

Hybrid Networking Platform for Minority Groups in Accessing Labour Market

Understanding the Role of Online and Offline Social Capital Interplay in Resource Accessibility

Cecilia Olivieri

X23 Science in Society
Treviglio, Italy
e-mail: cecilia.oliveri@x-23.org

Agathe Semlali

X23 Science in Society
Treviglio, Italy
e-mail: agathe.semlali@x-23.org

Davide Carminati

X23 Science in Society
Treviglio, Italy
e-mail: davide.carminati@x-23.org

Lorenzo Maggio Laquidara

X23 Science in Society
Treviglio, Italy
e-mail: lorenzo.maggio@x-23.org

Abstract—Social interactions and resource accessibility have long been central elements in social research. Social capital, an idea pioneered by Pierre Bourdieu, is an extremely effective concept for reading and interpreting social interactions. The rise of communication technologies and online social networks has further shaped human interactions and created new avenues for social ties. Although the analysis of offline and online networks separately is supported by an extensive bibliography, the interplay between the two still needs further development. The study addresses the gap in understanding the relationship in mutual influence between online and offline networks, particularly within migrant communities and minority groups. Focusing on a case study platform, connecting young Afrodescendant women and orienting them to their professional career, this research explores how the hybrid nature of the platform (promoting both virtual and in person networks) impacts the interplay between online and offline social capital of the platform's members and their ability to access resources. To achieve these goals, mixed-methods Social Network Approach (SNA) and a one-year longitudinal approach are employed. By uncovering the complexities of online and offline social capital dynamics, especially within marginalized groups, the study offers insights for effective platform-networking-building and highlights resource accessibility potential for similar platforms development.

Keywords—online networks; migrations; discourse network analysis; participatory research; gender.

I. INTRODUCTION

Understanding human social interactions and resource accessibility has long been a focal point in social research. In fact, investigating their functioning can offer an insightful vehicle to better understand research and policy issues such as migration, employment, social inclusion, and community development, just to name a few. Social capital was first conceptualized by seminal social scientist Pierre Bourdieu in his 1986 study on exclusion dynamics in French high society [3]. Social capital represents the aggregate of the actual potential resources that are linked to the possession of a durable network or, in other words, to membership in a group

[15]. Social capital is a multifaceted construct, reflecting the multifaceted nature of human relationships. One's own social capital consists of ties of various kinds (i.e., weak/strong, frequent/sporadic, direct/indirect) and nodes (that is, individuals, groups, institutions, or other entities). Each of them influences an individual's social standing and resource accessibility in relation to their social surroundings.

The above-mentioned theories have been strongly applied to the field of migration [10] and minority groups studies [1] since they provide a deep understanding of the dynamics by which these groups constitute, maintain, and exploit their network for resource accessibility [19]. In this context, networks represent a meaningful resource, as they provide a means through which individuals belonging to multiple marginalized or disadvantaged groups can access a diverse range of support, knowledge, and opportunities. However, a detailed investigation of these ties, their nature, origins, and constitution can reveal the particular kind of resources that flow among them. The complexity of such ties and networks and how they are established and maintained has become more complex over time [10].

The rise of new communication technologies and online social networks has added a new dimension to this understanding. The spread of Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) and social media has transformed interpersonal connections and communications and affected the ways in which people create and maintain social ties [12]. Online networks, made possible by digital platforms, occupy an increasingly relevant role in shaping modern social interactions, especially in the COVID-19 pandemic's aftermath. Indeed, this change has imposed the need to complexify the view and analysis of all social fields, including migration and minority studies.

Despite the relevance and permeability of such new human connection forms, the relationship between the online and offline dimensions needs further investigation [11]. Indeed, it is crucial for forthcoming research to delve into the specific domains where online and offline networks converge, not only enhancing the comprehension of network outcomes,

but also elucidating the underlying mechanisms through which ties influence outcomes in both contexts [16].

In this research, relying on an online platform fostering Afrodescendant networks case study, we intend to delve more into the interplay between the online and offline social capital by filling the above-mentioned gap. Through the analysis of this case study, we will explore (i) the role of this hybrid nature platform (active both virtually and offline, through in person activities) in promoting online and offline social capital at individual and community level, and (ii) how these different forms of social capital interplay and influence one another. The first objective will be reached by deepening the factors enabling such connections and the effectiveness in accessing resources, while the second one by delving into the mutual networking dynamics. The ultimate scope of the research is to provide a tridimensional and in depth understanding of the networking phenomena related to the hybrid nature of the platform. From this baseline, we intend to implement and strengthen the impact in networking-building and resources-access of the platform, by extracting meaningful insights from online and offline networks interactions. The rest of the paper is structured as follows. In Section II, we present the case study the research is investigating. Finally, we conclude our work in Section III, to present our research methodologies.

II. THE CASE STUDY

This study intends to reach our research objectives by addressing a critical real-world issue that intersects with minority groups' online and offline social capital dimensions - and their mutual interplay - and access to economic opportunities. Afrodescendant women, in most countries, are disproportionately prone to unstable and precarious jobs [18]. Gender-based inequality often intercepts ethnic-based discriminations, resulting in fewer economic prospects for Afrodescendant women. These inequalities arise from a combination of factors, including overrepresentation in informal employment [7] and limited educational opportunities [1]. In this panorama, the online and offline network dimensions generate a form of social capital, thus representing a decisive factor for access or exclusion from the labor market group [5]. In particular, migrant organizations, active both online and offline, are mostly considered important means of support for ethnic minorities [14]. In addition to specific services, these organizations have indeed a major role in increasing the social engagement and in reducing the social exclusion of their users, so in strengthening their social capital [4].

We intend to consider the case study of an online platform, mainly active in the Ile-de-France area, orienting young Afrodescendant women to their professional career, as a means of understanding online and offline network interplay and resource access promotion. This community was created with the scope of connecting young graduates, employees and expert Afrodescendant women and creating an inclusive space for sharing experiences, knowledge and support. It is a hybrid platform with both a virtual dimension - mainly oriented towards offering webinars, training activities and digital networking - and an in-presence dimension that complements

the networking experience with proximity and human involvement through activities and workshops.

The hybrid character of this platform on the one hand and the target group participating in it on the other, will make it possible to investigate the relationship between the two network dimensions in a privileged field of investigation for access to resources such as that of minority groups. The reference to this case study will be functional to the extraction of actionable insights that can substantively enhance the efficacy of networking-building and resource access within similar contexts.

III. EMPLOYED METHODOLOGY AND CONCLUSION

Qualitative and language-based approaches represent a promising attempt to provide narratives informed by migrants' voices and experiences. These approaches allow the researcher to get a progressively accurate knowledge of the community structure [8] [10] and multifocality [13]. This combines with ideas of community members shaping, mapping and evaluating their network and the resources linked to its belonging.

For us to achieve these goals, our methodology will rely on mixed-methods Social Network Approach, or SNA [4]. Our data collection strategy will consist of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, on a sample of ten subjects. Semi-structured interviews make it possible to explore processes and human experiences participation and resources access within the studied network [2]. On the other hand, quantitative SNA techniques [6] will be used, in order to map the existing formal connections and their characteristics. Network member features, their degree of activity within the network, and their virtual connections will be mapped and analyzed. Such a protocol will produce quantitatively built network maps, which will represent network tie directionality and strength [6]. The quantitative and qualitative data collected will be jointly analysed [17]. In conclusion, a longitudinal approach [9] will allow us to study how the interplay between the two online and offline spheres evolves over one year. The same data collection and elaboration processes will be indeed conducted twice along the study, with ten to twelve months of distance between the first and second interview.

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