Research Repository UCD

Title	Migration, Community and Social Media
Authors(s)	Bates, Jessica, Komito, Lee
Publication date	2012-03-09
Publication information	Bates, Jessica, and Lee Komito. “Migration, Community and Social Media.” University de Deusto, March 9, 2012.
Publisher	University de Deusto
Item record/more information	http://hdl.handle.net/10197/10261

Downloaded 2026-11-20 20:01:42

The UCD community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you. Your story matters! (@ucd_oa)

© Some rights reserved. For more information

MIGRATION, COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Jessica Bates and Lee Komito
University College Dublin

"…social networks only work if they are performed regularly in and through texting, phone calls, emails, blogs, home pages and so on. Without such networking at-a-distance, the distances that separate people can be unbearable"
(Larsen & Urry 2008: 89)

Introduction

New information and communications technologies (ICTs) have been linked with the "annihilation of space" so that distance no longer limits communication and interaction between people, the exchange of goods, services and information amongst people, or the movement of people from one locality to another. The result, it is often suggested, is the emergence of new forms of society. Whatever debates may have developed regarding the accuracies of such claims, people vary in the extent to which such claims might apply to them. Those living in small communities who interact largely with neighbours they see daily may feel little impact of any "death of distance" (Cairncross 1997: ii). On the other hand, the lives of individuals who feel connected with people or places at a distance may be greatly altered as a result of new technologies. There is little doubt that individuals, who due to limitations imposed by distance, previously would have had little possibility of contact with each other, can now communicate and maintain social relations. Thus, the social capital debate (Portes & Landolt 1996; Putnam 2000) has been extended to include "network capital" (Larsen & Urry 2008). In most cases, individuals use multiple modes (face to face, email, texting, and so on) to communicate with each other (e.g., Boase et al. 2006; Lenhart et al. 2007; Slater & Tacchi 2004).

However, there remain individuals for whom face to face communication with friends and relations continues to be difficult due to the barrier of distance: individuals who leave the communities in which they were raised to live elsewhere. Population movement is not new; people have always moved from one locality to another, and from one society to another, for multiple reasons, including economic opportunity, political necessity, and personal preference. However, it has been argued that, since World War II, and especially since the 1980s, levels of migration movements have increased (Castles & Miller 2003: 7-9). The limitations imposed by distance, and potentially ameliorated by new information and communications technologies, have become increasingly significant as the numbers involved in migration have grown. Furthermore, many of these individuals do not necessarily intend to remain in their new locality and wish to retain contact with the society and community in which they grew up.

Much has been learned of the relationship between the migrant and both home and host societies. Individuals often go to where they already have contacts, through chain or snowball migration (MacDonald & MacDonald 1964), and maintain contacts with friends and relations in their home society (Mitchell 1969). Sometimes they integrate into their host society and sometimes they create small urban enclave communities (Barth 1969). Often the result was a bricolage, as transplanted elements combined with elements from the host society, with new forms emerging (e.g. Clifford 1994). However, to some extent, the development of new information and communications technologies (especially, but not only, the internet) has changed the relation of migrant to both home and host community.

Migration and the internet

In tandem with increased migration has come a significant technological transformation since the 1980s. The emergence of new technologies, leading to reduced communication costs and increased "richness" of communication content, as well as decreased travel costs, have led to a reconsideration of migration processes. New technologies have enabled the emergence of transnational identities as a new factor in the traditional patterns of migration and integration, assimilation and/or diversity in host societies. It has become common to expect the persistence of ethnic and national identity despite physical dislocation, as well as the persistence (as well as creation) of long distance social contacts. New technologies and reduced transportation costs are enabling migrants to maintain contacts and identification with their friends, family and home society, and the physical locality in which a migrant lives can become unintrusive background or, in urban areas where there are fellow migrants, a means for the local expression of a long distance national or cultural identification.

With the first wave of internet based computer applications (e.g. email, discussion lists, bulletin boards), it was suggested that fast and inexpensive electronic communication would change traditional patterns of migration. No longer would individuals be cut off from their friends and family when they left their home culture; they could maintain personal contacts and continue to be part of an ethnic or national "diaspora" wherever they were. Brekke (2008: 111) highlights the importance of the internet for maintaining social relationships: "Chatting on the Internet is the most important way of keeping up with 'online friends' all over the world." Similarly, Wilding (2006) notes that, in her study of migrant families, in the late 1990s, those who adopted email reported that their frequency of communication increased significantly: "Short messages … about 'nothing in particular', were exchanged several times a day." It is clear the use of these technologies for long distance one to one communication had consequences for daily social life: "By using the Internet they are not so dependent upon finding friends and developing social networks in their geographic proximity, and regard online friends as being just as adequate as the people they meet face-to-face" (Brekke 2008: 111).

These observations are in accord with many studies about the impact of the internet on social relations, and have given rise to a new term: networked individualism (Castells 2001; Wellman et al. 2003). People participate in various and varying groups, whose other members often have little, if any contact, with each other. This view of social groups, in which various modes of communication are deployed and combined, provides a good picture of the way new technologies have been appropriated into everyday life. Crucially, individuals combined electronic with face to face modes of communication; it is the group that is crucial rather than the communication mode. People "inhabit socially and spatially dispersed networks through which they maneuver to be sociable, to seek information, and to give and get help" (Boase et al. 2006: 42).

Virtual communities

While the impact of new technologies on personal networks and national identity has been explored and, to some extent, understood, the relevance of new technologies for community has been less clear. What impact have new technologies had on individuals' ability to participate in the community which they have left - that set of relations more broadly inclusive and overlapping than personal networks but narrower than national identity? Could migrants continue to participate in the life of the community they have left, or perhaps create new "electronic" communities to replace it? Initially, discussion centred on whether communal solidarities, similar to the solidarities of traditional face to face physical communities, were possible, or whether there were elements of "real" community that could not be manifest in the electronic environment. Many argued that virtual communities, by definition, lacked some of the fundamental characteristics of "community", and so, while the

"imagined community" of national identity was carried over into the virtual world, the off-line "real" community does not transfer into the virtual world (Komito 1998, 2001). The debate has since ebbed, as researchers realised the distinction between virtual and physical communities, as ideal forms, was simplistic: individuals participate in numerous groups or communities, and communication amongst individuals in such groups combines face to face, print, electronic and digital media.

While many social groups combine multiple modes of electronic communication with face to face communication, this nimble combination of multiple communication modes is not feasible for migrants, who, having left their home society to reside and work in a distant location, may wish to maintain their participation in home communities and social groups. They must rely almost exclusively on electronic communication; although the decreasing cost of travel enables more frequent physical visits than previously possible. In this context, the limits of "virtual" communities remain relevant, since migrants may find it difficult to continue participation in home communities and groups given their dependence on technologically mediated forms of communication.

The impact of a second wave of new technologies that has emerged in the last five years is particularly significant for these fragile communities whose members are geographically dispersed. Some of these technologies fall within the rubric of web 2.0, because they depend on user-generated content, the combination of multiple applications into one interface, and rapid dissemination of multiple modes of content (O'Reilly 2005; Vickery & Wunsch-Vincent 2007), but other technologies are incremental technical developments (e.g. texting via mobile phones, or voice over internet). In all cases, there is increased media richness in the content being communicated, at substantially lower cost and faster dissemination speed (Komito 2008). Early research suggests that these technologies have the potential to change previous patterns of migration. Thus, a recent report prepared for the European Commission (Borkert et al. 2009: 2) notes the emergence of the "connected migrant" (taken from Diminescu 2008): "The present-day migrant is the representative of a new culture of mobility which entails international geographical mobility and also digital mobility. In spite of distance, the modalities of connection allow a continuous copresence, which disturbs the sociological classical interpretations of the migrants in terms of 'twofold absence': absence from home, but also absence of proper integration in the destination country". It is not yet clear how new technologies will affect the nature of migration and of being a migrant, and whether the high rate of communication among migrant communities is modifying patterns of departures and returns (Borkert et al. 2009), leading to the emergence of "peripatetic mobile workers." (Komito & Bates 2009: 243).

Social media

One of the most significant changes around how people use the internet over the last decade relates to the emergence and development of social media (Skype, Twitter, etc.) and social network sites (such as Facebook, MySpace and Orkurt).

> The term "social network website" describes a class of web services that invites users to create an online profile of themselves, most commonly with a photograph, a listing of vital statistics (e.g. name, geographic location, sexual preference, occupation) and interests (hobbies, favorite books, movies, television programs, and so on). Most crucially, these services are focused on allowing users to list other users as "friends," thereby linking their pages to one another and publicly demonstrating their connection. These links between people constitute the "network" part of the social network, and enable sharing with friends, including photographs and messages. Often they serve as a way to "keep tabs" on people one knows, to keep in touch, or simply to make a list of all the people you can find who you know. (Golder et al. 2007*:* 2)

Beer and Burrows (2007) describe web 2.0 and social, participatory media as "dynamic matrices of information through which people observe others, expand the network, make new 'friends', edit and update content, blog, remix, post, respond, share files, exhibit, tag and so on" and note that "it is the mundane personal details posted on profiles, and the connections made with online 'friends', that become the commodities of Web 2.0" (Beer & Burrows 2007).

There may also be a voyeuristic appeal in such behaviours (i.e. 'checking out' what other people are up to), as Bumgarner (2007) notes. Reflecting the activities that Facebook users typically engage in, "to Facebook" and "facebooking" are now used, particularly by Facebook users, e.g.

> verb : to search on someone's profile at facebook.com
> 'I just finished *facebooking* my friends and family.'
> (Merriam-Webster Open Dictionary 2009)

Social network sites, such as Facebook, are one part of the ever shifting cacophony of social media, which also includes Skype, Twitter, Flickr etc. Increasingly online activities are seamlessly integrated into everyday life. Ito et al, writing about mobile phone use ('keitai') in Japan, recognise that for young people in Japan the distinction between online and offline life is blurred and often not that relevant:

> The mostly young natives of the keitai-pervaded world experience social presence through pulsating movement between foreground and background awareness rather than through clearly demarcated acts of 'logging in' or 'showing up' to a sociotechnical space. … This is about the seamless and unremarkable integration of this 'virtual domain' into more and more settings of everyday life, simultaneously residing both here and elsewhere as a comfortable and unremarkable social subjectivity. (Ito et al. 2005: 15)

There is also a subtle impact of these new technologies, in which this constant presence means that social network sites to provide a "background context" in maintaining relationships, shown by Komito and Bates' study of migrants in Ireland (2009: 241):

> The "passive" communication use of social networking sites reported by interviewees adds a new dimension to virtual communities. These practices provide the background context of active communication, a characteristic of "offline" communities that is now also available for online virtual communities. … This background monitoring becomes the context of text or e-mail messages, a context that makes such messages more meaningful and enables a rich biography of shared lives to develop.

Social media and communication across space

New technologies and social media are enabling greater interaction, and enabling migrants and travellers to maintain contact with their families, peers, and social network, regardless of location. For migrants, this socio-technological scaffolding means they can maintain their "identification with their friends, family and home society" to the extent that "the physical locality in which a migrant lives can, in some cases, become unintrusive background" (Komito & Bates 2009: 232-3).

Much of what is written on contemporary information and communication technologies and globalisation, refers to a "time-space compression", as information can be communicated great distances virtually instantaneously. However, Larsen and Urry make the point that ICTs can also increase distance – they enable greater mobility as it is easier to keep in touch:

"'Time-space compression' can involve more spatially dispersed social networks, as close ties increasingly live in 'distant' places" (2008: 89).

Zook et al (2004) explore the implications of ICTs and "new digital geographies", and how they simultaneously empower the individual and facilitate the collection of data about individuals and their behaviours by the state and commercial organisations. In terms of individual use of ICTs, Zook et al (2004: 168) write that, "untethered digital geographies are allowing individuals more freedom and control of the process of constructing new (and often highly personal) geographies of how and where they create and consume information."

Whereas previously Castells has used the term "networked individualism" (Castells 2001), as has Wellman (Wellman et al. 2003; Wellman 2002), to embody the emergent patterns of sociability involving online and offline interactions across a range of networks which an individual is part of, he now asserts that with increasing social uses of the internet this has developed into "networked sociability" (Castells et al. 2004: 158). According to Castells et al (2006), "The culture of individualism does not lead to isolation, but it changes the patterns of sociability in terms of increasing selective and self-directed contacts. …When a network is common to a number of its members, it becomes a peer group. In other words, networked sociability leads both to an individual-centered network, specific to the individual, and to peer-group formation, when the network becomes the context for its participants" (Castells et al. 2006: 143-144).

The potential of social media for communicating with and maintaining social networks, and in particular weak ties, has been highlighted by several researchers (e.g. Ellison et al. 2007). Ellison et al (2007) state that, "it is possible that new forms of social capital and relationship building will occur in online social network sites. Bridging social capital might be augmented by such sites, which support loose social ties, allowing users to create and maintain larger, diffuse networks of relationships from which they could potentially draw resources." However, research is beginning to suggest that bonding capital, rather than bridging capital, is a more significant consequence of new social media.

Beer (2008) discusses a recursive process and relationship, whereby social media and friendship are interdependent, and where "understandings and values of friendship may be altered by engagements with SNS" (p.520). Maintaining social networks, whether through ICTs, such as social media, or through face to face interaction, or through a mix of methods, requires some degree of "network capital" and that "network capital" is a requisite for the mobility within modern societies (Larsen & Urry 2008: 93). Larsen and Urry discuss the concept of "network capital" and write that it involves "access to communication technologies, transport, meeting places *and* the social and technical *skills* of networking. ... Network capital is the capacity to engender and sustain social relations with individuals who are not necessarily proximate, which generates emotional, financial and practical benefit. 'Network capital' refers to a person's, or group's, or society's *facility* for 'self-directed' corporeal movement and communication at-a-distance" (p.93).

Larsen and Urry (2008: 93) warn that network capital cannot be unpacked or isolated from social relations and "embodied network practices" and emphasise the need to focus on understanding such networking practices. They also point out that network capital is relational, i.e. if the person or group who is to be the recipient of some communication does not have access to the tools or the skills to use them, having the tool oneself is of little consequence, so network capital "depends on other people's network capital" (Larsen & Urry 2008: 94).

There is a close relationship between network capital and social capital, which Larsen and Urry (2008) go on to discuss, and this relationship is particularly relevant to the social

networks of migrants: "Network capital enables disconnected people to connect, to produce social capital" (Larsen & Urry 2008: 95). Social capital is also a precursor to network capital.

Larsen and Urry reflect on what this means for international migrants, particularly those from poorer backgrounds, and how networking and social interaction can be part of the daily cycle of life for many migrants. The mobile phone and the internet become crucial networking tools for migrants (the mobile phone particularly where families back home may not have access to the internet): "More than a quarter of all children in the Philippines grow up with at least one of their parents living abroad. Migrant mothers do not desert their children ... they are 'there' through routinized communication, which may include almost *daily* text messages" (Larsen & Urry 2008: 97).

Integration or parallel communities?

Brekke (2008) focuses on migration and young people and her PhD explores the lives of refugees in Tromsø, Norway. She cites Olwig, who ascertains that "immigration does not necessarily lead to integration in the receiving countries", and this leads her to ask "does this mean that extended transnational networks result in lower levels of integration and inclusion in the new society?" (Brekke 2008: 104).

That migrants are generally viewed as "outsiders" is also discussed by Tyner (2009: 133), who refers to their need for strong bonds between each other and family and friends to compensate for the lack of interaction and integration with other (non migrant) people locally: "Whether living and working in Singapore, Canada, or Italy, Filipinos are often viewed as outsiders. Thus, the linkages between and among these transnational communities, and the connections between overseas communities and the Philippines, are important to consider".

Returning to the question that Brekke raised, concerning whether use of the internet by the refugees led to less need for developing face to face relationships with other Norwegians in the town, she found that "By using the Internet they are not so dependent upon finding friends and developing social networks in their geographic proximity, and regard online friends as being just as adequate as the people they meet face-to-face" (Brekke 2008: 111).

Wilding (2006) conducted an international qualitative study into the uses of ICTs by transnational families. Wilding is concerned with the "'everyday' interactions that occur between family members who communicate across distance and national borders". Wilding makes the point that as new communication technologies are adopted, they do not replace the previous methods used, but rather complement them: "families seemed to add layers of communication and thus increase their overall frequency of communication as each new technology was introduced." Ultimately, Wilding found that while "ICTs do contribute to a stronger capacity to construct 'connected presence'", the kind of relationship that existed between family members was perpetuated through uses of ICTs.

Thus, the impact of new social media applications may not be, as previously expected, a growth in new weak ties but, instead, the preservation of previously existing strong ties. For instance, in a study of Poles in Ireland[1,2], Komito and Bates (2009) found considerable evidence of use of social media, and social network sites in particular, for maintaining relationships with friends and family back home. Interviewees described how they used social network sites to keep up to date with what family and friends were doing. From this

[1] Funded by University College Dublin Seed Funding, 2008.

[2] According to the 2006 Irish Census, the population of Ireland was about 4.17 million. Of that, almost 420,000 (10.1 per cent) were non-Irish nationality. After UK nationals (112,000), the next largest nationality was Polish (63,276, equivalent to 1.5 per cent of the total population in Ireland). Hence the reason for selecting Polish migrants as the focus of this study.

study it was apparent that the passive browsing activity involving, for example, browsing photographs, news feeds, and messages, allowed the migrants in Ireland to know what family and friends were up to;

> .. . they leave message, they comment my photos, I comment their photos, without even talking to each other, but I know they're there, I know they're watching, and I know we're kind of in contact, so that enough to keep them, to make sure are all right and I am all right.
> (Komito & Bates 2009: 238)

According to Komito and Bates (2009: 243), "Just 'checking in' gives them [Polish migrants] a sense of continued participation in their previous social life. This 'passive' monitoring reduces some of the motivation for foreign nationals to integrate into their host societies."

This is not to suggest that migrants in urban lack a social life. But, the evidence suggests that social life is largely confined to members of the same migrant groups. In their study of (mainly Polish) migrant workers in the West Fjords in Iceland, Skaptadóttir and Wojtynska (2008) found that the migrants generally maintained their sense of ethnic identity, nationality and home ties through the migrant community within the area they were living and through the use of technology. This was also observed by Komito and Bates (2009), who found that social life was so limited to members of the same ethnic/national group that the result was a "virtual ghetto" or enclave – a parallel existence, alongside, but independent of, the rest of the urban society, in conjunction with close transnational links with friends and relations at home. Further research undertaken by Komito and Bates[3], found, when asked to name their six most significant contacts, 91% of Polish respondents' contacts were Polish and 88% and Filipino's contacts were Filipino. When asked about their social life, 94% of Polish and 97% of Filipino respondents said they socialised with fellow migrants. Over 56% of Polish respondents saw fellow migrants at least once a week, and 68% of Filipino respondents saw fellow migrants at least once a week. This is achieved largely through mobile phones (phone and texting). The use of mobile phones to arrange social life is not unique to migrants, but, in this case, it has the consequence of enabling migrants to maintain an urban existence which reinforces the national or ethnic environment in which their raised, through both their face to face contacts in Dublin and their electronic contacts in Poland and the Philippines.

Technology use

This ability to maintain an "virtual ghetto" or enclave in the middle of an urban area (Komito & Bates 2009), and also maintain contacts with friends and family abroad is possible due to most migrants' facility at expert use of multiple media. Caidi and colleagues (Caidi 2009; Caidi et al. 2010) have been looking at the information practices of immigrants in Canada, and as with Komito and Bates, they find that ICTs are altering the migrant experience. According to Caidi (2009) ICTs are "changing the nature and frequency of migrants' contacts with source countries … [and] providing new types of cultural consumption and production." Caidi (2009) also cites a Canadian Internet Project report that states that those who have migrated to Canada spend more time online that those living in Canada that were born there.

Boase et al (2006: 23) also found evidence of what they refer to as 'media multiplexity': "The findings suggest media multiplexity: people who communicate frequently use multiple media to do so. The more contact by one medium, the more contact by others." This was also found to be the case by Lenhart et al (2007) in their study of use of social media by teens in the US: "Multi-channel teens – those who have mobile phones and internet access, send text messages

[3] Funded by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences, 2009-10. This second more detailed study, focused on Polish and Filipino migrants in Ireland. Filpino's were selected as a useful contrast to the Poles and because of the high numbers of Filipino migrants employed in the health sector in Ireland.

and instant-messages and use social network sites – have many pathways to connect their friends. … These highly wired and connected teens are notable for the intensity with which they use connective technologies, layering new technologies over old, while sustaining an overall higher likelihood of daily use of all technologies" (p.19).

Migrants are equally proficient at multiple technology usage, as indicated by a study of Polish and Filipino migrants in Ireland. When asked what technologies they possessed, 94% of Polish and 90% of Filipino respondents had broadband at home, 79% of Polish and 90% of Filipinos had webcams, and 94% of Polish respondents and 52% of Filipino respondents used Skype. The relatively low percentage of Filipino users of Skype was largely due to lack of broadband availability in the Philippines, but it is noteworthy that 74% of Filipinos used Yahoo Messenger. The ability of migrants to juggle different technologies was demonstrated when they were asked how they contacted those people they listed as their six significant contacts:

TABLE 1
Polish and Filipino use of communication media

mobile phone	71%
Skype	59%
Landline	38%
SMS texting	24%
Gadu-Gadu, Polish Instant Messaging	21%
Nasza Klasa, Polish social media	18%
face to face	15%
VOIP other than Skype	9%
Facebook	3%

Polish respondents (n=34)

landline	58%
IM, online chat	39%
mobile phone	35%
SMS texting	26%
face to face	19%
social networking site	19%
Internet	19%
Email	16%
Skype	13%
Webcam	13%

Filipino respondents (n=31)

As previously noted, this "media ecology" is found in circumstances where face to face contact overlaps with digital connections; but when digital connections are all that are available, migrants' proficiency in this digital world has significant consequences.

ICTs, migration and community

According to Karim (2003: 1) "planetary connections produced by transnational migration contribute significantly to globalisation-from-below" and while diasporas have traditionally been viewed as "imagined communities" (Anderson, in Karim 2003: 2), mass media, ICTs, and in particular, social media are enabling diasporas to transcend this conceptualisation. Writing before social network sites really took off, Karim contends that "diasporic media is not monologic. Watching live television from the homeland does not automatically suspend time and space ... Diasporic media networks hardly negate the day-to-day existence in a location where one also interacts with other cultures and consumes local media content" (Karim 2003: 10). While this may be the case where only traditional one to many mass media content is consumed, what is the situation when individuals are in almost continual communication with their peers, family, friends, through social media, and accessing personal and cultural content in their own language regardless of their location, and the location of the originator of the content? Is such communication in place of interaction with other cultures and local media content?

Feldman (2008: 133-134) provides a useful examination of the concept of 'integration':

> In the context of migration, integration was initially seen as the process through which migrants 'become part of society'. This was often interpreted or implemented as a one-way process whereby migrants were expected to assimilate or 'fit in' to the host or majority society. The 'success' of integration was thus judged in terms of the extent to which 'they' became like 'us'. It is now accepted that integration is a two-way process, one that turns upon an accommodation by and change within society. Here, the achievement by migrants of economic, political and social outcomes equivalent to the majority society, as well as the development of a sense of place and belonging are linked to the acceptance and incorporation of immigration as a part of a society's vision for itself.

Traditionally migration has been assumed to involve "estrangement" (Ahmed in Askoy & Robins 2003: 90) and "dislocation": "Migration involves both 'spatial dislocation' and 'temporal dislocation': it is about separation and distance from the homeland" (Askoy & Robins 2003: 90). However, the use of social media by migrants is changing the migrant experience.

From bridges to bonds: recreating community

In our study of Polish and Filipino migrants (involving over sixty migrants being interviewed three times over a two year period), it is clear that Polish and Filipino nationals in Ireland are proficient digital migrants, combining multiple technologies to maintain contact with friends and relations at home, while create "virtual ghettos" for themselves in urban areas in Ireland. One explanation for this comes from the way in which social networking applications are being used by these nationals. Social media applications are being actively and intentionally used to provide elements of community life that have previously not been possible. It is notable that, while social networking sites can be used for email and other forms of messaging (such as comments), they are rarely used for such an active form of communication between individuals. Indeed, when asked how they contacted friends and family (an active and purposeful communicative act), most skipped social networking sites and enumerated one to one communication modes such as email or Skype. When asked what they used the social networking sites for, the most common phrases that were used were: "***check*** messages", "***browse*** photos", "***look*** for friends". These are passive, rather than active, activities in that their descriptions emphasize the monitoring function that these internet applications enable, as indicated by these Polish respondents:

> "The main thing I do on Nasza Klasa is just 'peeping' on others. I`m not involved in any kind of creating groups, or making contacts."
>
> "I like peeping at them, to know what they do now, how they look like now and what their life is like."
>
> "I only visit Nasza Klasa when I have time or I want to find a specific person. … Just to check what other people are up to, to see their photos. I just log in and check the photos only, … I only check their photos to see whether they've changed a lot."
>
> "I visit it [Nasza Klasa] just to check what's going on. … to see their photos (both on Facebook and Nasza Klasa), just to check what other people are up to, not necessarily to get in touch with them"

Although these phrases are slightly more prevalent amongst Polish nationals, similar phrases are expressed by Filipinos as well:

> "we post pictures and I get to see my friends photos as well and then I would know how well they're coping, how well they're doing with their job and all that, … it's more of an entertainment ((laughs)) and you know a kind of past time kind of thing…just to keep updated with my friends."
>
> "So I just want to check what's going on with my friends there and to check photos as well."

Migration has long been understood as a process of extending networks and new technologies have clearly assisted in the extension of personal networks. The evidence is clear that migrants are able to maintain kin and even non kin relations over time and distance and the new generation of internet applications that constitute "social media" provides additional means for the ever more effective extension and maintenance of personal networks (as noted by Wellman et al. 2003). However, these applications have an additional impact, supporting communities as well as networks.

The debate about the difference between "community" and extended personal networks is as much a philosophical as academic debate. Is a community an extended network that individuals can call on for help, a complex weave of overlapping and intertwined networks, or

a sense of common identification and collective solidarity? To avoid a rehash of such debates, it is easier to focus on descriptions of interactions rather than a generic label for those interactions (for further discussion of this debate, see Komito 1998, 2001, 2004).

The previous vignettes make it clear that, while social media may be used to enable one to one purposeful communicative acts, it is also being used to provide users with a low intensity participation in the lives of people they know. Respondents were fervent in the significance they attached to being able to see photographs of people they knew, in addition, of course, to the descriptions of activities which they could read about. It is also significant that these activities do not require large amounts of time on the part of these individuals: some respondents check the sites only a few times a week and their use of the social media sites is of very short duration. But this consistent low level monitoring, combined with active messaging provides a background to the daily lives of these Polish and Filipino nationals. It is important to note that this is not a one-way communication, characteristic of lurking or voyeurism. Those doing the posting of information not only know that others are going to look but can see that they have looked, so the communication is mutual monitoring: the monitored know who is monitoring them, as these two quotes indicate:

> "Some of them went back home now because of the recession. ... Everybody has something to say, you know. You just talk to people, you tell them how you feel about different things, what has happened to you, you just share this kind of things. ... on Nasza Klasa you send a message, and then, you wait for an answer, that's how you can talk with others there. Then, the person reads the message you've sent and answers you back the next day or in two or three days time. That's how you talk to people there. ... What I do is browsing photos. ... when I have new messages, I read them." [Polish respondent]

> "Friendster, Facebook…Every day! Every time I wake up, I just check on my phone…Check mails, check new profiles, check photos, to keep up to date. Sometimes they would leave messages instead of emailing you, sometimes they just want to know like you know, just to let everybody know that somebody is asking like this and that…I usually check my mails first. It's a way of like keeping in touch, sometimes they post a shout out, I don't do it for myself, I just want to read what they are up to." [Filipino respondent]

Polish and Filipino nationals visit sites, browse photos, and check postings and this maintains the background or context for the one to one communications that individuals also engage in. In fact, these monitoring activities are crucial in enabling effective one to one communication to continue over time. It is not necessarily that personal networks can not develop and endure without this background, but that the networks may endure longer. One Polish respondent, who is now back in Poland, commented that she expected that she would stay friendly with someone she met who lives in Cork even without the exchange of photos and messages via social networking sites, but the exchange of photos and messages makes it "so much easier, so much nicer to know details...". As she further commented, "it is easier, because you know what they have been doing".

This background, or "ambient presence" is not just a characteristic of personal ego-centred networks, because information circulates amongst friends, helping to maintain the cross-cutting information flows characteristic of communities. Thus, the same respondent (now back in Poland) commented that friends will tell her that they know what she had been doing the previous weekend, even without her posting any photos or messages, because other friends will post information that includes either photographs of her or messages about her. Equally, another Polish informant noted: "I call only some of my friends and get news from

them about other people." A similar observation was made by a Filipino respondent, when recounting the benefits of social networking sites:

> "I would say it would still be the same. I mean like but I think it's an advantage because it's more easier to communicate with friends I mean without those technologies I'd say you know we use other means like phoning them or things like that but am I'd say you reach out more on more friends, you know for example you one of your friend would actually connect to another one and oh! She's on my account, so it actually spreads out."

Final word

The various communication technologies are used, by and large, to maintain links amongst migrants who share the same national identity, and specifically used to maintain links amongst friends and relations; in other words, bonding capital. Checking photos, leaving comments, reading other people's descriptions of their weekends are all ways of maintaining a low intensity, ongoing participation in a community of affinity, and this is a facility which has not been evidenced in the usage of previous internet applications by users. If the first wave of internet applications helped extend personal networks and building bridging capital, this second wave of social media applications is, instead, enhancing and supporting communities by contributing to bonding capital. For migrants, this suggests a new manifestation of virtual communities – the possibility of interaction and communication patterns which, even though largely digital, still resemble those of individuals who are members of social groups with a sense of solidarity and commonality. Migrants may, if they wish, maintain contact with those who live remotely, and this may have a significant impact on migration processes. For instance, would the strong emotional support of a community provided by social media lessen the motivation for migrants to make social contacts in the society into which they have recently arrived? Will it become easier for migrants to move from one country to another, because the migrant can "carry" his or her community of friends with them, while also providing easier access to advance information on new locations? Or, if they decide to return home, will it make it easier for migrant to re-integrate into their home society because they have not really left, in terms of social interaction and participation? While it is too early to see the impact that social media will have on the migration process, there is good reason to think that the impact will be significant, but also different from the impact of previous internet applications.

References

ASKOY, A.; ROBINS, K. (2003) "Banal transnationalism: the difference that television makes", in Karim (ed.), *The Media of Diaspora* (pp. 89-104). London: Routledge.

BARTH, F. (ed.) (1969) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: the social organization of culture difference*, London: Allen & Unwin.

BEER, D; BURROWS, R. (2007) "Sociology and, of and in Web 2.0: Some initial considerations" *Sociological Research Online* 12 (5).

BEER, D. (2008) "Social network(ing) sites...revisiting the story so far: A response to danah boyd & Nicole Ellison", *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13 (2), 516-529.

BOASE, J.; HORRIGAN, J. B.; WELLMAN, B.; RAINIE, L. (2006) *The Strength of Internet Ties*, available at http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Internet_ties.pdf, consulted on November, 16th 2010.

BORKERT, M.; CINGOLANI, P.; PREMAZZI, V. (2009) *The State of the Art of Research in the EU on the Take up and Use of ICT by Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

BREKKE, M. (2008) "Young refugees in a network society" in Bærenholdt & Granas (eds.) *Mobility and place : enacting Northern European peripheries* (pp. 103-114). Aldershot: Ashgate.

BUMGARNER, B. A. (2007) "You have been poked: Exploring the uses and gratifications of Facebook among emerging adults", *First Monday,* 12 (11).

CAIDI, N. (2009) *Information practices of immigrants*. Paper presented at the Health Nexus Workshop. Available at http://www.slideshare.net/settlementatwork/information-practices-of-immigrants, consulted on November, 16th 2010.

CAIDI, N.; ALLARD, D.; QUIRK, L. (2010) "Information Practices of Immigrants", in Cronin (ed.) *Annual review of information science and technology* (Vol. 44, pp. 493-531). Medford, NJ: Information Today, Inc.

CAIRNCROSS, F. (1997) *The Death of Distance*. London: Orion Publishing Group.

CASTELLS, M. (2001) *The Internet galaxy: reflections on the Internet, business, and society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

CASTELLS, M., FERNANDEZ-ARDEVOL, M., QIU, J. L. & SEY, A. (2004) "The Mobile Communication Society: A cross-cultural analysis of available evidence on the social uses of wireless communication technology." A research report prepared for the International Workshop on Wireless Communication Policies and Prospects: A Global Perspective, held at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, October 8th and 9th 2004. Available at: http://arnic.info/workshop04/MCS.pdf, consulted on May, 11th 2009.

CASTELLS, M., FERNANDEZ-ARDEVOL, M. & QIU, J. L. (2006) *Mobile communication and society: a global perspective.* A project of the Annenberg Research Network on International Communication, MIT Press.

CASTLES, S.; MILLER, M. (2003) *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*: Palgrave Macmillan.

CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE (2008) "Non-Irish Nationals Living in Ireland." Available at: http://www.cso.ie/releasespublications/non-irishnationals.htm, consulted on May, 11th 2009.

CLIFFORD, J. (1994) "Diasporas", *Cultural Anthropology,* 9 (3), 302-338.

DIMINESCU, D. (2008) "The connected migrant: an epistemological manifesto", *Social Science Information,* 47, 565-579.

ELLISON, N. B.; STEINFIELD, C.; LAMPE, C. (2007) "The benefits of Facebook 'friends': social capital and college students' use of online social network sites", *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication,* 12 (4).

FELDMAN, A. (2008) “Integration - Mapping the terrain”, *Translocations: Irish Migration, Race and Social Transformation Review,* 3 (1).
GOLDER, S. A.; WILKINSON, D. M.; HUBERMAN, B. A. (2007) *Rhythms of social interaction: Messaging within a massive online network.* Paper presented at the Third Communities and Technologies Conference, Michigan State University.
ITO, M.; OKABE, D.; MATSUDA, M. (eds.) (2005) *Personal, portable, pedestrian : mobile phones in Japanese life*. Cambridge, Mass. ; London: MIT.
KARIM, K. H. (2003) *The media of diaspora*. London: Routledge.
KOMITO, L. (1998) “The Net as a foraging society: flexible communities”, *The Information Society,* 14 (2), 97-106.
KOMITO, L. (2001) “Electronic community in the Information Society: paradise, mirage or malaise?” *Journal of Documentation,* 57 (1), 115-129.
KOMITO, L. (2004) *The Information Revolution & Ireland: prospects and challenges*. Dublin: UCD Press.
KOMITO, L. (2008) “Information Society Policy” in Hearn & Rooney (eds.), *Knowledge Policy: challenges for the 21st Century* (pp. 83-97). Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
KOMITO, L.; BATES, J. (2009) “Virtually Local: social media and community amongst Polish nationals in Dublin” *Aslib Proceedings: new information perspectives,* 61 (3), 232-244.
LARSEN, J.; URRY, J. (2008) “Networking in mobile societies” in Bærenholdt & Granas (eds.), *Mobility and Place: Enacting Northern European Peripheries* (pp. 89-101).
LENHART, A.; MADDEN, M.; MACGILL, A. R.; SMITH, A. (2007) *Teens and Social Media*. Washington, D.C.: Pew Internet & American Life Project.
MACDONALD, J. S.; MACDONALD, L. D. (1964) “Chain Migration, Ethnic Neighborhood. Formation and Social Networks”, *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly,* 42 (1), 82-97.
MERRIAM-WEBSTER (2009). ‘facebook’, Merriam-Webster Open Dictionary. Available at http://www3.merriam-webster.com/opendictionary/newword_search.php?word=facebook&last=0, consulted on March, 17th 2009.
MITCHELL, J. C. (ed.) (1969) *Social networks in urban situations*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
O’REILLY, T. (2005) “What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software”, available at: http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html, consulted on March, 23rd 2007.
PORTES, A.; LANDOLT, P. (1996) “Unsolved Mysteries: The Tocqueville Files II. The Downside of Social Capital”, *The American Prospect,* 7 (26).
PUTNAM, R. D. (2000) *Bowling alone: America's declining social capital*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
SKAPTADÓTTIR, U. & WOJTYNSKA, A. (2008) “Labour Migrants Negotiating Places and Engagements” in: Bærenholdt & Granas (eds.) *Mobility and Place: Enacting Northern European Peripheries*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 115-126.
SLATER, D.; TACCHI, J. (2004) “ICT innovations for poverty reduction”, available at: http://cirac.qut.edu.au/ictpr/downloads/research.pdf, consulted on November, 16th 2010.
TYNER, J. A. (2009) *The Philippines: mobilities, identities, globalization*. London: Routledge.
VICKERY, G.; WUNSCH-VINCENT, S. (2007) *Participative Web and User-Created Content: Web 2.0, Wikis and Social Networking*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
WELLMAN, B. (2002) “Little boxes, glocalization, and networked individualism” In: Tanabe, van den Besselaar & Ishida (eds.) *Digital Cities II: Computational and sociological approaches*. Berlin: Springer, 10-25.
WELLMAN, B.; QUAN-HAASE, A.; BOASE, J.; CHEN, W.; HAMPTON, K.; DE DIAZ, I. I., et al. (2003) “The Social Affordances of the Internet for Networked Individualism”, *Journal of Computer Medicated Communication,* 8 (3).

WILDING, R. (2006) "'Virtual' intimacies? Families communicating across transnational contexts", *Global networks,* 6 (2), 125-142.
ZOOK, M.; DODGE, M.; AOYAMA, Y.; TOWNSEND, A. (2004) "New digital geographies: Information, communication and Place", in Brunn & Harrington (eds.), *Geography and Technology*. Kluwer Academic Publishers.