

**MEDIATISED SOCIAL NETWORKS
ON THE TURNING OF 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES
*HOW THE BALKAN WARS OF 1991-95 EFFECTED
HUNGARIAN MEDIA CONNECTIONS***

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ABSTRACT

The space a young person might cover with his „smart devices” has extended significantly compared to the situation 10-20 years ago. The young generation does utilise these possibilities. They leave digital marks, sometimes very unwisely. No doubt, many useful things can be learnt by using mediatised social network connections, but these young people are to be taught their wit about the world by trial and error method, rather than from elders through the process of socialisation. The process of learning is enhance, or at least influenced by at least crisis situations. It was the case for Hungarian press and consequently to Hungarian general public during the Southern Slav Crisis regarding the communication practice of American air force troops stationed in Taszár, Southern Hungary. To what extent are we able to resist thematisation? To what extent can we prevent thematisation by friends and what can be done to persuade cyber-acquaintances to talk about what is important for us? To what extent can social networks be extended? Is there a possibility to decompose these social networks? Can a young media-nomad be a hub in his own realm of information and data? To what extent does a media-conscious youth intend to play an active role in sharing information that is relevant for others and by doing so be part of street-publicity (Faragó, 2011), that is controlling power and media? I seek answers to these questions on the following pages. I try to prove or disprove empirical phenomena by theoretic approach.

Keywords: cyber-hero, thematising strategy, creative minority, intercommunication interaction, edited climate of opinion

**STRONGLY FIXED MATRIX POINTS, WITH OBVIOUS
DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL STATUS**

Dividing age might be 10 years. Minors older than 10 years of age has access to use some kind of smart device that is suitable for phoning, taking photos, but more importantly to act as a *mediative link for a social network*.¹ I would draw the age limit for the group of young adults mentioned in the foreword at 10 years of age.

¹ According to my experience, school regulations do not allow pupils (6-12 years old schoolchildren) to use mobile telecommunication devices and parents acknowledge this. However it can not be prohibited for older children, so it justifies definition of the lower segment of the respective age group. Age differences may arise by children's different age when starting school.

Evidently I do not consider them adults, although regarding their social activity they are often more „diligent” and conscious than the wiser, more experienced age group in their 20-s and 30s. I should mention that the most popular social network portal so far sets the age limit of registration at 13years. Minor sin their early teens using smart devices try to outwit this restriction, moreover this difference is not relevant in analysis. The older members of the group analysed are of 25 years. Usually it is the age when they leave higher education and enter the world of work for a living that is characteristically a medium where being mobile is a must and they are obliged to cope with a high rate of turnover.

Besides ever changing labour market, the necessity of obtaining money capital there must be another pillar of safety (Maslow) – in addition to the family, instead of parental-fraternal bonds that serves as point of orientation, help, information base and field of entertainment (Garai, 2003). This is a *virtual community network*, social capital (Bourdieu), in which an important index is *the number of self-permitted or self-activates points of connection*, simply said: the number of acquaintances. Intended reduction of the connection matrix occurs very rarely; they are normally proud of the opposite, moreover they share information they find prestigious about themselves. In this regard co-operation by smart devices is quite steady. I am of the opinion that among the age groups I studied any level of connectedness is a *strongly fixed point*, meaning not the quality but indestructibility of the connection. Adding a new element to these solid matrix points it is not a single friend to enter the space of connectedness; he brings friends and relatives of friends, who might extend the network. This reasoning seems to verify the idea that one might close some gates due to bittered relations, a new player fills the gap almost immediately and this new player is not alone, most probably.

It is to note that this social network is dynamically changing and is active online. Recently I had a lecture at an elementary school. It wasn't a compulsory one; pupils (of 11-13 years) could choose to attend the lecture. We discussed the relation of light and media. I asked them to share a piece of information (s) he found interesting about this special lecture. Teachers immediately reacted by noting that the task cannot be performed as pupils have no access to the wireless network of the school. But pupils gave loud voice to their protest noting that they have their own access to mobile internet, mostly for the purpose of being connected. A post was published within minutes.

Years earlier (in 2010-11) I had a similar test with my group of students. Then about 60% admitted having online connectedness during lecture. In 2015 connectability was 100% at graduating BA students of Communications and Media. A very talented young man, who resisted using smart devices, had to realize the hard way that there was nothing for him but go with the current. After years of insisting to use a device that was suitable only for voice calls, had to change it for a smart one during the graduating year. The study group mentioned had an own Facebook-group. The emphasis here is on sustainability and fixed matrix points: the Facebook group was formed for study progress reasons, but later, with obviously less activity it served as means of connectedness, a resource of social capital and can be activated any time.

It can be clearly stated: access ways, matrix points are worth maintaining; this is a well known rule for elder members of the group studied. The situation is similar to the decades when business cards meant points of connectedness and conscious network builders never disposed of a business card. Is there life or rather connectedness after the days of business cards are over? Of course. This life / connectedness is manifested in *fixed and mediatized networks of connectedness*.

Besides money capital and cultural capital Bourdieu considers social capital one of the most important factors. He holds that the easiest way to obtain money as well as material and incorporated cultural values is by operating our social capital assets properly (Bourdieu, 2008). But the social capital manifested in cyber-space also depends of the group we formed and approved. It is very likely that conclusion by the French sociologist applies here: *our network re-creates social disparities*, that this new frame of society also includes the possibility of inequality.

„Disposition or habit as an organisation obtained by the group for the group and became characteristic of the group, serves as a base for collective memory. Being the means of the group, reproduces experiences of progenitors in successors, or simpler put: reproduces progenitors in their successors.”²

Maintaining network access points might become an essential necessity, because their existence and continuous expansion might lead to accessing a long-seen acquaintance, and provides the possibility for maintaining the „they may find me if they want” strategy. So it is interesting to extend the research to the question: To what extent do we need to expand our networks to find a quasi acquaintance. To obtain such result most people utilize community spaces accessible via smart devices.

INFORMATION BRIDGES, WEEK CONNECTIONS

Expansion of wireless interactions were forecast by a forefather of radio broadcasting, G. Marconi in 1909 at his Nobel Lecture (Faragó, 2013). „ *However great may be the importance of wireless telegraphy to ships and shipping, I believe it is destined to an equal position of importance in furnishing efficient and economical communication between distant parts of the world and in connecting European countries with their colonies and with America ...If it should become possible to transmit waves right round the world, it may be found that the electrical energy travelling round all parts of the globe may be made to concentrate at the antipodes of the sending station. In this way it may someday be possible for messages to be sent to such distant lands by means of a very small amount of electrical energy, and therefore at a correspondingly small expense.*³ What Marconi spoke of in 1909 is eerily similar to 'small world' theory by Milgram and quite similar to Marchall McLuhén's 'global village' (global world). But long before these excellent social scientists used these concepts,

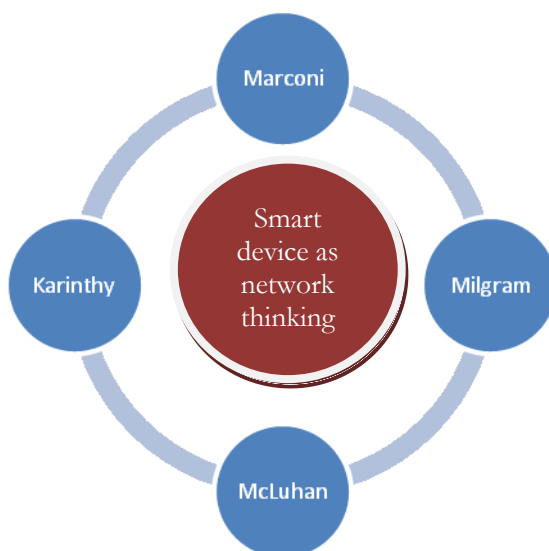
² Angelusz (ed.): A társadalmi rétegződés komponensei, (Components of Social Stratification) p. 158. *

³ Marconi, Guglielmo: Wireless Telegraphic Communication, Nobel Lecture, December 11, 1909, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/physics/laureates/1909/marconi-lecture.pdf. [2015.05.19.]

Hungarian writer Frigyes Karinthy wrote a feuilleton that is quite relevant and interesting to the topic in which he distinctly described what Milgram proved by empiric research in 1967. Karinthy in a short story titled *Láncszem* (A Link of Chain)⁴ opines: (...) „you never need more than five links of the chain to connect to any Earth-dweller by merely personal contact.”

Figure 1

Network based thinking and smart devices⁵



Marconi, Karinthy, Milgram and McLuhan thus create the base for present network thinking related to smart devices. However the dilemma remained an important one: How many links of chain are necessary to prove and build the connection. By other words: what are the chances for two people to know about each other by intermediate persons. Karinthy wrote about five intermediate links of chain, Milgram's empiric research by letters sent shows in some cases nine, in other cases four „information bridges”. Street public with smart devices and users' willingness to act makes this series of chain-links even shorter. Moreover today these connections are not limited geographically; network users can be in live, 'online' contact with each other.

Thus quality of the contacts is characterised by rapidity, online access and the possibility of bilateral or multilateral interaction. Once – from the first days of verbal communication to general accessibility of printed books – the narrative

⁴ Karinthy Frigyes: *Címszavak a Nagy Enciklopédiához I-II.*; Cikkek. Válogatta és a szöveget gondozta Ungvári Tamás. 1980, Budapest, Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, I. kötet, 351. oldal (Karinthy Frigyes összegyűjtött művei)

⁵ By the author.

medium providing continuity of cultures was the spoken word (Csepeli, Prazsák, 2010). Then books have 'relieved memory', providing the possibility for Past and Present to separate. They fixed information, created storage of data, archival, made reuse of data possible. Nevertheless access limits were not lifted: due to the lack of necessary knowledge capital in the beginning only very few people were able to use such stored information, moreover 'consumption' of books was very limited in space and time.

Beginning at the early years of 20th century wireless radio signal generation and reception made it possible to forward messages to distances earlier inconceivable and these messages might have almost unlimited number of receivers simultaneously. Network size was determined by the transmission distance of the radio station. The small world of Marconi-Milgram and McLuhan completed with Internet became really world-wide. What did change in comparison to the beginning of 20th century wireless devices: the possibility and quantity of interactions and the fact that smart devices outnumber user identities.

Internet can be considered a 'small world' or a necessary and unavoidable network. Access to the network might be a means of avoiding social marginalization. Nevertheless we must realize that interconnection of the growing number of new connection points is not random at all; new contacts, new acquaintances, route choosers show a tendency for preference of high prestige hubs (the members of which can be called cyber heroes). Ensuing from theories of Luhmann and Habermas, access to communication devices marks out the individual's place in social stratification in which the measure unit might be the ability and frequency of interaction. Here is to mention the theory of Angelusz and Bourdieu (Angelusz, 2000), about information bridges to be constructed on weak connections. Strong, that is friendly- and family ties are almost inconceivable without community space. These are interconnected groups, in which conscious members allow only horizontal penetrability that is more widespread groups for smaller ones often remain invisible.

COMMON OPINION EDITED BY THE MEDIA

It is worth looking back to recent past and examine network connections in 20th century traditional media world, especially reviving a crisis situation. A few lines above I stated: 'Quality of the contacts is characterised by rapidity, online access and the possibility of bilateral or multilateral interaction.' During the Southern Slav Crisis mentioned in the foreword there was no public online surface, although American air base and several American command posts were connected online. The author used to be the correspondent of Hungarian Radio during the crisis; as a radio reporter present at the Taszár air base on almost daily basis. Nevertheless online connection is sensible to mention in case of Taszár, although it was not an internet-based one: the task set to American news factories was to forward two-three pieces of news per day to Hungarian media consumers about the Southern Slav war and peace process. It means no less than a citizen to be considered media conscious today checks his/her favourite news portals. During the 90ies of last

century radio broadcasts were synonym to promptness; there were hourly news; noon news program of Hungarian Kossuth Radio had an audience of about 1 million people. There is no media field of such proportions today. Here is the link to infinite access to network points, i.e. publicity.

Why did the American government need to find access points to Hungarian public via the army and military press? First of all it was a successful strategy to influence international reactions via Hungarian public opinion. They had to make an American military presence of 7-8 thousand soldiers in Taszár accepted. They had to inform the public about the humanitarian way of eliminating the remains of war, how cautiously they set new borders. (Considering this last item it was obviously merely a message, but did not represent reality.) Anyway, Americans did not entrust anything to be taken care of co-incidence in communication: the first army man to set foot on the tarmac of Taszár airport was the spokesman of the army. His first and foremost task was to build up direct contact to leading Hungarian journalists. (American soldiers were not left without media-communication: in an age without mobile phones there were as many (AT&T) phone booths at the Taszár air-base, as in half of the county altogether. Radio frequency market was unregulated in Hungary at that time, there were only temporary frequency allocations, but the Taszár air-base got permission to use three radio frequencies simultaneously. American type commercial radio broadcasts were listened to at the nearby town of Kaposvár, seat of the county. Later Americans also recognised this and used their radio station as a channel of contact and communication.)

American mediators utilized their contacts and communication tools according to a pre-set plan: in pre-decision situations or for accepting decisions they consciously and little by little fed the public with information; reaction by the public might have modified decisions or news repeated several times consciously or subconsciously became interiorized, part of the public opinion. This practice of thematisation is continued with success in Hungary ever since. It can be prevented only by taking less care for news programmes, consciously check truth factor in information and exclude sentences aimed only to persuade. The aim of thematisation is to 'drive into a single net', creating a public opinion, members of which are aware of these messages, thus become members of the contact matrix community: they do not reject information on the specific topics. Instead of elaboration they make heuristic decisions in choosing channels and receiving news. The matrix gained by this method was and is relatively stable.

SHARING DOCUMENTS FOR ACCEPTANCE, INTERACTION

Interaction formed within elements of the connected network is media-like in its operation (Consequently it was the same 20 years ago). Tools used for maintaining co-operation are also mediative: pictures, texts, videos. I include smiles here; these can be considered as compact and often humorous texts (cp. spots), that are not necessary to decode; colourful pictures, make messages completed, emphasized, easier to understand.

It is worth to go a roundabout here to the roles of media that make it clear-cut: *connection network in cyber space is strongly mediatized*. Media, as social integration force can be detected only in the phenomena of unlimited quantity of access, ideological parallels or simply in common attitudes. Groups of the social network can be characterized by social integration in all cases. But connectedness within the group can be explained by similar disposition as well. It is also true – as mentioned earlier – that members of cyber-community influence each other and it can even enhance, strengthen their real social situation, i.e. inequality. The question arises whether key persons of connection hubs are leading persons in reality. According to Richard Florida the creative minority finds its place and feels at home at such communication hubs (Csepeli, 2007). According to my experience there is often a coincidence, concurrence between key persons of real and virtual space. Apart from this: those careful to chose their posts, makes photos from an interesting point of view and is able to criticize with clear arguments, may become a „hub”, while he is really mediocre in everyday life. Anyway, they are considered creative minority of virtual space. Leydesdorf notes that social systems – by their very special dynamics – work by re-distributing the possibility to act at local hubs (Leydesdorf, 2011). That means it is clearly possible for actors of communication hubs to fluctuate and change. So those who considers himeslf/herself to be part of creative society, might need to learn features and enhance ability of composing compressed messages.

Media indisputably plays an important role in the flow of information that unavoidably goes together with subjective distortion, direct influence or leaving some information unsaid willingly or unwillingly, the role of a 'gate-keeper' and thematisation. Taking only thematisation in consideration from above list, we might understand that within the connected communities I studied a well-placed post (picture and/or text) may initiate a conversation within the group. The post message does not intend to set what members of the group should think about the author or the content (although this possibility is not excluded altogether), but calls members of the matrix to talk about it. See: thematising.

In order to 'find a topic of conversation' otherwise call attention to himself/herself or others, it is necessary to have inclination for public performance. Members of connected matrixes often become actors, sharers in virtual, than in real space. Especially younger members of the studied group might seem to be inconsiderate. I think even the wiser generations take a risk in obtaining likes and comments; they do not consider what dangers arise from publishing a personal text or photo for other members of the cyber community. And it is very difficult to erase embarrassing content: deleting is in vain if others have already made copies or forwarded the content to others. friends. We have to talk about *passive network members*, too. They are not registered members of the community network, but quite often become 'actors' during different content shares or in photos posted. Such cases might cause quite embarrassing situations or on the bases of *any kind of promotion is usefull* the network gains a new member. On the other hand the content posted might become entertaining. In both cases two main features of media, namely periodicity and publicity are evident. The public accessible is a consciously

or unconsciously selected group of the contact matrix, who are expected to like the posts.

The content shared is often mere documentation of their whereabouts, activities, company and partner. Referring to an earlier hypothesis, we should note that documenting personal content/actions is a basic part of social identity: 'I exist, I am proud of something'. These statements become an item of reality only if others acknowledge them (like-interaction). In other words: it is in the interest of the person posting the content and reader/spectator for the connection network to be maintained.

'Things you do not post about are like never happened.' This attitude is characteristic of almost every smart device user. The most important thing is to show themselves, to be present so members of the network community might be very curious, yearn or simply be informed about them, so their identity get strengthened. The question arises whether each and every important event and occurrence gets to selected points of the matrix. Not at all. The self-editor, the 'gate keeper' lets only those events and occurrences published that enhance good feeling in the receiver, too. 'Nothing bad about myself, ever.'

But in order to arise attention of community members one has to post something more startling and exciting than average. The desire to get reinforcement might mislead those posting the content when publishing excessively personal content, switching off control that otherwise is alert and works well. Those sharing the content will realise that for more intense information, they get more effective fixing.⁶ We might postulate that fixing is the most effective when media-communication goes together with some kind of interaction (Faragó, 2014). In our case it is comment or chat conversation. Posting the content is never for the sake of posting itself; it is for reinforcement, for interaction.

It is again the very characteristic of mediatized connections; curiosity is the driving force to make users regularly inquire about how acquaintances are doing. Of course they do so in the hope that between lines, pictures and videos they might find some bad fate as well. Regular inquiry and posting proves periodicity of the media. Natural exhibitionism and excessive interest ensures publicity. Periodicity and publicity – as stated above – are basic features of media.

CHECK-FIELD

Community site sin cyber-space strongly contribute to form network thinking within the young adult group studied. They have to form groups, they manage categories, permeability, publicity, editing and re-arranging while they gain knowledge about basic operation of community networks. As mentioned in the foreword, this knowledge is seldom obtained from parents, during early socialization, learning, if not from other members of the community network, i.e. from even-aged children. Most often they learn using cyber-space the sadder the wiser way. The question arises whether social integration forces are stronger or

⁶ By fixing I mean the rememory of text or picture information, elaboration of the message.

being member of the cyber-community does not make them 'strong bound' member of the community and continue to live their solitary lives as in the realm of reality. Depth of relations is determined by the quality of personal communication and trust; obviously a friendly relation can be formed only leaving cyber-space: meeting face-to-face is another dimension altogether, but nowadays it lasts much shorter than online chatting. Personal talks leads to forming confidence, reinforcement of a stabile connection. A face-to-face meeting is suitable to unveil a series of possibly false communication and reduce the risk of aggression.

Reasoning members of the connected network find time for checking accuracy and timeliness of content posted by others the same way as some web stores request buyers and sellers to evaluate buyers and sellers by a qualitative scale. But here everyone must make his/her own index of trust.

Connective networks may act as a control field for media and political power. Community portals already act as a mediatory tool between the government and society, so they cannot be used without severe consequences if we do not understand contemporary cultural phenomena. Media system forced on society, censorship, consequently *curtailed publicity* (Faragó, 2014) operated by pride of power often leads to dramatic tenseness. A means of dissolving such tenseness is members of the connected network to feel enough inclination to document important events of virtual space for others. It is a media field again; we could call them net-reporters: virtual piazza, where net-reporters share content, was earlier referred to as street publicity (Faragó, 2011). New publicity organising within the network community is suitable to perform controlling role of traditional media. Activity of connected community members is prominently high in situations of violence. In such cases there's no point in sharing pre- and post event facts. Only real-time news make sense and there is a never-decreasing demand for such news.

Media events broadcasted and created by street publicity not only inform and strengthen social solidarity, but play a key role in forming the scale of values. We might consider it as network-communication of equals in rank, where trust index formed within the community matrix becomes an important factor again. The more elements the matrix contains, the more chance there is for detection of false, untimely, partly true, made up information shared. But excluding sharer of such information of the network is not sure.

IT IS REWARDING TO BE CYBER HERO IN THE SHORT RUN, TOO

I do not see any possibility for decomposing connection networks in cyber-space. The reason for this is that according to my opinion and all the facts and factors mentioned above, community matrix is filled with mediative content, and this mediative content maintains its dynamics. Not online cyber-world of 20 years ago and this present reality are very similar in this regard. For creators of the matrix it becomes an essential necessity to maintain connection points, but they would eagerly replace actors of hubs in certain situations. Not only because being a cyber-hero or key figure is rewarding in the short run. The network is in dynamic change, moreover hubs are occupied solely by members of the creative minority, who are

easy to replace by a new member. There is no geographical or time limit. Quality of network connections are defined by speed, online access and the possibility of mutual or group interactions. Members of the network are more open in the virtual space than in reality: documenting (posting, sharing) personal content or activity is an essential part of maintaining social identity in cyber-space.

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