Weak Ties and Virtual Communities

From Granovetter to Zuckerberg
Granovetter: Interviewed people and asked: “How did you find your job?”
kept getting the same answer: “through an acquaintance, not a friend”

Interaction network

- **Nodes**: People
- **Edges**: Between people with a social relationship
  - **Weight**: strength of connection
    Quantize to either “weak” or “strong”
Network Analysis

Nodes

Bridge

Edge

Path Length
Network Analysis
Bridges

- Bridges allow diffusion of information between otherwise disconnected communities.
- Bridges bring otherwise distant communities together.

“What Bridge” concept provides an important piece of the micro => macro puzzle

- What sort of relationships act as bridges?
Tipping Point

An individual’s uptake of a new technique depends on how many of those around him have “bought in”

- The “Tipping Point” (Gladwell, 2000)

- Quickly adopted techniques must be rapidly spread to many cliques
Tipping Point

- People with many weak ties critical to spreading the idea

- Without weak links, community exists as a set of strongly connected, but disjoint cliques

- Let's talk Politics!
  - Consensus building and weak ties
Access to Resources

- Our weak ties are with people whose ties are with those socially distant to us.
  - Weak ties bring us knowledge of our community not available through friends

- Many weak ties => more access to wider community’s ideas, resources, etc.

- Few weak ties => little information of outside world
Access to Resources

Example: Academic Hiring

- School’s reluctance to hire your own PhD’s
- Want to prevent “intellectual inbreeding”
Social Networks

- Social networks can explain how communities are created and maintained.
- Individuals create interpersonal bonds with others within their social network that are interwoven with the social institutions of their society.
Virtual Communities

• “The online social network provided a venue for storytelling, showcasing, projects and best practices that could be leveraged to create new knowledge resources” (Kimball & Rheingold, 2000)

• People who are geographically separated or “on the road” need a way of maintaining contact, whether they are part of a large community or an organisational project team.

• Virtual settlements.
The Future of Networks

Opposite to what you might expect:
- Weak personal relationships bind communities together
- Exclusively strong ties lead to global fragmentation

Social Media has emerged as an example of the strength of weak ties
facebook

Social Media Website

- Interact with other members inside or outside of your organization
- Make and develop friendships
- Get to know somebody
- Putting a name to a face
History of facebook

- Founded by Mark Zuckerberg
  - Harvard University
  - Launched Feb 4\textsuperscript{th}, 2004
- Originated for College students only
  - High School level
  - All users from different organizations
- Approximately 900 Million users
We are going to split into two teams and debate the following statement:

The long term impact of social media sites and increased reliance on technology as means for communication is ultimately harmful to both individuals and society.
Academic Debate

- We will meet in class on Weds and go to the SS Computer lab (A123)
- Each team will have the day to do research and prepare a 5-7 argument that presents their team's position.
- Students will be prepared to engage in questions and argumentation with the opposing side.