structure systems fail
- Website access becomes overloaded
- “force majeure”
 - Power blackout
 - Act of war or terrorism that decimates core communications infrastructures
- Insider/outsider dimensions of networks – based on geography
 - Eg. Fashion and news bloggers in New York, gossip and movie info bloggers in Los Angeles
- Some social networks have been historically associated with corruption and crime
 - The Mafia: Sicilian mafia, Colombian drug cartels, Russian mafiyas, Chinese Triads, Japanese Yakuza