Media Aesthetics

04 Social Networking Media

01: Introduction: the nature of networks
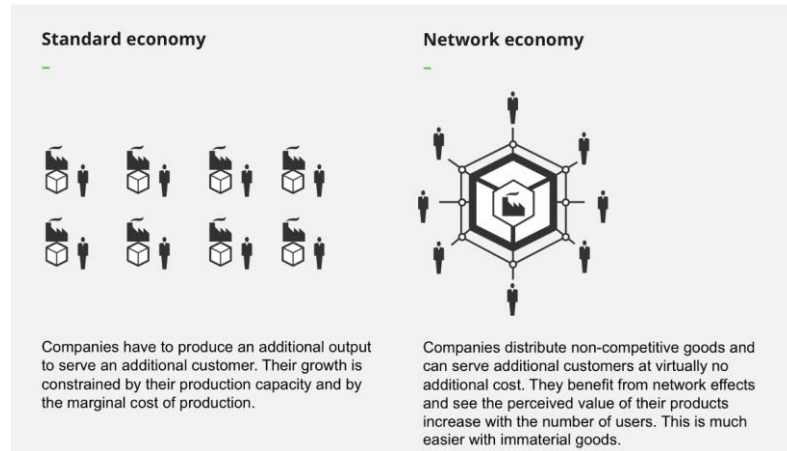
- Manuel Castells 'new social morphology of our societies … around networks'
  → Bruno Latour's 'actor-network theories' → networks in the natural sciences: 'open up a novel perspective on the interconnected world' grounded in communications networks (Albert-Laszlo Barabasi 2003)
- Distributed network through a shared technical language → no center, to promote decentralization: Social networks, SNA
  : 'how people's connections affect possibilities and constraints in their behaviour … and the large patterns of what people and organizations do and how these patterns fit into society'
- Individual personality vs. categorical differences such as class, gender or race
  : 'networks are a great way to get rid of phantoms such as nature, society, or power, notions that before were able to expand mysteriously everywhere at no cost' (Latour 2011)
- **Common properties of network**
  1) Being small world
  2) The strength of weak ties
  3) Hubs and connectors
  4) Power laws of distribution

02: network economics

- Network economics
  1) network externalities
  2) networked forms of organization
  3) the relationship between market and non-market production
- **1. Network Externalities**
  1) large networks are more attractive to users than small ones: education (positive)
  2) environmental degradation of third parties (negative)*
  3) New media have been strongly driven by positive externalities
     : Metcalfe's Law (proportional to n^2) by Bob Metcalfe, the inventor of Ethernet : the internet as a free public good
     : software standards have been subject to lock-in and winner-take-all economics (MS Office suite)
- **2. Networked Organizations**
  1) new institutionalist approach: hierarchical internal organization (bureaucracy) and ways of managing relations within and between firms
  2) why the firm exists: reducing transaction costs associated with routine economic activities (nexus of contracts, pooling capabilities, etc.)

**3. The relationship between market and non-market production**
1) the rise of information, knowledge and culture to the center of economic relations is associated with the growing significance of <u>non-market or social production</u>
2) the preparedness and the need to share information with the internet as a decentralized ICT-based digital network: collectively and on a global scale → promote <u>a culture of sharing</u>

Standard economy
-

Network economy
-

Companies have to produce an additional output to serve an additional customer. Their growth is constrained by their production capacity and by the marginal cost of production.

Companies distribute non-competitive goods and can serve additional customers at virtually no additional cost. They benefit from network effects and see the perceived value of their products increase with the number of users. This is much easier with immaterial goods.

03: networks and social production

- **Networked information economy**: <u>Decentralized individual action, non-market mechanisms</u> (Yochai Benkler 2006)
  1) the generalization of the internet and networked personal computing
  2) 3 subsidiary conditions:
    - need to be more flexible and more reliant on non-market motivations and incentives for creativity
    - information good in market and non-market, state and non-state
    - the rise of peer production of information, knowledge and culture (open source software movement and hacker culture, the rise of Web 2.0 and social software)
- **The rise of social production**
  1) uniquely possessed <u>by individuals</u>
  2) these individuals now 'have the threshold level of <u>material capacity</u> (networked computer)
- **For effective social production**
  1) <u>modularity</u> or the properties of a project: independently produced before they are assembled into a whole (nuclear power plant: quality (accident), loyalty (trafficking) vs. Wikipedia)
  2) <u>granularity</u>, or the size of the modules: Wikipedia: fine-grained

- Adam Smith's 'The Wealth of Nations, 1776: the expansion of markets and trade as being at the core of new forms of wealth creation → late 19th C and 20th C the rise of the large corporation: 'control revolution, '<u>visible hand</u>'
- 'Consumers are changing into users-more active and productive than the consumers of the industrial information economy'
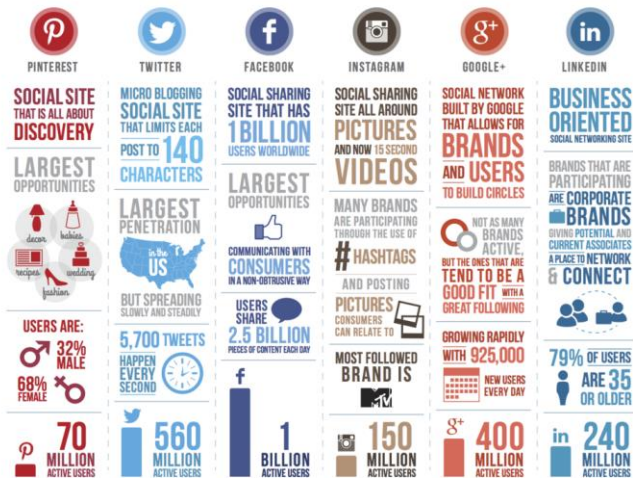
04: social network media and social capital

- **On participatory media** (will be in ch.5)
  1) on the building of social capital, or a stronger sense of community, trust and commonality
  2) on the enhancing the public sphere
- **Social capital**
  1) as 'features of social life-networks, norms, and trust … social connections and the attendant norms and trust' (Robert Putnam 1995)
  2) 'the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Pierre Bourdieu and Luc Wacquant 1992)
- **3 main types of social capital**
  1) bonding social capital: between individuals
  2) bridging social capital: weaker, less dense but more cross-cutting ties
  3) linking social capital: between those with differing levels of power or social status: social classes
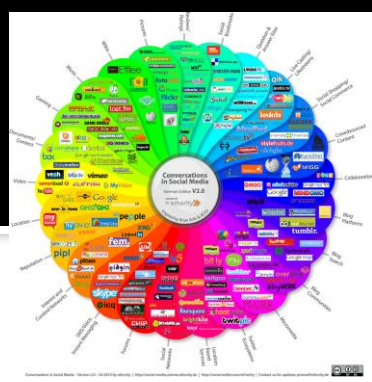
- Blogs and other **social software**
  1) virtual social capital
  2) new forms of bridging social capital: 'connects between individuals that would not otherwise be made' (Danah Boyd and Nicole Ellison 2008)
- **SNS to enhance social capital**
  1) more face-to-face interactions with close friends
  2) more acquaintances offline than non-users
  3) <u>positive</u> role in developing and maintaining bridging social capital
  * paradoxical findings also: very active SNS users, or socializers may experience greater <u>loneliness </u>than non-users (Sherry Turkle 2011)
  * critical too: as for-profit commercial entities, advertisers, to facilitate some modes of interaction while <u>blocking</u> others

05: a networked public sphere?

- **New media can revitalize the public sphere, citizenship and civic life?**
- The **Public Sphere by Jűrgen Habermas** (1974, 1989)
1) <u>Citizens behave as a public body</u> when they confer in an unrestricted fashion-that is, the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions-about matters of general interest. (1974) : the emergence of a bourgeois public sphere in early modern Europe
2) 3 forces
      1. The rise of commerce and private business, and the progressive emancipation of economic life
      2. Legally circumscribed powers over the wider society
      3. The rise of a literary-cultural public sphere: journalism, arts, facilitating the consciousness of a novel public
3) transforming factors
      1. The growth of working class demands
      2. The growing influence of large corporations over the media, culture and politics
      3. The greater role of the state
      4. The growing management of public opinion through industries such as advertising and public relations

- The rise of mass media such as film and broadcasting as particularly problematic: their centralized control and their communicative form (Peter Dahlgren 1995)
- The public sphere is 'constituted as a network for communicating information and points of view' (1996)
- Not to attain consensus, but rather to affect policy (Dahlgren 2005)
- <u>Habermas pessimistic view on the internet and new media: it has led to the fragmentation of ... mass audiences into a huge number of isolated issue publics</u> (2006)
- <u>Necessary to develop a more pluralistic and flexible concept of publics</u> to comprehend the role that everyday creativity and communication may play within it, in the context of online social networks (feminists critique, too)
- From the search for an ideal speech situation to the affordances and limitations of new media forms

Conclusion