

# ICT and Social Capital

## The Interplay of Connexion and Connectivity

Christian Licoppe  
Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Télécommunications  
[christian.licoppe@enst.fr](mailto:christian.licoppe@enst.fr)

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# Various approaches to social capital

Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to **connections** among individuals – **social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them**. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called “civic virtue.” The difference is that “social capital” calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a sense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital. (Putnam 2000: 19)

Social capital refers to the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the **quality and quantity of a society's social interactions**... Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society – it is the glue that holds them together. (The World Bank 1999)

Social capital consists of the stock of active connections among people: the trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviours that bind the members of human networks and communities and make cooperative action possible. (Cohen and Prusak 2001: 4)

Part I  
ICT and the management of weak  
bonds

# ICTs and the engineering of weak bonds 1/2

- The strength of weak bonds
  - Structural holes (Burt, 1992)
  - Finding a Job (Granovetter, 1987)
- The Web as a way to extend the size of available contacts (potential connexions)
  - Online job ads (Mellet, 2004)
  - Online Dating

# ICTs and the engineering of weak bonds 2/2

- Does the extensions of potential connexions offer a decisive advantage ?
- Reshaping coordinations around « investments of forms » (Thevenot, 1985)
  - The profiles in online dating
- The heavy cost of managing this extension of social capital
  - The work of getting in contact and building a sense of mutual affiliation
    - The burden of netWORKING (Whittaker et al., 2002)
  - Connectivity : Reinforces the obligation to answer calls and e-mails

Part II  
ICT and the management of strong  
bonds  
« Connected Presence »

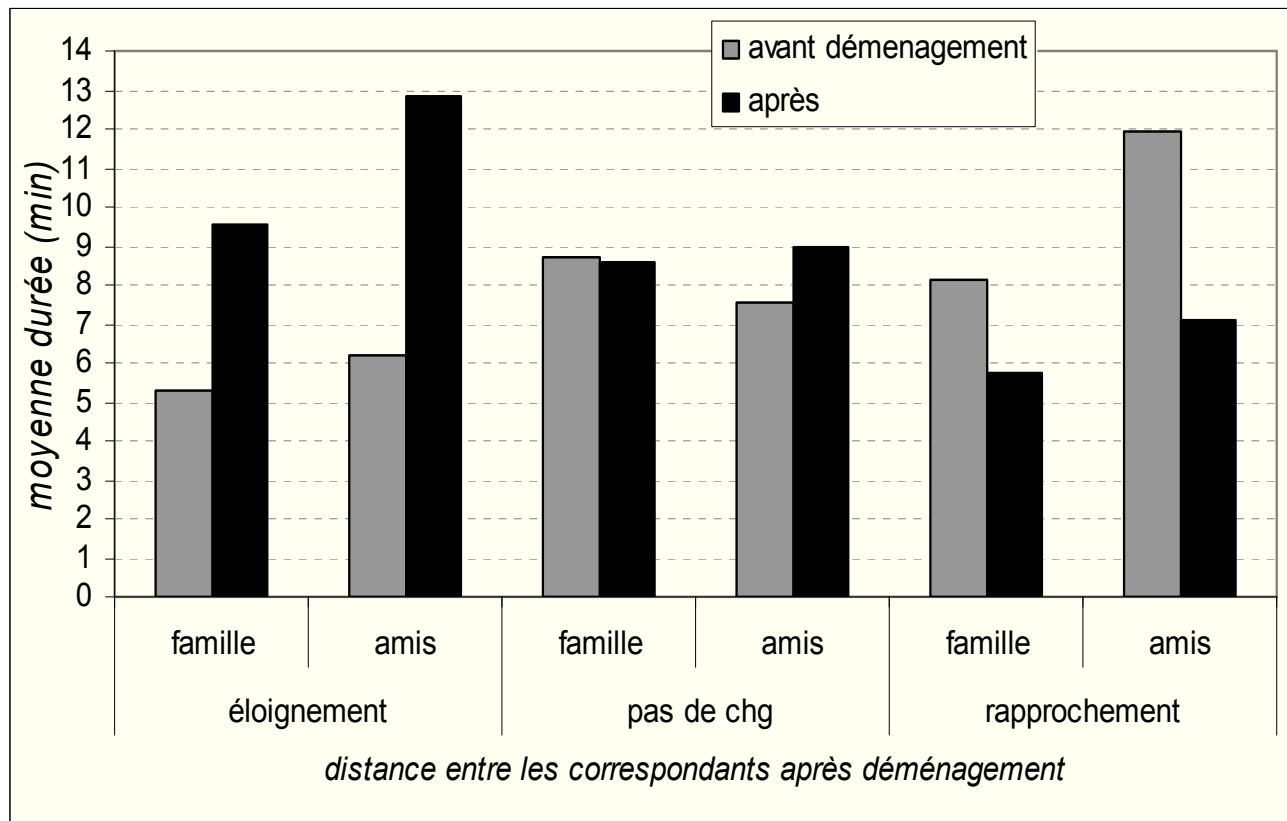
# 1. An older model for the management of strong bonds

- A « substitution » model
  - ICTs are used to compensate
- Letter writing (XIXth century) or phone calling (XXth century)
- Sharing and reassert bonding
  - « Calling for exchanging news »
- The basic law of the substitution model
  - Length of calls vary inversely with frequency of calls (Strong bonds)
  - Length of calls testify to the mutual commitment of participants to maintain the bond
- Connectivity
  - The caller is expected to have thought out his decision to call
  - Called will be heavily accountable for trying to evade his duty to answer

# Management of strong bonds in the « substitution » model for the uses of ICTs

## Moving in and moving away (Licoppe and Smoreda, 2005)

### Evolution of the length of calls before and after moving

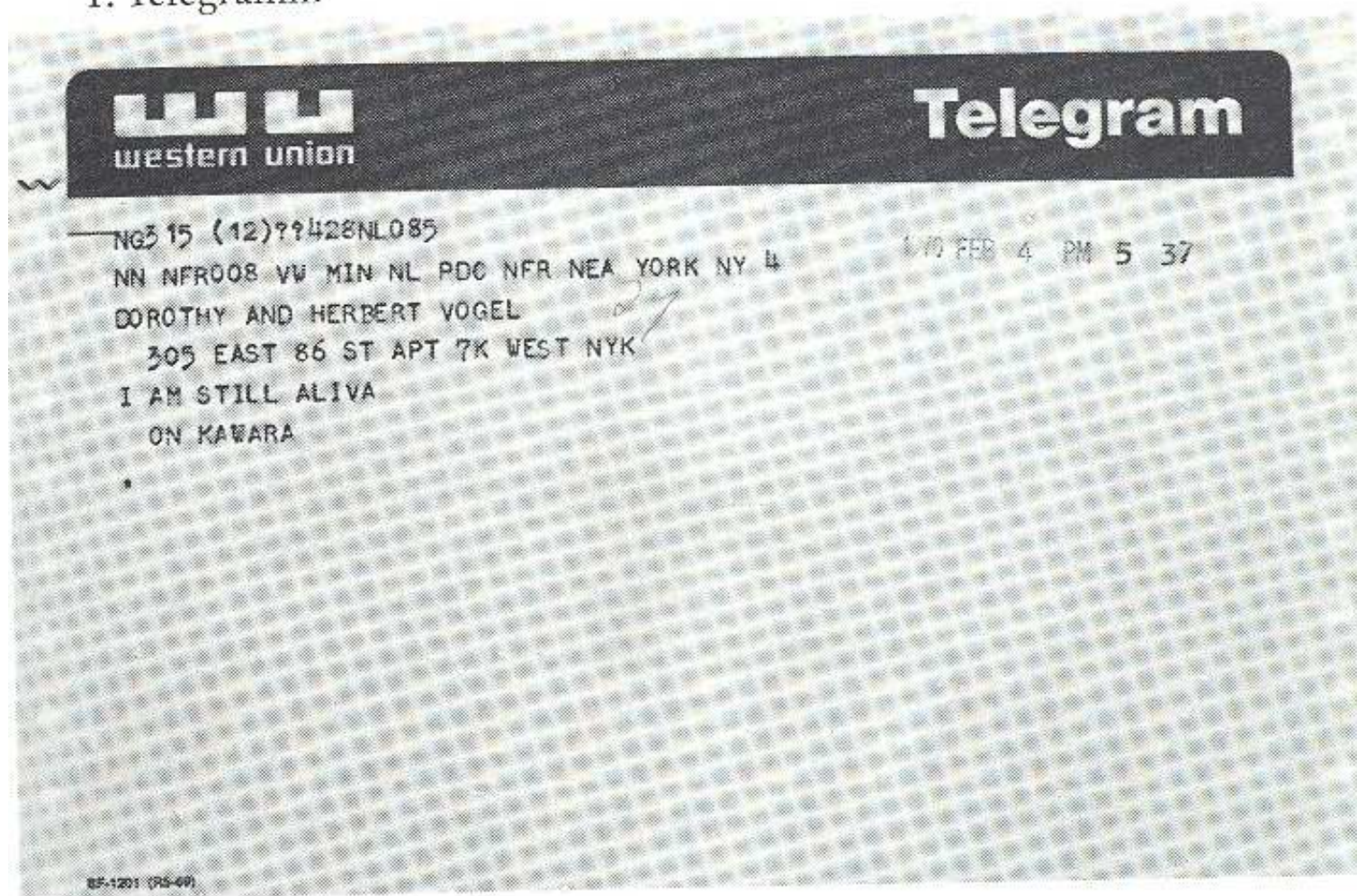


## 2. « Connected presence » and the management of strong bonds (1/2)

*Licoppe et Smoreda (2004, 2005)*

- **Maintaining the bonds by communicating all the time with all the available resources**
  - « Open states of communication » (Goffman, 1961)
  - A significant part of communication is devoted to testing availability, to maintaining mutual awareness and readiness to communicate
    - « I just called to say hi »
    - « Hi » in IM (Nardi, 2005)
    - Sharing current state (SMS) : « I am going to bed What about you ?»
  - Establishing an ICT-based sense of presence : « Growing old together » (Schutz)

- 11 On Kawara, *I am still alive (Ich bin noch am Leben)*, 4. 2. 1970,  
1. Telegramm



« Hi Ina! He's called Leo, he's italian, he's cute and i'll soon introduce him to you ... good night ! Avrora »

## 2. « Connected presence » and the management of strong bonds (2/2)

*Licoppe et Smoreda (2004, 2005)*

- **A seamless web of communication**
  - With those you see very often in ftf
  - And a few chosen close ones who live away
  - Uses all available resources of communication
- **Impulsive calls from callers are warranted**
  - The burden of assessing the relevance of the call will depend more on the called

## Part III

Connexions and Connectivity :  
a paradox of ICT-supported social  
capital

# An evolution in the reciprocity norms that govern mediated mutual availability

- The increased need to be open to communication
  - To benefit from extended connexions with weak bonds
  - To support the ICT-supported intensification of strong bonds
- Reinforces the need to be available and to display one's readiness to « connected presence » or « perpetual contact »
- But availability is constrained by schedules and activities
- This inelasticity is compensated by a weakening in the obligation to answer (i.e. treating the incoming call as a summons (Schegloff, 1972))
  - Growth in asynchronous communication (5% in the 1990s 20% in 2004)
  - Filtering practices
- Assessment of the relevance of the call was assigned to the caller (Schegloff, 2002)
- Now becomes more the burden of the recipient
  - Allowing callers just to say « hi » on a whim
- Explains the success of resources that allow him to rely on the environment to shape the force of the incoming call as a summons (Schegloff, 1972)
  - The display of call number
  - The personalization of musical ringtones

# CONCLUSION

- If social capital is :
  - The quantity *and* the quality of bonds
  - The social connexions *and* the reciprocity norms that govern the forms of cooperation they support
- ICT may play a more mixed role with respect to social capital than is usually recognized
  - Increase weak bonds and intensify strong bonds
  - This increase may be paid in an evolution of reciprocity norms, which raise the legitimacy and relevance of « unavailability » behaviour
- **A possible tradeoff between connexion and connectivity**