SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE ERA OF THE INTERNET

Zhukovskaya O., *Belarusian State University, Minsk, Republic of Belarus*

In order to outline the main features of social capital in the era of the Internet it is necessary to consider the following issues.

First of all, it is important to work out the definition of social capital. It is possible to define this phenomenon as organizational and economic relations between social and economic subjects that bring social and economic benefits (in the form, for example, of obtaining direct or indirect income) by saving transaction and transformation costs as well as access to the variety of resource types, benefits and values (including information) through networking social and economic relations at the level of society, social groups and individuals. We emphasize that either online or offline relations, which provide the usage of the resources that are inaccessible outside these interactions, constitute social capital in the Internet era.

Secondly, it is essential to take into account the structural features of social capital and the types of Internet activities. In general *three dimensions* of social capital are identified: *structural* (network ties, network configuration and appropriate organisation), *cognitive* (shared norms and language as well as shared narratives) and *relational* (norms, trust, obligation and identification) [1, p. 251]. The relational component of social capital makes it possible to gain access to knowledge and gives motivation for the exchange of information. We should also mention the approach to the allocation of five forms of structural social capital (business network assets, information network assets, research network assets, participation assets and relational assets) and one form of cognitive social capital (reciprocal trust) [2, p. 681].

Thus, the structural component of social capital is recognized as more important (due to the effect of synergy, elimination of duplication, acceleration and reduction of the costs of information exchange and diffusion of innovation [3, p. 220–221]) compared with the cognitive one. By contrast, the cognitive components of social capital are especially important for trust (including institutional trust) and norms (for example, reciprocity, as well as civic participation) that lead to an increase in the role of human capital and innovativeness. Nevertheless, networks (in comparison with markets and hierarchies) are considered to provide the greatest reduction of transaction costs.

Moreover, it is important to distinguish between *the conceptions of social capital at the individual and organisational level as well as at the community level.* In this relation, first of all, we also have to underline *the increasing role of social networks nowadays.* Community is becoming more and more embedded in online social networks rather than in offline activities: people are tucked away in their homes rather than conversing in real life. The Internet affords opportunities to constitute networks at low costs, nevertheless, in order to increase social capital the Internet usage should be accompanied by more offline interpersonal contacts, organizational participation, and commitment to community [4, p. 438]. Here we should also mention crowdsourcing as a problem-solving three-step model (constructing a crowd, developing crowd capabilities and harnessing crowd capabilities [5, p. 80]) that is playing a significant role in creating and sustaining competitive advantage by means of the following main alternatives: crowd-voting, idea crowdsourcing, micro-task crowdsourcing and solution crowdsourcing [5, p. 79]. This tool is used mostly online and it is a powerful source for creating value by means of social capital on the Internet.

On top of that, we distinguish between *synchronous and asynchronous Internet activities* (the former tend to be more significant for building network social capital, nevertheless the latter is more widely used): for instance, asynchronous e-mail is the most frequently used Internet activity (for 48 % of all contact with distant kin and for 60% of all contact with distant friends [4, p. 444]).

In general, the activities fall into two categories: social activities (such as e-mail and chatting that promote interactions), and asocial activities (for example, Web surfing and reading the news); when the Internet engages people primarily in asocial activities, then even more than television, it can turn people away from community, organizational and political involvement, and domestic life [4, p. 451]. So, in order to talk about the positive influence of the Internet on social capital we should focus on stimulating and developing social and synchronous Internet activities during interpersonal, interorganisational, and community interactions.

Thirdly, it is vital to consider different varieties of social capital (some of the main varieties are presented in Table). Bonding and linking social capital, as well as civic culture, are thought to promote the economic development, while «bridging can divert the resources and energy of society to a redistributive struggle for rent» [6].

Table 1 – Main features of the varieties of social capital

Varieties of social capital	Key features
Bridging	Broad social networks, a large «radius of trust», shared norms and values among groups of people with different social statuses (heterogeneous groups) as well as the creation of broad public coalitions («Putnam-type groups»).
Bonding	Relationships within homogeneous groups (kinship or similar demographic characteristics) of people with a «limited morality» and narrow «radius of trust» as well as the emergence of narrow interest groups («Olson-type groups»).
Linking	Occurs when interacting with power structures, as well as people who occupy high positions in the political or social hierarchy.
Civic culture	It implies that people have the sense of ownership to public affairs and personal responsibility for the situation in society, thereby imposing a significant impact on the quality of state and municipal government.

Source: [7, p. 227].

Social capital could have open and closed character, which correlates with M. Grannovetter's concept of soft ties (weak ties) and hard ties (strong ties) [8]: it is mainly soft (and not hard) communications that solve the problems of collective action and facilitate the exchange of information.

For instance, adults are using Facebook to maintain large, diffuse networks of friends, with a positive impact on their accumulation of bridging social capital; although it is tempting to consider these large networks of acquaintances as shallow, in reality these connections have true potential for generating benefits for Facebook users [9, p. 444]. Facebook usage was found to be associated with distinct measures of social capital, including bridging social capital (which emphasizes the informational benefits of a heterogeneous network of weak ties) and bonding social capital (which emphasizes emotional benefits from strong ties to close friends and family) [9, p. 435].

Lastly, it is necessary to consider the dualistic nature of the Internet. On the one side, it assures the flow of resources and information as well as provides new additional means of communication. On the other side, the Internet takes people away from their communities and families.

In general, online ties may be less able than offline connections to foster complex friendships, provide intangible resources such as emotional support, and tangible material aid: although the Internet enhanced weak online ties, it simultaneously decreased stronger offline interactions [4, p. 439]. All in all, Internet activities may lead to larger social networks with more weak ties.

At the same time, the Internet usage increases participatory capital: the more people are on the Internet and involved in online organizational and political activities, the more they participate in offline organizational and political interactions. The results suggest that the Internet increases interpersonal connectivity and organizational involvement, however, this can not only expose people to more contact and more information, but also reduce commitment to community [4, p. 450–451].

Thus, in order to supplement social capital, the Internet usage should contribute to offline interpersonal interactions as well as affect organizational participation and increase commitment to community [4, p. 441].

Taking into account all the above-mentioned aspects, the Internet could become a tool for building and maintaining social capital even on international level.

The Internet is regarded as especially useful in connecting geographically dispersed people and organizations bonded by shared interests as well for maintaining existing ties and overcoming limitations of space and time than for creating new ones [4, 440]. It is vital to notice that the Internet has lower entry and exit costs than offline life [10, p. 611] and that's why it could be used for promoting interactions especially in large territorial units (for example, the EAEU), where the main function and task of social capital is to «ensure proper accountability of the government» [11, p. 65]: «the larger the territorial entity is, the more important is the role of state and municipal government as a transmission mechanism between social capital and the quality of life» [11, p. 65].

To conclude, the prospects for the social capital formation under the auspices of the EAEU are largely based on the digitalization. Nevertheless for creating and developing social capital in the era of the Internet it is essential to combine online and offline interactions: the formation of online virtual communities is only a way to expand the range of various means of communication.

References

1. Nahapiet, J. Social capital, intellectual capital, and the organizational advantage / J. Nahapiet, S. Ghoshal // The Acad. of Management Rev. – 1998. – Vol. 23, № 2. – P. 242–266.

2. Landry, R. Does social capital determine innovation? To what extent? / R. Landry, N. Amara, M. Lamari // Technological Forecasting a. Social Change. – 2002. – Vol. 69, № 7. – P. 681–701.

3. Kaasa, A. Effects of different dimensions of social capital on innovative activity: Evidence from Europe at the regional level / A. Kaasa // Technovation. – 2009. – № 29. – P. 218–233.

4. Does the Internet increase, decrease, or supplement social capital? : social networks, participation, and community commitment / B. Wellmann [et al.] // Amer. Behavioral Scientist. – 2001. – № 45. – P. 436–455.

5. How to work a crowd: developing crowd capital through crowdsourcing / J. Prpić [et al.] // Business Horizons. – 2015. – Vol. 58, Iss.1. – P. 77–85.

6. Halpern, D. Social capital / D. Halpern. – Cambridge ; Malden : Polity Press, 2005. – XI, 388 p.

7. Жуковская, О. Ю. Социальный капитал в национальных инновационных системах стран с малой экономикой Северной Европы / О. Ю. Жуковская // Беларусь и мировые экономические процессы : сб. науч. ст. / Белорус. гос. ун-т. – Минск, 2015. – Вып. 12. – С. 225–231.

8. Granovetter, M. S. The strength of weak ties / M. S. Granovetter // Amer. J. of Sociology. – 1973. – Vol. 78, № 6. – P. 1360–1380.

9. Social capital, self-esteem, and use of online social network sites: a longitudinal analysis / Ch. Steinfield [et al.] // J. of Applied Developmental Psychology. – 2008. – № 29. – P. 434–445.

10. Williams, D. On and off the 'net: scales for social capital in an online era / D. Williams // J. of Computer-Mediated Communication. – 2006. – № 11. – P. 593–628.

11. Полищук, Л. Экономическое значение социального капитала / Л. Полищук, Р. Меняшев // Вопр. экономики. – 2012. – № 12. – С. 46–65.

ЦИФРОВОЙ ШЕЛКОВЫЙ ПУТЬ

Королева А. А., *Белорусский государственный университет, г. Минск, Беларусь*

Концепция «Пояс и путь» общеизвестна и успешно развивается, последнее время в рамках этой концепции выдвинут Си Цзиньпином в 2017 г. проект цифрового Шёлкового пути. Китай намерен выстраивать цифровой мир вдоль маршрутов нового Шёлкового пути – трансграничная электронная торговля, цифровые платежные системы, умные города, индустрия 4.0 – всё это будет развивать Китай вдоль пути. Причина цифровой активности Китая – ему не нужны страны-партнеры, застрявшие в прошлом веке.

Главная компонента цифрового Шёлкового пути – цифровая трансформация логистики, включающая цифровой путь, оснащенный сетями связи 5G, что сделает возможным отсле-