
Performing Network Theory? Reflexive Relationship Management on Social Network Sites

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1 From Serendipity to Strategy: Networks as Asset

Networking has become a key imperative of contemporary capitalism. The *Rolodex* (and its digital version) has turned into a critical asset, the ‘know whom’ it seems indeed is valued almost as much as the ‘know how’ (Gann and Salter 2000). Along similar lines, the social capital embodied in trust-full ties is celebrated as a key source of collective prosperity (Putnam 2000). Moreover, rather than merely as a transitory phenomenon, networks have come to be seen as defining a new area of capitalist development (Castells 1996), as a manifestation of the ‘new spirit of capitalism’ (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005).

More specifically, networks offer, as a rich body of research substantiates, real economic benefits (Granovetter 2005). Social networks positively impact upon the path and pace of information flows (Granovetter 1973); they reduce uncertainty and the risk of opportunistic behavior by generating trust (Uzzi 1996); and specific positions within a network are potentially important sources of power (Burt 2004). In fact, with the transformation towards knowledge-based production and temporary project-based organization during the last decades, personal networks have turned into an ever more important asset (Wittel 2001).

On the one hand, innovation increasingly demands to tap into heterogeneous and diverse sources of knowledge. By cutting across organizational structures, personal networks afford the conduits that allow to combine information that is fragmented in the disciplinary ‘silos’ of organizations (Obstfeld 2005). Networks are not only key to early and accelerated information access, they also provide the relational resources for the interpretation and triangulation of information (Amin and Roberts

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2008). Networks, then, contribute to the transformation of information into knowledge (Brown and Duguid 2000).

On the other hand, the shift towards project-based organizational practices and temporary employment has fundamentally altered career paths (Jones 1996). Life-long affiliation with a single organization has turned from the rule into a rather rare exception. The emblematic ‘organizational man’ who is offered job security in exchange for loyalty is increasingly being replaced by ‘contractual (wo)man’ struggling to remain employable in a highly volatile market for temporary assignments (Grabher and Ibert 2006). In these increasingly unstable labor markets, personal networks are critical means to screen the market for job opportunities and follow-up employment, and to gain status in an environment that is regulated by reputation rather than by certificates (Windeler and Sydow 2001; Reagans et al. 2004).

Against the background of the transformation of knowledge production, organizational strategies and labor market governance, this paper argues that we are currently witnessing a profound shift in the status, strategies and practices of personal networking. Building and maintaining relationships have become an economic activity *in its own right*. Personal networks appear to be managed in an increasingly deliberate and conscious fashion. Networking more and more represents a strategic investment in social capital deliberately renegotiating boundaries between the private and professional realm (Grabher 2004: 1502–1506).

The praxis of personal networking is more and more shaped by perceptions, tools and devices that are derived from social network analysis (Healy 2011). This instrumentalization of social network analysis, we maintain in this paper, is strongly suggestive of the performativity of social network analysis. Two inter-related dynamics reinforce the performativity of social network analysis.

First, the spread of social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter has transformed the way of how networks are perceived (Donath and Boyd 2004). SNS render relationships transparent and calculable. SNS transform the previously diffuse and intricate amalgamation of social relations into a crisp graph of ties between nodes that, in principle, can be unequivocally categorized either as family, close friend, acquaintance or business contact. Moreover, SNS incorporate features and software tools that afford “valorimeters” (Caliskan and Callon 2010: 17) that translate incommensurable values like trust, sympathy or respect into quantitative indices and competitive rankings.

Second, the proliferation of SNS and the re-appreciation of social capital set off (and in turn have been boosted by) the emergence of a distinct genre of guidelines and prescriptions of how to manage and to ‘optimize’ social networks. This genre evolves in various media, ranging from academic publications, ‘airport-literature’, ‘how-to’-guides, blogs, and discussion groups to dedicated seminars and coaching. Of course, guides to socializing behavior are anything but new,¹ and the last

¹In fact, antecedents can be traced back to ancient Egypt up to the first comprehensive accounts by Erasmus von Rotterdam’s *De Civilitate* (1529) or Adolph Knigge’s *Über den Umgang mit Menschen* (1788).

decades saw a proliferation of attempts to evangelize a network gospel of linking up with ‘friends in higher places’. However, in contrast to these earlier accounts, the more recent wave of networking guidelines increasingly seeks to mobilize social network analysis to legitimize advice with scientific authority.

The paper starts with a brief overview on the current debate on performativity and the emergence of SNS (Sect. 2). In Sect. 3 the paper probes into the socio-technical affordances of tools and metrics of SNS that allow to incorporate principles of social network analysis into everyday practice. Section 4 provides an analysis of the literature on network management and online networking in academic business journals. We conclude the paper with a preliminary evaluation of the performativity thesis in the realm of SNS.

2 From Description to Prescription: The Performativity Debate and Networking Practices

2.1 Science as Social Engineering

The current debate of the *performativity thesis* has been instigated by Callon (1998, 2007) and subsequently been refined by MacKenzie and Millo (2003), and MacKenzie (2006). Economics, as Callon contends, produces a body of formal models and transportable techniques that through the dissemination into the economy (‘reality’) by economists and gatekeepers shapes, reformats and reorganizes the phenomena that the models purport to describe. The economy, Callon (1998: 30) concludes, “is embedded not in society but in economics”. In its strongest interpretation (MacKenzie 2004), this idea suggests that performative practices align empirical phenomena with the abstract models of science. The “socio-cognitive prosthesis” (Caliskan and Callon 2009: 380) of practical technologies, reproducible models and portable algorithms enable actors to accomplish calculative tasks previously beyond their reach. When enacted in everyday practice, these devices attune real settings with scientific models and their assumptions.

In the cogent and careful study of the performativity of economic theory on financial markets *An Engine, not a Camera*, MacKenzie (2006: 18–19) differentiates three kinds of performativity. Whereas *generic performativity* implies that theoretical models move beyond the realm of science and inform actual professional practices, *effective performativity* requires that theoretical models are applied so as to “make a difference” in practice. In the case of *Barnesian performativity* theoretical models alter processes “in ways that bear on their conformity to the aspect of [the theory] in question”. In the case of Barnesian performativity the application of the theoretical model transforms actual practices from a state of non-conformity to a state of conformity with its own predictions. The theoretical model, of course, also might induce, analogous to a self-defeating prophecy, counter-reactions to its own predictions: a case of a *counter-performative effect* (Healy 2011: 5).

The notion of performativity, as Aspers (2007) elaborated, is neither entirely new nor does the “performative loop” operate as smoothly and universally as suggested by some of its followers (see also Santos and Rodrigues 2009).² Nevertheless, we start from the proposition that social network analysis is performative in a similar theoretical sense, and increasingly on a similar empirical scale as the economic models studied in the social studies of (financial) markets (Callon 1998; MacKenzie 2006; MacKenzie and Millo 2003; Muniesa et al. 2007). At least two observations support an endeavor to explore this proposition (Healy 2011: 1–2). First, as intellectual and practical projects, social network analysis and economic theory show similarities in form. Second, while evidence of weaker versions of the performativity of social network analysis is available, its stronger versions are only circumstantially supported so far (Healy 2011: 2). To what extent stronger versions of performativity can empirically be corroborated is, in other words, an open question.

2.2 The Performative Loop of Social Network Analysis

How then might social network analysis, in principle, inform, shape or transform networking practices? Of course, reflexive considerations have not been absent from networking practices up until more recently. However, a particular strand of network research consistently warned of the dangers of a contamination of ‘life-world’ ties by the calculus of the ‘system-world’ (see, for example, Lundvall 1993; Eve 2002). ‘You can’t buy trust’ is an idiomatic expression of this line of reasoning that insisted in a strict separation between networks based on trust, and ties forged for profit. In this perspective, networks were likely to evolve according to three key principles.

First, actors normally tend to trust actors and connect with actors who share the same basic characteristics and attributes like ethnic background, gender, or socio-economic status: the power of homophily (McPherson et al. 2001). Second, relationships are more likely to be established if both actors are somehow situated proximate to each other (Powell et al. 2005). Proximity can refer to both spatial and/or social distance or to shared affiliations. Third, empirical research has elucidated that network building follows the rule of transitivity: if A is related to B and B is related to C, there is most likely a relation between A and C (Granovetter

²In the phenomenological tradition, Husserl and Heidegger have already theorized the interdependencies between scientific theory and “lifeworld” (Aspers 2007: 381–383). Drawing on this tradition, Giddens’ (1984: 32–33) notion of “double hermeneutics” alludes to changes in society induced by the application and enactment of scientific knowledge in everyday life. Turning to economy more specifically, Callon’s (1998: 22) proposition that the homo oeconomicus is not an incarnation of basic human traits but is formatted finds its precursor in Polanyi’s ([1944] 1957) concept of the “double movement”, albeit in different parlance of course. Finally, Callon’s approach is more restricted than some of his supporters claim, and seems primarily confined to a specific class of markets (switch-role markets) (Aspers 2007).

1973; Uzzi and Gillespie 2002). In a mutually self-reinforcing manner, all three principles encourage the establishment and reinforcement of dense, homogenous and coherent networks.

Another strand of social network analysis, in contrast, advances arguments about the economic benefits of sparse and heterogeneous networks. These network configurations allow to tap into a broader range of knowledge sources and to exploit “structural holes” by brokering across disconnected sub-networks (Burt, 1992, 2004; see also Simmel 1908). Following this particular strand of reasoning, performativity of social network analysis might first induce strategies to occupy network positions that lend themselves to arbitrage behavior. Second, performativity most likely entails a deliberate search for diversity in social relations. Beyond the realm of academic network analysis, however, the individual position within a network as well as the overall configuration of networks was more a matter of subjective perception than of explicit calculation up until more recently. This has radically changed with the advent of SNS. Calculation has entered the praxis of forging social relations (Cross et al. 2003).

3 Performativity Online: Socio-Technical Affordances of SNS

Technical support for the making and breaking of relationships is by no means a contemporary phenomenon.³ In the last decades the emergence of the Internet, of course, has opened up an unprecedented range of tools and devices supporting personal networking. Templates and theoretical models from social network analysis seem to be deeply incorporated into the design of the socio-technological affordances (Gaver 1996) of SNS (Mejias 2010).

3.1 SNS as Camera I: Revealing Actual and Potential Ties

The advent of Social Networking Sites (SNS) heralded by Sixdegrees.com in 1997 has radically altered the field of personal networking. SNS can be described as partially bounded systems that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile and to connect with other members (Boyd and Ellison 2007). In the ever expanding-ecology of SNS (Papachrassi 2009; Kim et al. 2010), three networks stand out. First, Facebook, with 1.79 billion active users (Facebook 2016) the most popular one, allows its users to communicate and share content (pictures, videos, links, etc.) which each other via different tools. Second, LinkedIn with 433 million members (LinkedIn 2017) is perceived as the biggest SNS in the realm

³In the mid-nineteenth century, to name but one example, the Carte de Visit (CDV), a small, standardized portrait photograph, shared among friends, relatives and acquaintances, gained widespread popularity in Europe and America (Plunkett 2003). As a material manifestation of the own social cosmos, CDVs were presented to others and collected in dedicated albums—a *Facebook* quite literally.

of business, and is built around the display of individual job experience and the exchange of mostly job-related personal referrals. Third, the real-time micro-blogging platform Twitter enables its 317 million active users (Twitter 2016) to send and receive restricted text-messages ('tweets') of 140 characters maximum. Unlike most other SNS, the Twitter network is asymmetric and made up of unidirectional relations; members do not necessarily mutually follow each other (Gruzd et al. 2011).

Within the expanding ecology of Internet-based platforms, the distinctions between SNS and other web-based media like blogs, wikis or online communities become increasingly blurred.⁴ Yet two distinct features of SNS resonate with the notion of "socio-cognitive prostheses" (Caliskan and Callon 2009: 380) that facilitate the incorporation of social network analytical premises into actual networking practice.

On the one hand, SNS profiles usually comprise a list of other members with whom the network member shares a connection, and allow viewing this list of connections and those made by others within the network. These "networked publics" (Boyd 2010) that emerge as a result of networked technology and practice, then, transform the formerly diffuse and implicit individual social world into the explicit sociogram of ties and nodes that indicates the path-length to individual contacts (cf. Moreno 1934). Moreover, SNS allow to continuously monitor the basic architecture of the networks of friends, colleagues and competitors (Utz 2010). Since the architecture of networks is publically displayed, networks turn into a visible expression of social capital and relational status (Donath and Boyd 2004).

On the other hand, most SNS comprise "Affiliation Engines" that routinely suggest lists of "people you may know" to encourage network members to expand their network by including these suggested contacts. Despite the diverse algorithms that drive these engines, they seem to be organized around three principles. First, resonating with the rule of transitivity, most algorithms of SNS are based on the assumption that a member most likely is familiar with the friend of friends (of friends). Shared affiliations constitute a second principle of algorithms that suggest to link up with members of the same community or members who have worked for the same organization. Finally, some affiliation engines also take shared interests and "likes" (expressions of affinity and a form of "social grooming"; Boyd 2010: 6) into account. Twitter, for example, suggests to connect with members who follow the same tweets. Affiliation engines, as this third principle elucidates, are not only about transforming offline-acquaintances into online contacts and about increasing the congruence between online and offline networks. Rather, SNS also provide affordances to establish online-only relations with people whom you, according the rule of homophily, should know.

⁴Most generally, online communities are organized around common interests while the primary focus of SNS is on networking (Haythornthwaite and Kendall 2010).

3.2 SNS as Camera II: Revealing Relational Status

Rather than just rendering relational structures transparent (and expandable), SNS offer an extending spectrum of devices to quantify, statistically analyze, and evaluate personal networks. On the one hand, SNS provide basic tools that can be applied by members in everyday practice. LinkedIn, for example, offers information about the size of the personal network up to three degrees of separation; it reveals dominant industries and locations within the ego-network of a member; and it unravels network dynamics, such as fast growing network domains (in terms of shared organizational affiliations, for example). The incommensurable subjective perceptions of sympathy, social proximity or distance are translated into the quasi-objectivity of a neat sociogram.

On the other hand, there is a growing business segment that offers social network metrics. These dedicated businesses promise to assess influence and centrality in social networks with quantitative scores and figures that ostensibly measure centrality and influence in social networks. The biggest provider of SNS “valorimeters” (Caliskan and Callon 2010: 17) is the *Klout-Score*, a representation of influence ranging from 1 to 100. The company computes data from several SNS and online communities (i.e. Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Google+, and Foursquare). The same holds true for *PeerIndex*, the biggest competitor of Klout. Additionally, there are several smaller providers that concentrate on a single SNS (for an overview: Strom 2011).

Although the algorithms of these network metrics are not revealed in detail, they build on general assumptions of social network analysis. Most obviously, they refer to different notions of centrality, i.e. degree and *Eigenvector*. The number of ties and the centrality of the nodes with whom a member is connected are taken as key proxies for influence in online social networks. Additionally, these algorithms calculate the frequency of interaction on SNS and of mentions in tweets and posts. Even if these metrics are discussed controversially and ritually played down in their actual significance in the SNS media environment, they unfold a significant impact on networking behavior. Rankings, as has been demonstrated for a variety of social settings (MacKenzie 2006; Kornberger and Carter 2010; Pollock and D’Adderio 2012) cannot be reduced to a mere representation of the world. Rather, they induce “mechanisms of reactivity” (Espeland and Sauder 2007: 5) amongst actors who, more or less consciously, incorporate the metrics of the ranking into their behavioral calculus.⁵ Not surprisingly then the emergence of social network metrics gives rise to the proliferation of tools and templates to leverage and boost the scores like Klout-Index (Schaefer 2012). Similar to search engine optimization, technological devices increasingly align social interaction.

⁵The role of social network metrics in the individual calculus of networkers is indicated by the spread of services like *FanSlave*. By taking the marketization of social capital to the next level of outright monetarization, these services offer packages of „authentic“ Facebook-“likes” and Facebook-“comments” by a sub-network that can be customized in terms of geography, language and socio-demographic criteria.

4 Performativity Offline: The Evolving Genre of Network Guidelines

The proliferation of SNS has triggered (and in turn been reinforced by) the emergence of a distinct genre of prescriptions of how to manage and to ‘optimize’ social networks. This genre evolves across various media, ranging from ‘how to’-guidelines in business journals, check lists in newspapers, and blogs. Websites ponder the question “Does your Klout score determine your value?” (Socialmediaexaminer 2012); books deal with ‘LinkedIn for Dummies’, ‘Networking Like a Pro’ or ‘The Power Formula for LinkedIn Success’; and coaches and consultants promise hands-on advice for the reengineering of networks in seminars like ‘Networking Skills’ or ‘The Personal Network Action Plan’. The diffusion of social network analytical concepts and templates into networking praxis is further reinforced by the personal overlap between theoreticians, teachers, and coaches (see, for example, Burt and Ronchi 2007; Uzzi and Dunlap 2005). Social network analysts are increasingly employed at business schools (Healy 2011), and their theories are embraced in the curricula of an increasing number subjects (Janasz and Forret 2008).

The genre of prescriptions for self-improvement, again, is not a creation of more recent times (Illouz 2007: 9).⁶ However, SNS has significantly enhanced its scope and been increasingly legitimized with the theoretical authority of network research (Cross et al. 2003). Practitioners, of course, follow these prescriptions not in a straightforward fashion. The canon of guidelines and suggestions, however, percolates through the vocabularies of individual self-understanding as well as the perception of the individual social cosmos (Illouz 2007: 10).

4.1 Translating Social Network Analysis into Business Advice: Academic Business Journals

This chapter examines publications on network management and online networking that have been published in academic business journals. As a starting point, we selected the *Journal Quality List* (45th edition, April 2012) edited by the Department of Management at the University of Melbourne (Harzing 2012).⁷ In total, 184 peer-reviewed business journals were included into our analysis.

⁶We assume that the proliferation of the network imagery is also, though rather indirectly, related to the loss of significance of a very distinct, historically authoritative sociogram—the family tree.

⁷The *Journal Quality List* itself is not a ranking of academic journals, but a compilation of 21 different journal rankings from a variety of sources, including business schools and universities (e.g. ESSEC Business School Paris or Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien), newspapers (*Financial Times* Top 45 Business Journals Ranking), business magazines (e.g. *British Journal of Management*) or professional associations (e.g. *Australian Business Deans Council*). The *Journal Quality List* comprises academic journals from a broad variety of subject areas like “economics”, “finance and accounting”, “marketing” or “sociology”. To conduct the literature review, we focused on the subject areas “communication”, “entrepreneurship”, “general management and strategy”, “organization studies”, “human resource management” and “industrial relations”.

In the next step, we searched these journals for the keywords ‘social networking sites’, ‘Facebook’, ‘LinkedIn’, and ‘social media’. From the resulting total of 967 papers, we excluded papers with an exclusively empirical focus and those that referred to inter-organizational networks. Correspondingly, we included publications on inter-personal networking that offered at least fragmentary advice about optimal network structures and networking strategies. In sum, 41 papers published in 14 different journals provided the basis for the literature review (see Appendix 2). The sample ranged from papers on specific software to essays on management education, leadership development and human resources. Only 14 papers focused exclusively on generic networking recommendations.

Following the notion of grounded theory (Strauss 1987), the texts were coded by using a set of core and sub categories (see Appendix 1). These categories were aimed at identifying favorable network structures, economically promising networking strategies as well as advantageous network positions with which actors should seek to establish contact. Furthermore, these categories elucidate possible networking risks and refer to potentially valuable conclusions drawn from social network analysis.

4.2 How to “Optimize” Your Network: Preliminary Results

Despite a certain diversity, the instructions and guidelines offered converge towards a few assumptions and propositions on economically beneficial networking strategies. Not surprisingly, nearly all papers stressed the increasing importance of social capital concerning learning and job market opportunities: “possessing effective networking skills is even more important given changes in the work environment” (P16). One paper directly made reference to the visibility of relations on SNS: “Soon, we expect, organizations will begin to seek out employees with demonstrably strong online connections (...). The best networkers will become even more highly valued” (P29).

4.3 Network Size

When it comes to the size of the optimal network, 12 of 14 papers recommended a highly selective and strategic approach towards network growth due to the limitations of managing extensive networks effectively. Only one paper (P25) argued in favor of a growth strategy following the maxim of “bigger is better”. Five papers even suggest to apply “a strong hand” (P22) to end relations, and advice networkers to make “some hard decisions to back away from redundant and energy-sapping relationships” (P8).

4.4 Network Diversity

In sum, 22 papers made suggestions about the optimal network structure. Only two of them seemed to appreciate homogenous networks of technological experts, while a majority of 15 papers favored diverse network structures: “Networks of high performers are more diverse than those of average or lower performers” (P3), mainly since they allow to exploit a broader range of knowledge sources: “Highly diverse network ties can help you develop more complete, creative, and unbiased views of issues” (P41). Concurrently, only two papers emphasized the strengths of dense network configurations (P27, P30), while three recommended balancing dense and diverse networks (P31, P16, P40). The appreciation of diversity is also corroborated by two other observations.

First, when it comes to preferential attachment, 18 papers recommend to establish relationships with actors who exhibit some kind of importance, varyingly labeled “kingpins” (P2), “experts” (P11), “loveable stars” (P6) or “inner circle” (P37). Connections with these central nodes afford access to knowledge, financial resources or other contacts. These assumptions reflect different understandings of network centrality. While “hubs” (P35) seem to show high levels of degree-centrality, “super-connectors” (P41) are characterized by their closeness to other nodes.

However, at least 11 of this 18 articles accentuate the usefulness of the network periphery such as “junior colleagues who are involved in the front line” (P2) or persons without formal power (P23) since “having ties to peripheral zones makes it possible to bring new ideas to the creative process” (P7). Additionally, 15 papers suggest connecting to actors who are likely to diversify one’s portfolio of relations: “leaders develop contacts not only in the typical areas—local clubs, industry associations, and customer and supplier relations—but beyond them” (P22).

Second, a decline in diversity is widely perceived as major risk in networking. At least seven articles refer quite explicitly to problems of cohesion and proximity:

Choosing contacts to maximize a sense of trust in your network (...) can inadvertently undercut its diversity. Another obstacle (...) is the proximity principle, which holds that workers prefer to populate their networks with the people they spend the most time with. (P41)

Homophily is regarded as a key pitfall of networking strategies: “One of the greatest drawbacks of choosing to work with similar people is the limited range of perspectives that a homogeneous group often brings to bear on a problem” (P6). Especially, the senior staff is asked to be aware of network closure (P7, P8, P40): “Over time, their networks become more selective and homogenous. Consequently, they are more impaired in their ability to accurately convey what is going on” (P2).

4.5 Network Position and Networking Orientation⁸

With regard to most favorable structural positions, the suggestions (given by 18 papers) are rather inconsistent. Some authors endorse capturing the position of a hub (P9, P20, P22, P30); they see bonding as the most promising network strategy: “connectedness makes them attractive to other players” (P20). Bridging and taking advantage of structural holes is mentioned rather seldom. Only three papers consider the powerful broker benefiting from information asymmetries as a rewarding network position (P9, P15, P29). Instead, ten papers argue in favor of strategies to actively connect third parties. Sparse networks and unconnected sub-networks are not seen as an opportunity to accumulate superior information but to foster connectivity: “When you detect networks that appear to be disconnected, bridge the gap not through yourself, but helping representatives from the different networks to connect” (P2). In the reviewed literature, *tertius iungens*-approaches [i.e., approaches to introduce disconnected people and facilitate interaction among them (Obstfeld 2005)] are favored over *tertius gaudens*-approaches [i.e. approaches that seek to leverage a broker position between disconnected units by monopolizing interaction (Burt 1992)]. Although the reviewed literature endorses an ethos of strategic behavior, network members should not to be treated as “mere resources” (P16). Rather, the papers we analyzed suggest to develop reciprocity and trust in order to benefit from long-term profits.

4.6 Theoretical Points of Reference

The suggestions for network management and online networking are not simply presented as result of experiential and empirical induction. Reference to theoretical and methodological considerations of social network analysis could be found in 30 papers. First, seven of them make reference to or apply social network analysis as a means to make informal networks visible and turn relations into calculable assets: “A tool called social network analysis can be applied to make clear where such critical junctures exist within the organization” (P9). Moreover, even authors with a distinct background in business studies widely refer to social network theory:

There is a huge amount of work in sociology, really beautiful work that shows, especially if you want innovation and novelty, that your weak ties are a better place to go than your strong ties. Your weak tie network is extremely valuable. (P28)

As regards individual authors, the reviewed literature refers, apart from 11 quotations of Mark Granovetter, extensively to Ronald Burt. In sum, 23 papers employ Burt’s concept of structural holes, or at least selected aspects of

⁸The term “networking orientation” denotes a construct of medium specificity and a “strategic orientation” that refers to preferred means for approaching problems in a social context (Levine et al. 2000; Obstfeld 2005).

it. Additionally, “Dunbar’s number” that suggests a cognitive limitation of the human capacity to maintain social relationships is widely cited. When it comes to networking orientation, one paper extensively makes reference to David Obstfeld’s notion of *tertius iungens* (P2). Social network theories then not only represent analytical categories to describe empirical realities. Rather network concepts are regarded as socio-technological tools to deliberately engineer the social world.

5 Performing Social Network Analysis? Summary and Conclusion

Networking has more and more turned into a reflexive and strategic investment in relational capital that provides a key resource to navigate through increasingly volatile markets for information, reputation, and employment (Jones 1996; Sydow et al. 2004; Grabher and Ibert 2006). The more recent advent and global proliferation of SNS like Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter advanced networking practices to a new level of reflexivity. The increasing mobilization of the theoretical authority of social network analysis to forge the socio-technological affordances and the actual praxis of SNS, we maintain in this paper, is highly suggestive of a performativity of networks. More specifically, the present analysis was aimed at answering the question which dimension of performativity (as identified by MacKenzie 2006: 18–19) is at play in the realm of social networking.

Generic performativity is evinced in the very imagery of nodes and ties that in itself represents an abstractified perception of personal relations. The imagery of the sociogram (cf. Moreno 1934) with its crisp geometries is a basic accomplishment of social network analysis that has shaped the basic vocabulary of SNS. As “socio-cognitive prosthesis” (Caliskan and Callon 2009: 380) SNS transform the diffuse social world of subjective sympathies, familiarity, social proximity or distance into what is perceived as *social networks*. Yet, the (almost naturalized) enactment of the idioms of social network analysis does not necessarily imply an impact on both the practices of networking and the structure of personal networks. Indeed, available evidence suggests that SNS (like Facebook or LinkedIn) are primarily employed to re-activate, maintain or strengthen relations that have been established offline (e.g. Ellison et al. 2006; Cheung et al. 2011). The socio-technological affordances of SNS, then, primarily seem to provide additional options to communicate with offline contacts.

Effective performativity requires that the employment of (an aspect of) social network analysis “makes a difference” in practice (MacKenzie 2006), i.e. impacts significantly on actual networking processes. At least two socio-technological features of SNS actually shape both tie formation and node selection. First, as an ‘engine’, SNS enable to extend personal networks by activating “dormant ties” (Levin et al. 2011) and by establishing “latent ties” (Genoni et al. 2005). SNS afford “persistence” (Boyd 2010: 7–8) by alerting to activities of nodes that have drifted towards the periphery of awareness, and by adding ephemeral ties to the portfolio of connections. Second, the increased transparency of networks allows to strategically

mobilize relational resources by linking up with nodes who are as close as two or three degrees of separation. Reference to shared contacts eases resource-dependent tie formation (Skeels and Grudin 2009).

Such a strategic approach is also a chief mantra of the evolving genre of network guidelines. An analysis of 41 academic publications offering advice on networking practices stresses the importance of a considerate selection of contacts and of strategic relationship management. In this literature, SNS are praised as effective socio-technologies to pursue these goals. In particular, they provide opportunities for occupying a *tertius*-position, either as a *tertius gaudens* (Burt 1992) who exploits structural wholes or as *tertius iungens* (Obstfeld 2005; Long Lingo and O'Mahony 2010) who bridges formerly decoupled sub-networks. However, it remains an open question to what extent such a functional networking orientation resonating with the paradoxical notion of "strategic friendship" (Grabher and Ibert 2006) actually impacts on every-day networking practices. Effective performativity of social network analysis, therefore, seems to apply in particular occasions and specific settings only (see also Ellison et al. 2011)

Two socio-technical affordances of SNS seem to indicate *Barnesian performativity* in the sense that theoretical models of social network analysis alter processes "in ways that bear on their conformity to the aspect of [the theory] in question" (MacKenzie 2006: 16–18). First, the algorithms of affiliation engines that are built around the rules of homophily and transitivity are increasingly molding network growth. The software-generated suggestions to connect with 'people you might know' enhance awareness of offline networks in online profiles. Moreover, by proactively contributing to the formation of ties with 'friends of friends', affiliation engines attune network structures to the rule of transitivity. Affiliation engines disperse "forbidden triads" (Granovetter 1973: 1363) by establishing at least weak ties between two nodes who have a significant overlap in their portfolio of connections. In a similar vein, affiliation engines driven by shared interests, raise the level of homophily in a network by triggering ties between "birds of a feather" (McPherson et al. 2001). Indeed, finding like-minded persons is both a promise of SNS and an important motivation to join them (Lin and Lu 2011).

Second, SNS afford the socio-technical infrastructure of an expanding spectrum of "valorimeters" (Caliskan and Callon 2010: 17). Indices like the *Klout-Score* or *PeerIndex* transform subjective perceptions into quasi-objective and commensurable scales (see Schaefer 2012). The reference to *Eigenvector* centrality is likely to trigger cumulative dynamics within wider network structures (Powell et al. 1996). In attempts to improve network ranking, nodes preferentially attach to central nodes and contribute to the ongoing stratification of networks (Newman 2001). This behavior is also consistent with the advice of networking guidelines that stress the strategic importance to link up with central nodes and "super-connectors" (Uzzi and Dunlap 2005).

The 'how to'-literature on personal networking, however, also reveals some moments of *counter-performativity* that induce, analogous to a self-defeating prophecy, counter-reactions to predictions of social network analysis. Diversity is

widely regarded as a key asset in network management since it affords access to diverse source of knowledge, and benefits individual careers as well as organizational development (Healy 2011: 19–20). Consequently, networking guidelines warn against the pitfalls of homophily and transitivity.

In the next steps of our research⁹ we also seek to examine the assumption that the performativity of networking practices is not confined to the realm of SNS. Rather, these practices enacted online increasingly transform the ways we establish and maintain relationships in our offline world (Beer 2008). SNS then afford not only an online version of our offline networks, rather they precipitate a more performative approach towards our own social worlds more generally.

Appendix 1: Core and Sub Categories for the Text Analysis

Core category	Sub category
Network structure	Size
	Density
	Diversity
	Sub-networks
	Other
Network position	Hub
	Broker
	Connector
	Other
Network relations, core	Hub
	Broker
	Facilitator
	Connector
	Other
Network relations, periphery	Hub
	Broker
	Connector
	Periphery
	Other
Networking orientation	Bonding
	Bridging
	Facilitating
	Other

(continued)

⁹This paper results form a research project funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG GR 1913/10-1).

Network failures	Over-embeddedness
	Cohesion
	Multiplicity
	Other
Networking rationality	Opportunistic
	Altruistic
	Other
Theoretical reference	Burt
	Granovetter
	Other

Appendix 2: Papers Included in the Literature Review on Social Network Management and Online Networking (Sect. 4)

P1: Alstyne, M. 2012. Why strong ties matter more in a fast-changing environment. *MIT Sloan Management Review* 53: 1–3.

P2: Anand, N., Conger, J.A. 2007. Capabilities of the Consummate Networker. *Organizational Dynamics* 36.1: 13–27.

P3: Athey, R. 2008. It’s 2008: do you know where your talent is? Connecting people to what matters. *Journal of Business Strategy* 29.4: 4–14.

P4: Brown, R. 2010. Reputation Management. *Business Information Review* 27.1: 56–64.

P5: Byham, W.C. 2009. Start Networking Right Away (Even If You Hate It). *Harvard Business Review* January: 22.

P6: Casciaro, T., Sousa Lobo, M. 2005. Competent Jerks, Loveable Fool, and the Formation of Social Networks. *Harvard Business Review* June: 92–99.

P7: Chauvet, V., Chollet, B., Soda, G., Huault, I. 2011. The contribution of network research to managerial culture and practice. *European Management Journal* 29: 321–334.

P8: Cross, R., Gray, P., Cunningham, S., Showers, M., Thomas, R. 2010. How to Make Employee Networks Really Work. *MIT Sloan Management Review* 52.1: 83–90.

P9: Cross, R., Liedtka, J., Weiss, L. 2005. A practical guide to Social Networks. *Harvard Business Review* March: 1–9.

P10: Cross, R., Nohria, N., Parker, A. 2002. Six Myths about Informal Networking—and How to Overcome Them. *MIT Sloan Management Review* Spring: 67–75.

P11: Cross, R., Thomas, R. 2011. A Smarter Way to Network. *Harvard Business Review* July–August: 149–153.

P12: Dale, S. 2011: Surviving and thriving as a 21st century knowledge and information professional. *Business Information Review* 28.1: 30–37.

P13: Dutta, S. 2010. What’s Your Personal Social Media Strategy? *Harvard Business Review* November: 127–130.

- P14: Enders, A., Hungenberg, H., Denker, H.-P., Mauch, S. 2008. The long tail of social networking: Revenue models of social networking sites. *European Management Journal* 26: 199–211.
- P15: Flemming, L., Juda, A. 2004. A Network of Invention. *Harvard Business Review* 82.4: 22.
- P16: Friar, J.H., Eddleston, K.A. 2007. Making Connections for Success: A Networking Exercise. *Journal of Management Education* 31.1: 104–127.
- P17: Gratton, L. 2009. How to “Glow” and Become a Better Leader. *Business Strategy Review* Summer: 9–12.
- P18: Gratton, L. 2011. Workplace 2025—What will it look like? *Organizational Dynamics* 40: 246–254.
- P19: Gray, K. 2009. Creative career development. An entrepreneur’s guide. *Business Information Review* 26.4: 288–292.
- P20: Harris, L., Rae, A. 2011. Building a personal brand through social networking. *Journal of Business Strategy* 32.5: 14–21.
- P21: Harris, L., Rae, A. 2010. The online connection: transforming marketing strategy for small business. *Journal of Business Strategy* 31.2: 4–12.
- P22: Ibarra, H., Hansen, M. 2011. Are you a collaborative leader? *Harvard Business Review* July–August: 69–74.
- P23: Ibarra, H., Hunter, M. 2007. How Leaders create and use networks. *Harvard Business Review* January: 40–47.
- P24: Jacobs, G.H. 2009. Online Professional Networking. *Contract Management* August: 10–14.
- P25: Janasz, S., Forret, M.L. 2008. Learning the Art of Networking: A Critical Skill for Enhancing Social Capital and Career Success. *Journal of Management Education* 32.5: 629–650.
- P26: Jones, T.D., Swain, D.E. 2012. Managing Your Online Professional Identity. *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 28.2: 29–31.
- P27: Kietzman, J.H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I.P., Silvestre, B.S. 2011. Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons* 54: 241–251.
- P28: Kiron, D. 2012. Interview with Andrew McAfee: What Sells CEOs on Social Networking. *MIT Sloan Management Review* 53.3: 1–6.
- P29: Korotov, K., Khapova, S.N., Arthur, M.B. 2011. Career Entrepreneurship. *Organizational Dynamics* 40: 127–135.
- P30: Lanzolla G., Anderson, J. 2008. Digital transformation. *Business Strategy Review* Summer: 73–76.
- P31: Lengnick-Hall, M.L., Lengnick-Hall, C.A. 2003. HR’s role in building relationship networks. *Academy of Management Executive* 17.4: 53–63.
- P32: Levin, D.Z., Walter, J., Murnighan, J.K. 2011. Dormant Ties: The Value of Reconnecting. *Organization Science* 22.4: 923–939.
- P33: Miller, L.G., Christakis, N.A. 2011. Tapping the Power of Social Networks. *Harvard Business Review* September: 28.
- P34: Molinsky, A.L., Davenport, T.H., Iyler, B. 2012. Three Skills every 21st-Century Manager need. *Harvard Business Review* January–February: 139–143.

P35: Patrick, J. 2008. Coming Attractions. *Business Strategy Review* Winter: 59–60.

P36: Roberts, S.J., Roach, T. 2009. Social Networking Websites and Human Resource Personnel: Suggestions for Job Searchers. *Business Communication Quarterly* 72.1: 110–114.

P37: Sacks, M.A., Graves, N. 2012. How Many “Friends” Do You Need? Teaching Students How to Network Using Social Media. *Business Communication Quarterly* 75.1: 80–88.

P38: Schweer, M., Assimakopoulos, D., Cross, R., Thomas, R. 2012. Building a well-networked organization. *MIT Sloan Management Review* 52.2: 35–42.

P39: Strehlke, C. 2010. Social Network Sites: A starting point for career development. *Journal of Employment Counseling* 47: 38–48.

P40: Üstüner, T., Godes, D. 2006. Better Sales Networks. *Harvard Business Review* July–August: 102–112.

P41: Uzzi, B. Dunlap, S. 2005. How to Build Your Network. *Harvard Business Review* December: 53–60.

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