

# **Professional networking online**

**A qualitative study of LinkedIn use in Norway**

**Linda Elen Olsen**



**Master in Media Studies**

**Department of Information Science and Media Studies**

**UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN**

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## ABSTRACT

Professional networking has become an important aspect of many professionals' work and is often regarded as a valuable asset to businesses. This thesis presents a qualitative study of how professionals in Norway employ the social networking service LinkedIn. Several social networking services provide support to the creation and maintenance of professional networks, and this has led to an increased potential for many professionals. In January 2008 LinkedIn had 17 million members world-wide, representing over 150 different industries.

The study focuses on how professionals in Norway perceive social networking services and how they employ LinkedIn as a professional networking tool. As such, the study explores how professionals manage their professional network through LinkedIn and examines possible implications of this use.

The empirical findings in the study are based on in-depth interviews with 11 professionals in Norway, which were conducted in November and December 2006.

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In this thesis there are a few concepts that will be presented and that need a further explanation. The term *social network*, which will be explained in chapter 3.2, has been defined as a group of people that have certain patterns of contact or interaction. The concept social network has also been divided into two subcategories: *personal network* and *professional network* (see chapter 3.2). The term professional network has been presented as adequate to what Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz (2002) refer to as an *intentional network* (see chapter 3.2.1).

Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz also introduce the term *personal social network* as a definition of the social network that any individual has access to (see chapter 3.2.1). This concept has not been further elaborated in the thesis, as the term *social network* has been reckoned as sufficient to provide a satisfactory description.

When referring specifically to social networking services that focus on professional networking, these have been referred to as *professional networking services*.



# 1 INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that interpersonal communication is one of the most important reasons why people use the Internet at home (Baym, 2006; Baym, Zhang and Lin, 2004; Haythornthwaite, 2000). Since 2001 there has been a rapid expansion of what is described as *social network services*<sup>1</sup> that focus on interaction between members (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). In the period between September and December 2007, 25 % of Norwegian internet users had visited a social networking service<sup>2</sup> during an average week (Vaage, 2007). Professional networking has become increasingly important to many businesses and their employees (Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz, 2002), and this study investigates how professional networkers employ the social networking service LinkedIn. The study will explore how members manage their professional network through LinkedIn and how this use manifests itself. It will also examine possible implications of this use.

Statistics demonstrate that even though a large percentage of the Norwegian population does not use the Internet daily, internet access and use is growing. The percentage of people<sup>3</sup> with access to the Internet at home grew from 66 % in 2004 to 83 % in 2007, and the percentage of people using the Internet on a daily basis grew from 44 % to 66 % during the same period (Vaage, 2007). A total of 94 % of Norwegian companies<sup>4</sup> had access to the Internet in 2007 (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2007). The people that spend the most time on the Internet are generally highly educated and consist of students, company leaders or people with academic professions (Vaage, 2007).

## 1.1 Background

When people search for jobs or employees, assistance to certain projects or expertise on particular matters, it has become usual to contact people in one's social network that might be of assistance (Haythornthwaite, 2000; Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz, 2002; Pickering and King, 1995). The idea of gaining access to resources through friends or acquaintances is far from new (Ancona and Caldwell, 1988) and has become a frequent element to many

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<sup>1</sup> This concept is defined in chapter 3.3.1.

<sup>2</sup> In Vaage (2007) the term *networking site* is used instead of social networking service. These terms will be explained more thoroughly in chapter 3.3.

<sup>3</sup> The study was conducted with an age-span between 9 and 79 years old. People who were younger or older than this selection were not included in the survey.

<sup>4</sup> This statistic only includes companies with more than 10 employees.

professionals' practices. Many professionals also build and maintain professional networks intentionally as a way of doing business (Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz, 2002). Business-cards are exchanged on conferences or meetings and e-mails occasionally find their way to possible business-partners. In addition, tools such as Microsoft Outlook keep track of the name and position of most of the connections. Social networking services, such as LinkedIn, combine all of these features, and more, in one application. Because various applications generally have different strengths LinkedIn may not replace any networking tools, but it might complement or improve them. This study examines LinkedIn as part of the process of managing a professional network.

When the study was conducted in November and December 2006, LinkedIn was still relatively new to Norwegian users. Some of the informants had been members for nearly three years, but they had, at the most, used LinkedIn actively for about two years. The informants had also noted an escalation in Norwegian activity on LinkedIn during 2006. There is no count on how many Norwegians that are registered on LinkedIn, but the Norwegian subgroup Nettverket.org had approximately 800 *active* members in May 2008. The total number of Norwegian professionals on LinkedIn is estimated to be considerably larger.

### **1.1.1 Personal motive**

The Internet is something that has always interested me. I have been an active internet user since my teens and when I began my studies I quickly developed a fascination towards the Internet and its implications on interpersonal relations. When I began my Masters degree there were several research topics that crossed my mind, but a course in New Media and Society led me towards CMC applications and how they were employed in businesses or by professionals. When I received a tip about LinkedIn new ideas quickly developed and it became clear that this was the application I wanted to examine more carefully. I did not have any knowledge of LinkedIn prior to that point, but I did have some experience with other social networking services.

The idea of studying LinkedIn combined several of my previous interests with new interesting perspectives. My fascination for interpersonal relations on the Internet was combined with the notion of studying professionals and examining how social networking services affected their

professional practices. To me this was extremely fascinating and something I was eager to gain more knowledge about.

## **1.2 Intention**

By taking a closer look at the professional networking service LinkedIn, this study has sought to examine some of the issues concerning professional networking on the Internet. The study's intention has been to research how the social networking service LinkedIn is employed by professionals in Norway, by examining LinkedIn as a professional networking tool. The study also explores how this tool is implemented in the practices of professional networking, and the study has had a particular focus on how LinkedIn supports the managing of connections in a professional network. The main purpose of the thesis has been to map out some of the areas that may benefit professional networkers, and to investigate to what extent LinkedIn may serve as a valuable networking tool.

## **1.3 Research questions**

In order to understand how LinkedIn has been employed it is important to gain insight into what a social network is and how social networks are supported through the Internet. It is also beneficial to acquire knowledge about the elements that build social networks and how these building-blocks correlate. As such, the thesis will provide an overview of social networks in general and how the Internet functions as a social space.

The research questions serve as the main approach to the area of study. In order to study how LinkedIn is used, it is also necessary to examine LinkedIn's characteristics and how the users perceive LinkedIn. This will be examined through research question number one:

- 1. What characterizes LinkedIn and how is it perceived by its users?*

How Norwegian professionals employ LinkedIn will be examined through research question number two:

- 2. How do professionals in Norway use LinkedIn as a networking tool?*

Finally, research question number three will explore how LinkedIn supports the process of managing connections:

3. *How does LinkedIn support the establishment, maintenance and development of connections in a professional network?*

The research questions have served as a guide-line during the collection of data, the analysis, the discussions and the conclusion.

## **1.4 The structure of the thesis**

*Chapter 1:* Presents an introduction to the thesis, its intention and the research questions.

*Chapter 2:* Provides a presentation of LinkedIn and its main features and structures.

*Chapter 3:* Introduces various theoretical perspectives that are relevant to the analysis and the research questions. The chapter's main focus is on social networking, personal ties and concepts that describe social interaction on the Internet.

*Chapter 4:* Presents the methods that the thesis is based on. It also explains how the study has been conducted and how the data has been analyzed.

*Chapter 5:* Presents the findings in the study and an analysis of that data. This is the empirical basis of the thesis.

*Chapter 6:* Discusses the findings in relation to the research questions and the theory that was presented in chapter 3. This chapter includes an evaluation of the study.

*Chapter 7:* Presents a summary of the findings and a conclusion to the thesis.

*Chapter 8:* Displays the bibliography.

*Chapter 9:* Presents additional data that was not included in the thesis.

## 2 LinkedIn

In this chapter the main features and structures of LinkedIn will be presented.

### 2.1 What is LinkedIn?

LinkedIn is a world-wide social networking service that was established in 2003. It may also be referred to as social software or an online community, and it has many similarities to a Web 2.0 application (Boulos and Wheelert, 2007; Fernback, 2007; O’Rielly, 2005). These concepts will be discussed more carefully in chapter 6.1.

LinkedIn’s main purpose is to provide business opportunities for professionals from all over the world through organizing and expanding one’s professional network. The network addresses both employers and employees, and it mediates a potential for people to find new resources in addition to being found and given opportunities as a resource. Users can search for jobs, clients or partners, they can distribute listings, discuss business issues and make themselves more visible in their own industry.

In short, users create a profile where they put down their qualifications and interests, very much like a résumé. Any member of LinkedIn will, through searching for the same qualifications, be able to find someone’s profile. In addition it is possible to send out invitations and search for former colleagues and classmates, as well as other acquaintances. The users create the content and manage the information on their own. Still, the website is not free from co-operative control and users operate under a number of limitations, especially in regard to interaction (see chapter 2.2.3) and whether or not the user has a paid (premium) account<sup>5</sup>.

In January 2008 LinkedIn had grown to include over 17 million members, representing 150 different industries. From March 2007 until March 2008, LinkedIn had a growth of 319%, making it the fastest growing social networking service available (Bergfeld, 2008). LinkedIn users may choose between free and premium accounts. The latter gives access to better tools for searching and communicating, making it easier to get in touch with new people.

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<sup>5</sup> There are two types of premium accounts; business and business plus which both have a monthly fee. They give access to the same features, but business plus enables the members to reach more people at a time and to conduct larger searches.

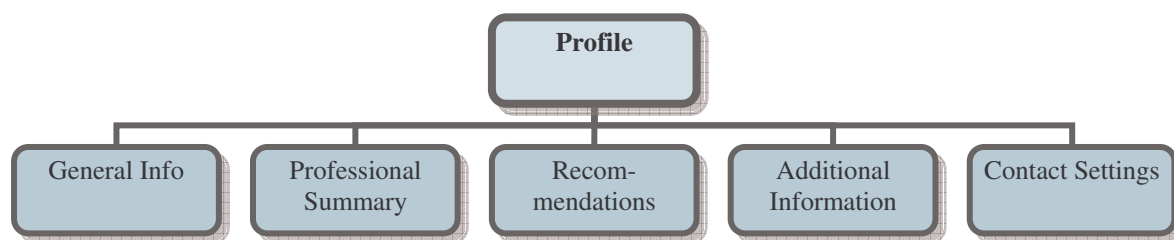
## 2.2 Features

LinkedIn is constituted of a number of different features, designed for presenting profiles, expanding networks and interaction between members. Many of these features are under constant development and new features emerge regularly. In order to gain an overview, LinkedIn will be divided into four main categories: *profile*, *network*, *interaction* and *jobs and hiring*. They all display features that are important to the LinkedIn experience.

### 2.2.1 Profile

The profile is in many ways the most important feature on LinkedIn. This is where users fill in their information; define who they are and what they are searching for. There are many characteristics to a LinkedIn profile, and these have been assembled into six main categories (Fig. 1).

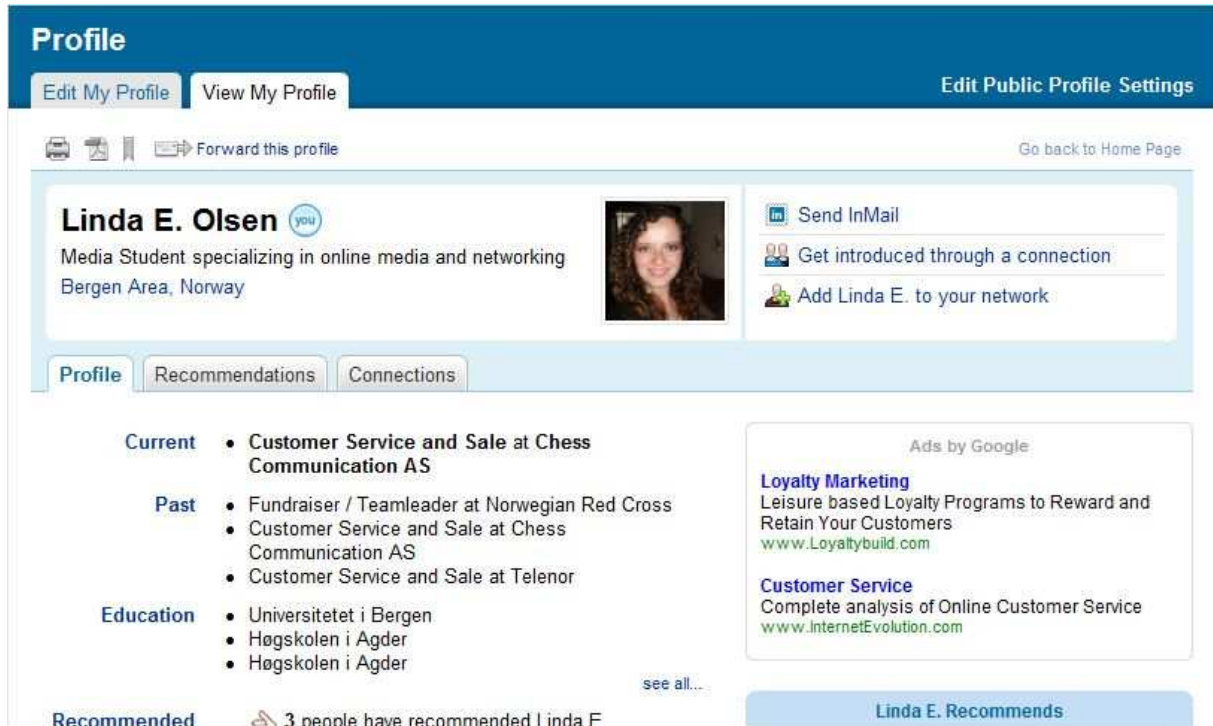
Figure 1 – Profile features



All of these features are important in their own way. The *General Info* helps to build the body of the person's profile and includes name, geographical area, past and present jobs and educations, and a profile picture. The *Professional Summary* is a presentation of the person's professional headline, industry of expertise, professional experience and goals, and his/her specialities within his/her industry. This feature enables the members to pinpoint their most valuable assets and to identify what kind of expertise one might expect them to possess. The *Recommendations* is mainly a feature that gives a better and more nuanced picture of the members' competence. People may recommend their connections and their work through this feature. The *Additional Information* is a feature that helps to provide even more information about the member and what he/she is all about. This feature may be perceived as more personal than the others. Company and/or personal websites, interests, groups, associations, honours and awards all add to the fullness of the profile. Finally, the *Contact Settings* helps to define the members' intentions and what they are searching for. Through this feature, the

members decide how and for what opportunities they want to be contacted. An example of a LinkedIn profile is shown in Fig. 2.

Figure 2 – Example of a LinkedIn profile



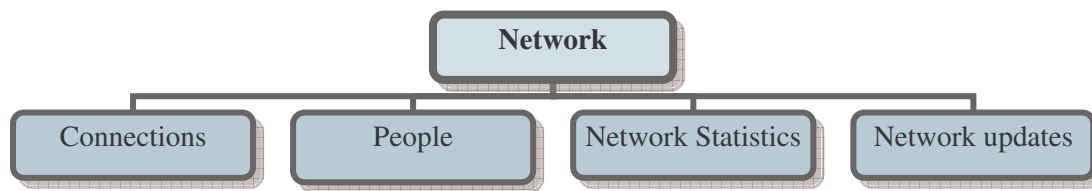
When members on LinkedIn view another person's profile they get access to two different versions of the profile. The *full profile* is the complete profile view containing all the features, and their details, as presented above. This profile view is always visible to the person's 1<sup>st</sup> degree connections. The *public profile* is the profile that is visible to all members on LinkedIn. The members can control which features, and details, they want to present in their public profile themselves. The profile may be hidden completely so that members have to be connected in order to view it, or it may be completely visible, so that the public profile displays the same details as the full profile. It is also possible to choose something in between.

## 2.2.2 Network

After completing one's profile, the network is what LinkedIn is all about. This is what attracts millions of users and it is on the basis of one's network that users search for and find information, new jobs and so on. The network features have been divided into four main categories (Fig. 3).



Figure 3 – Network features



First of all, a person has to have *Connections*. The connections tie individuals together and form the online network of LinkedIn. The more connections a person has, the bigger that person’s network is and the more opportunities are, in theory, available. The connections may function as a window to new resources, as well as helping to give a picture of the person’s strategy (the number of connections may indicate if the person has a closed or open networking strategy, see chapter 5.5.2) and position in his/her industry (what type of people the person is connected to). A person has to be a 1<sup>st</sup> degree connection in order to see another person’s contact list, but it is also possible to hide the contact list completely. Connections can be found through the *People* feature, where it is possible to search for names, titles, companies and locations.

When viewing someone’s profile it is possible to see how, and through whom, one is connected as far as the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree. Through the feature *Network Statistics* the user can also see how many 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> degree connections which are available in ones network (Fig. 4). In addition, it is possible to see the three top locations and industries in one’s network through this feature. This may help to get a better picture of one’s own network and what kind of resources that are available.

Figure 4 – Example of network degrees





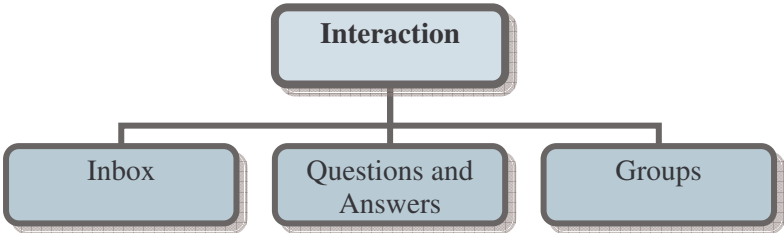
In addition to strengthening one’s network and expanding opportunities, LinkedIn also provides updates related to the users’ existing network. Through the feature *Network Updates* users can see what is new with their 1<sup>st</sup> degree connections, and as such, stay updated on what is happening in their professional lives. If a connection adds another connection, updates his/her profile, asks or answers a question, or changes jobs this will be updated so that the information is available to all of his/her connections. Users can also choose to subscribe to this type of information through e-mail.

A person may have as many connections as one pleases, but upon reaching 500 1<sup>st</sup> degree connections the exact number of connections is no longer displayed on one’s profile. If a person has more than 500 connections, this will be shown as 500+ connections. Still, users have found a way to avoid this regulation, as many open networkers put their number of connections in their professional headline.

**2.2.3 Interaction**

The point of creating a profile and developing a professional network will most likely be to have some sort of interaction with other members. Through LinkedIn, such interaction is mainly constituted through three different features (Fig. 5).

**Figure 5 – Interaction features**



The *Inbox* is where members send and receive messages, InMails, introductions and invitations. If the member has a premium account he/she will also be able to send and receive OpenLink Messages through the inbox (see Fig. 6). The *Inbox* is the main interaction feature available through LinkedIn, and may play an important role

**Figure 6 – Inbox features**

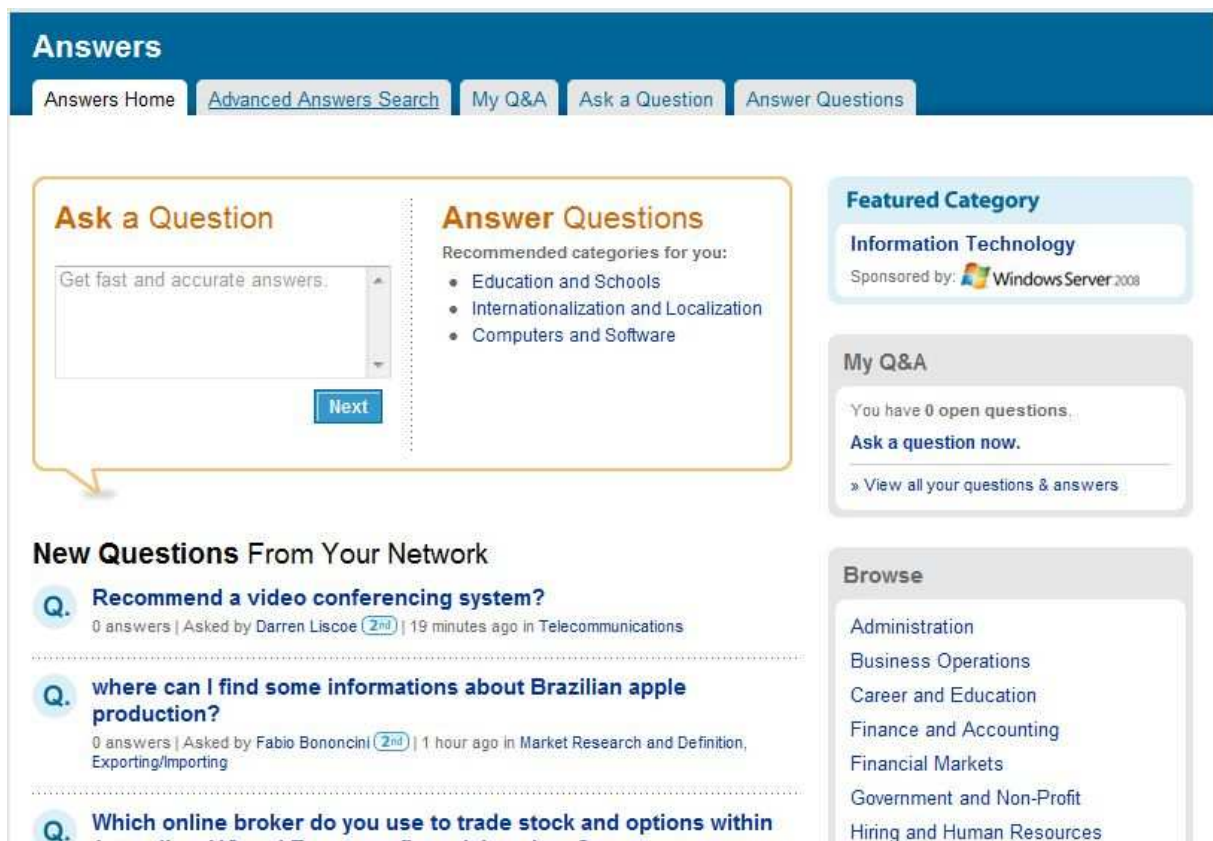
<b>Message</b>	A message is similar to an e-mail, and can be sent between 1 <sup>st</sup> degree connections.
<b>InMail</b>	An InMail is a message that may be sent to all LinkedIn members, regardless if one is connected to them or not. As a free member it is possible to receive InMails, but the member has to have a premium account in order to send them. Even with a premium account there

when building a professional network.

Another way to interact is through the *Questions and Answers* feature. This feature allows LinkedIn members to ask questions within their network, regarding any subjects. People may be in search of assistance in areas where they do not have much expertise themselves, or simply be wondering about other people's experience of LinkedIn, or other matters that interest them (Fig. 7).

	is a limitation to 3 (business) or 10 (business plus) InMails per month.
<b>Introduction</b>	An introduction is a message that is sent to a 2 <sup>nd</sup> or 3 <sup>rd</sup> degree contact. A person may reach or be reached through asking a 1 <sup>st</sup> degree connection to forward his/her message.
<b>Invitation</b>	An invitation is a request to connect. Invitations may be sent to friends or colleagues that are already signed up, or to anyone the member would like to join.
<b>OpenLink Message</b>	An OpenLink Message is a message tool that is available between premium account holders. There is no limitation to its amount and it may be sent to any premium account member.

Figure 7 – Questions and Answers



It is, however, important to note that most members are likely to interact through a number of other mediums than those mediated through LinkedIn.

The *Groups* is a feature that allows for members to promote themselves, their organization or their events. Members sign up and can choose to display the group picture on their profile. The feature does not promote any interaction, but a member can choose to allow other group members to contact them directly.

In addition to the group feature that is provided through LinkedIn, there are also several groups that have been created by LinkedIn members. Seeing that LinkedIn does not offer any forum where members may interact and discuss freely with other members of their network, many members have formed groups that are associated to LinkedIn. These groups operate on their own and are not regulated by LinkedIn in any way. They are still very important to the online environment that many LinkedIn members are a part of. An example of such a group is the Norwegian LinkedIn sub-group called Nettverket.org<sup>6</sup> (Fig. 8).

Figure 8 – Nettverket.org

Norge	Innlegg	Poster	Siste Post
<a href="#">Oppslagstavlen</a> ✉ Informasjon fra Styret Under forum: <a href="#">Medlemstilbud</a>	13	17	15. aug2007 kl. 14:58 Av <a href="#">John-Patrick Skaar</a> →
<a href="#">Diskusjoner</a> ✉ Åpen oppslagstavle og diskusjonsforum Under forum: <a href="#">Møter</a> , <a href="#">Blogg</a> , <a href="#">Pauserommet</a>	77	285	08. jan2008 kl. 13:35 Av <a href="#">Alexander Jensen</a> →
<a href="#">Nettverk</a> ✉ Informasjon og diskusjon om forskjellige andre typer nettverk Under forum: <a href="#">LinkedIn</a> , <a href="#">Facebook</a> , <a href="#">Xing</a> , <a href="#">Ecademy</a> , <a href="#">Hodeiegere</a>	42	87	15. jan2008 kl. 12:10 Av <a href="#">Morten Bessha</a> →
<a href="#">Lukkede Forum</a> ✉ Forskjellige lukkede forum Under forum: <a href="#">Krigsskolens Venner</a> , <a href="#">NorSec</a> , <a href="#">Styre</a> , <a href="#">Moderator kanalen</a>	71	418	29. des2007 kl. 14:48 Av <a href="#">Edgar Valdmanis</a> →

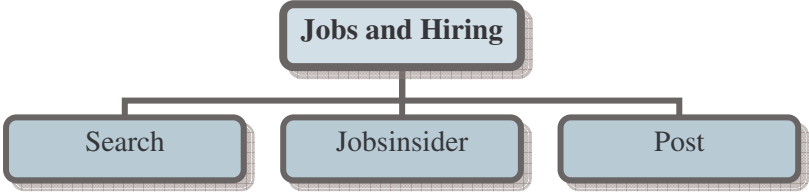
## 2.2.4 Jobs and Hiring

After joining LinkedIn, creating a profile, growing a network and interacting with members the desired outcome for many members is probably to find a job or to hire someone. In order

<sup>6</sup> Nettverket.org is an independent society for members of LinkedIn who speak Norwegian. It focuses on development of competence, networking stimulation and communication between members. The group has an annual meeting where, among other things, board members are elected. There is no member fee.

to find the job or employee of one's choice LinkedIn offers a number of different features to make it all happen (Fig. 9).

**Figure 9 – Jobs and Hiring features**



The *Search* feature is probably the most frequently used way of finding potential resources. In addition to searching for keywords (e.g. engineer, designer) the member may search according to location, experience level, job title and function, company or industry (Fig. 10). This feature has been further developed through the *Jobsinsider* feature which is downloaded as a toolbar connected to the member's web-browser. The feature automatically shows the member who he/she is connected to through jobs found online (Fig. 11). If the member is looking to hire someone it is also possible to *Post* a listing through LinkedIn. This will be shown in the network updates as well as being available to the LinkedIn network as a whole when searching for jobs. This does, however, require a fee.

Figure 10 – Searching for and posting jobs through LinkedIn

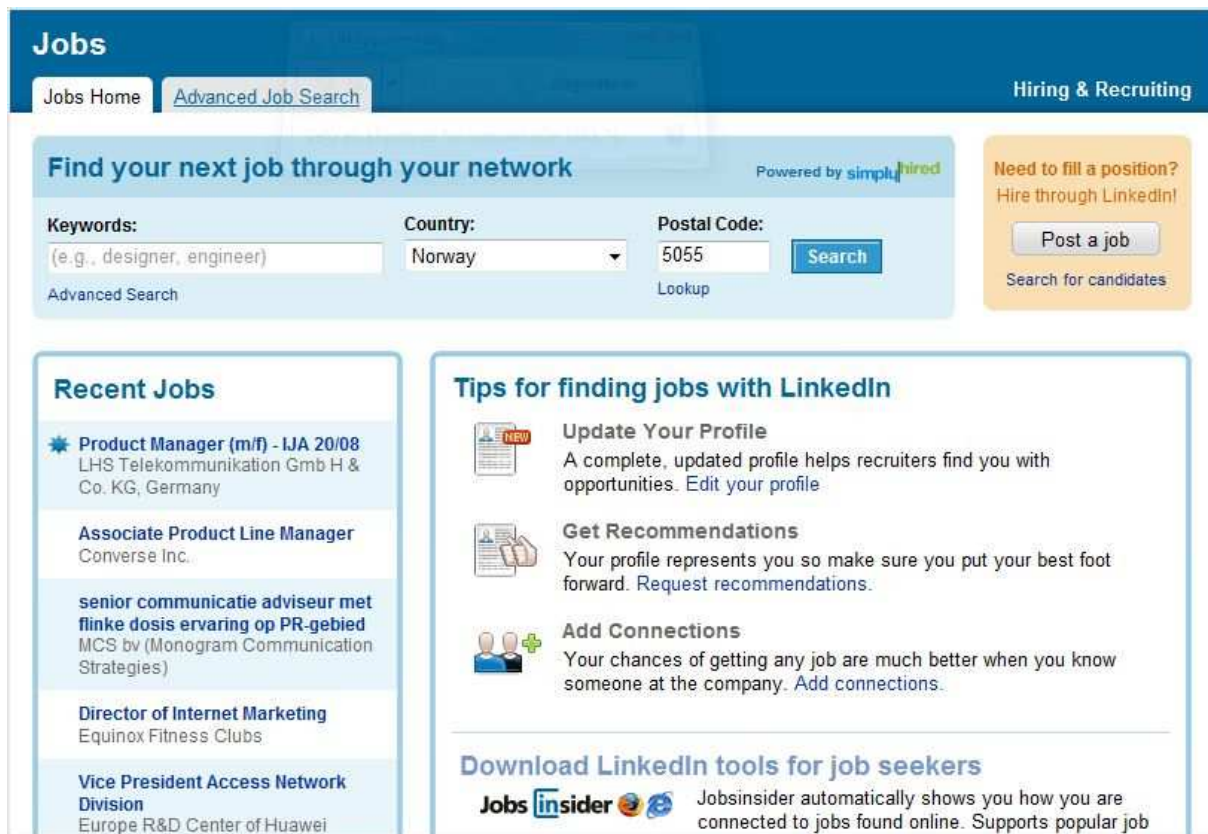


Figure 11 – Example of results using Jobsinsider

Displaying jobs 1 - 10 of 44473 results

Title	Company	Location	Date	Jobs Insider
SPONSORED <a href="#">Senior Facade Designer</a>	Arup	Seattle, WA	Jan 18	<a href="#">Who do I know at Arup?</a>
SPONSORED <a href="#">Designer Job</a>	The Parsons Corporation	South Jordan, UT	Jan 17	<a href="#">Who do I know at The Parsons Corporation?</a>
<a href="#">Designer</a>	ALK Technologies, INC	Princeton, NJ	Jan 18	<a href="#">Who do I know at ALK Technologies, INC?</a>
<a href="#">Designer</a>	Squarefactor	Orlando, FL	Jan 18	<a href="#">Who do I know at Squarefactor?</a>
<a href="#">Designer</a>	Icraive	New York, NY	Jan 18	<a href="#">Who do I know at Icraive?</a>

## 2.3 Possibilities on LinkedIn

The fact that LinkedIn has over 17 million members does not necessarily mean that all of them are active users. The amount of time spent on LinkedIn is also likely to vary a great deal among members, and may change during one's membership. The members who use the

network actively will, however, have access to a valuable networking tool when it comes to both nurturing and keeping track of existing connections, as well as getting in touch with other professionals.

Seeing that LinkedIn is a complex and constantly evolving social software, there are a number of available features that have not been introduced or discussed, as they are not directly relevant to this thesis. In addition, since the study was conducted in 2006/2007, many of the LinkedIn features have changed and new ones have emerged. For example, it was not possible to add a profile picture or ask questions<sup>7</sup> when the interviews were conducted. There was also only one premium account, as business plus did not exist. New features are constantly introduced and, consequently, this introduction may not include the most recent developments.

In this chapter a presentation of LinkedIn's main features has been displayed. The next chapter will present theories and studies that are related to the thesis.

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<sup>7</sup> The feature *Questions and Answers* was launched in January 2007 and was therefore not available upon the time of the interviews.



### 3 THEORY AND RELATED STUDIES

In this chapter various perspectives related to communication on the Internet, personal ties, social networking and concepts that describe social interaction on the Internet will be presented. An explanation of terms, applications and studies relevant to the research will also be provided, and there will be a short introduction to the field of study.

The Internet is a constantly evolving and complex term that is almost impossible to define (Jones, 1999). It may be studied according to its technology, its applications or its use, something which can make it a complicated field of research. Studies related to the Internet have been drawn from a number of disciplines, including communication research, media studies, anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, cultural studies, psychology and political economy (Jones, 1999). All of these disciplines constitute what is called *social sciences*, a set of academic disciplines that study people and human aspects of the world (Jones, 1999; Remeneyi et al., 2005). Jones (1999) divides social science research on the Internet into two main categories:

1. The abilities to search and retrieve data from large data stores.
2. The interactive communication capabilities of the Internet.

This thesis falls into the second category, as it studies interaction through a social construct that would not have been formed without the Internet. Still, the category is both vast and comprehensive, and studies often combine a number of social science disciplines. The study that is presented in this thesis is based on a combination of media studies, communication research, cultural studies and sociology.

The thesis is also part of a research field often referred to as *New Media* (Bolter and Grusin, 2000; Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006; Manovich, 2001). Exactly what constitutes the term new media often depends on the interpretation of the word new, but a common and popular perception is that new media is text, voice, pictures or video that is distributed through the use of a computer (Manovich, 2001). This does not limit new media to computer distribution, other media tools may also change cultural languages, but in an age where much of our culture is distributed through computers, it is also likely that this will affect the perception of new media.

Manovich (2001) points at five different principles that may help to characterize new media. These principles are not absolute and should be considered as a summary of tendencies rather than rules.

1. Numerical Representation: *New media are numerical representations created through a digital code, making it possible to program them.*
2. Modularity: *New media are constructed of objects that may be individually separated and broken down into the smallest parts (pixels, text-characters, 3-D points).*
3. Automation: *New media consists of operations that allow for automation of media creation, manipulation and access.*
4. Variability: *New media is never fixed and may be transformed into different versions.*
5. Transcoding: *New Media consists in two layers: a cultural layer and the computer layer. These layers influence each other.*

The *numerical representation* may best be exemplified through the convergence of old media forms into new ones. For example, analog media such as the traditional photography was re-invented through the new media form of the digital photography. *Modularity* represents the fact that every piece of new media information that might be reached through text, photo, video or sound, may be taken apart and separated into individual pieces of pixels, text-characters or 3-D points. *Automation* refers to the idea that in order to create, manipulate and access new media users do not have to be part of the creative process. Different types of software automatically perform these types of tasks. *Variability* is closely linked to automations, as new media versions often are partly assembled through the help of a computer. New Media is often open to variation and re-definition according to user needs. *Transcoding* refers to the idea that through its creation, new media also reflects culture and translates existing cultural categories and concepts: they influence each other.

Communication on the Internet is usually referred to as computer-mediated communication (CMC) and generally refers to the exchange of data between two or more networked computers (Jones, 1999). Researchers often narrow the term by limiting it to communication through computer-mediated applications such as e-mail, instant messaging etc. (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006; Woolgar, 2002). This will be further elaborated in chapter 3.1.1.



CMC research is a large and extensive field and primarily dates back to the 1980s. Early studies generally focused on task-oriented communication and the effects of computer-mediated communication systems. Researchers studied what happened when face-to-face groups met through computers, and how communication affected areas such as the quality of decision-making and leadership (Hiltz, Johnson and Turoff, 1986; Kiesler, Siegel and McGuire, 1984; Siegel et. al., 1986). These early studies were, however, generally concentrated on the efficiency in companies, and the studies have been criticized for being unrealistically small and for lasting as little as 30 minutes (e.g. Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006). In the 1990s researchers started to focus more on the social nature of CMC, and the Internet's impact on human social relationships (Walther, 1996; Walther and Burgoon, 1992; Wellman et. al. 1996).

The impact of the Internet in relation to how people socialize with others has been discussed at length ever since it became available as a public service in the 1990s (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006; Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002; Woolgar, 2002). As Baym, Zhang and Lin point out in their article "Social interactions across media" (2004), one of the most popular reasons for using the Internet is in fact social interaction. Many researchers believe that the media, and especially the Internet, might have a significant impact on people's social lives, and this influence has been described as both positive and negative. The disputes are generally related to the Internet's effect on social interaction, expression and forms of identity (Baym, 2006; Baym, Zhang and Lin, 2004; Rice and Haythornthwaite, 2006; Watt, Lea and Spears, 2002). For example some researchers have stated that CMC cannot be reckoned as equal to face-to-face communication and that tools such as e-mail or chat are not suited for building interpersonal relations (Nie and Erbring, 2002). As long as the participants do not meet face-to-face it is believed that the relations will remain superficial and that it will be difficult to create tight and reliable connections (Baym, 2006).

Other researchers believe that even though CMC does not happen at the same speed as face-to-face communication, the relationships that are created can become equally strong given time. In addition, the fact that people meet face-to-face is by no means a guarantee that the communication will be reliable. In their article "How Social is Internet Communication? A Reappraisal of Bandwidth and Anonymity Effects" (2002), Watt, Lea and Spears argued that the Internet has had one of the most important impacts on contemporary social life. They

state, among other things, that research has shown that the Internet increases the number of attainable social contacts and that it may assist in the maintenance of relationships.

### 3.1 A brief history of the Internet

Defining the Internet is a difficult, if not impossible, task. As Lievrouw and Livingstone state, the Internet is “ (...) a bundle of different media and modalities – e-mail, websites, newsgroups, e-commerce and so forth – that make it perhaps the most complex and plural of the electronic media yet invented” (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006: 21-22). Without venturing into too many technical details this very brief, and far from complete, summary seeks to show the main events that made it all possible.

Starting off with an aim to link different university departments that were working for the ARPA<sup>8</sup>, the network ARPANET was launched in 1969, based on J.C.R. Licklider’s concept of a ‘Galactic Network’. The concept was published through a series of memos in 1962, and its original idea was for a number of globally connected computers to access the same resources and information at any location. As the world’s first packet switching<sup>9</sup> network, the ARPANET is reckoned as the Internet’s ancestor (Leiner et al., 2003; Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006; Winston, 1998). After its launch in 1969 the number of computers connected to the ARPANET grew rapidly. By 1985 the ARPANET was a well established technology used by researchers and developers, as well as other communities in the need of computer-mediated communication (Leiner et al., 2003).

While ARPANET made it possible for computers to communicate, e-mail made it possible for people to communicate through computers. The idea of developing a way for files to deliver messages between users had been cultivating since the 1960s. At the early stages e-mail could only be sent to people who were using the same computer, but thanks to Ray Tomlinson<sup>10</sup> it became possible to send messages across the ARPANET in 1972. This was mainly due to

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<sup>8</sup> The Advanced Research Project Agency of the United States Department of Defence.

<sup>9</sup> Packet-switching is the term used when computer files are broken into small packets before they are sent through a network of computers. Instead of travelling through circuits, the packets can travel through alternate routes and thus be able to reach its destination even if a computer breaks down along the way (Leiner et al., 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Ray Tomlinson was an engineer for Bolt Beranek and Newman, a high-technology company that helped develop the ARPANET. In March 1972 he wrote a basic program which made it possible to read and send messages across the ARPANET (Leiner et al., 2003; Winston, 1998).

Tomlinson's invention of the @ sign<sup>11</sup> which helped to separate users from their computer. A year later 75 % of all ARPANET traffic consisted of e-mails (Winston, 1998).

As the ARPANET grew, so did the interest in the commercial sector. CompuServe<sup>12</sup> started its commercial online service in 1979, making it the first of its kind in the United States. The commercialization of the ARPANET contributed to its expansion as well as its development. Among other things, commercial vendors developed products that made use of the technology, they helped to point out problems that were being discovered along the way, as well as testing and introducing new ideas (Leiner et al., 2003; Winston, 1998; Woolgar, 2002).

Through the years the ARPANET continued to develop, constantly improving in terms of infrastructure, applications, commerce and so on. Hosts were assigned names instead of numbers, evolving into the Domain Name System<sup>13</sup> which exists today. The World Wide Web (also known as *www* or *the Web*), a part of the ARPANET consisting of interlinked, hypertext documents, was created in 1989. In 1991 the Web became available as a public service. Finally, the Federal Networking Council<sup>14</sup> passed a resolution defining the term Internet in 1995 (Leiner et al., 2003; Winston, 1998).

The Internet has, and will probably continue to, develop throughout its existence. In August 2007 it offered over 1.173 billion users an enormous amount of services world-wide, ranging from information and entertainment to shopping and financial transactions (Internet World Stats, 2007; Woolgar, 2002). Since its growth exploded in the 1990s new users continue to log on every day. Even though the Internet was not invented with interpersonal communication in mind, applications such as the e-mail is still a top priority among users, and has resulted in a wide range of socially constructed services (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006; Woolgar, 2002).

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<sup>11</sup> The @ sign originates from the letters a and d (ad) which is Latin and means at/to/near. It is used in e-mail addresses as a sign that the person belongs somewhere (the user belongs to for example hotmail or gmail).

<sup>12</sup> CompuServe Information Services was funded in 1969 and started out by selling time on the ARPANET to other companies (also known as time-sharing). By 1994 it had over 3.2 million users in 120 countries (Winston, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> The Domain Name System links various sorts of information through domain names. Among other things, it translates domain names into IP addresses, thus enabling electronic devices to identify and communicate with each other through a computer network.

<sup>14</sup> The Federal Networking Council (FNC) is a group of representatives from different U.S. Federal agencies that coordinate the development and use of federal networks.

### 3.1.1 The Internet as a new social space

According to Nancy K. Baym's article "Interpersonal Life Online" (2006) the Internet is fundamentally social. This social aspect of CMC has been a hot topic among researchers since the 1980s, and findings have resulted in both pessimistic and optimistic conclusions (Rice and Haythornthwaite, 2006; Watt, Lea and Spears, 2002). While some researchers have argued that the CMC technology, such as the Internet, is too limited for the creation of meaningful relationships (Nie and Erbring, 2002), others have argued that the Internet actually makes people more social (Walther, 1996). The very definition of the word social is often a key element to these contrasting statements (Baym, 2006). Also, most of CMC research has been based on a comparison to other forms of communication, mainly face-to-face communication. This sort of comparison is by no doubt interesting, but the fact that one form may be perceived as more social, does not necessarily make the other one not social. One point all researchers agree on, however, is that the Internet is a complex medium of communication (Baym, Zhang and Lin, 2004; Cummings, 2002; Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006; Nie and Erbring, 2002; Walther, 1996; Woolgar, 2002).

In many ways the invention of the e-mail has had a huge impact on the development of the Internet in terms of how it is used and how it is perceived. E-mail is still one of the most popular applications online and it has probably contributed to making interpersonal communication one of the Internet's most frequent uses. The e-mail was the first application to provide interpersonal CMC, but it most certainly was not the last. In retrospect a number of applications designed for CMC have emerged and examples include chat, instant messaging, internet communities and so on. Many of these applications were instantly adapted and have become widespread among internet users. As Cummings, Butler and Kraut state in their article "The Quality of Online Social Relationships" (2002: 2):

*"People use the Internet intensely for interpersonal communication, sending and receiving email, contacting friends and family via instant messaging services, visiting chat rooms, or subscribing to distribution lists, among other activities"*

Nancy K. Baym (2006) also point out that even applications that do not seem social have some social elements to them. Chat spaces and bulletin boards are becoming widespread, encouraging people to express their opinions and to communicate through business sites, online magazines and information services on the Internet. It is also on the basis of the

Internet's ability to promote all kinds of interpersonal communication that Baym and other researchers draw their conclusion of the Internet as being a social space (Baym, 2006; Cummings, Butler and Kraut, 2002; Fernback, 2007; Watt, Lea and Spears, 2002).

### 3.2 What is a social network?

In order to define what makes a social network it is necessary to define the concept *network*. A network is generally defined as something that is constituted of *nodes* (also known as *vertices*) and *ties* (also known as *edges*). Nodes represent the individual actors within a network, while ties represent the connections between the actors (Garton, Haythornthwaite and Wellman, 1997; Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006; Newman, 2003). For example, a computer network consists of a number of different computers (actors) connected through telecommunication systems (ties).

A network may have many different compositions, ranging from a simple network consisting of two actors and one tie (Fig. 12), to more complex networks consisting of networks within networks, such as the Internet (Fig. 13). In addition, there may be many different types of actors and ties within a network. The actors in a computer network can, for example, represent laptops or desktops, new or old technology, different colors and so on. The ties (or connections) may also represent different weights according to the quality and speed of the telecommunication system. Furthermore, the tie between two actors may be pointing in both or only one direction. This means that a computer network, for example, may consist of computes where one is communicating with the other, without the other communicating back (Newman, 2003).

A social network is built on the same principles as any other network. In relation to a social network, the actors represent individuals and the ties represent the relations between

Figure 12 – Simple network

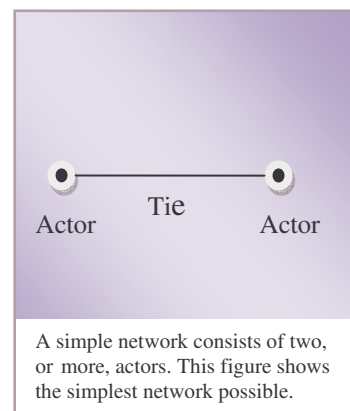
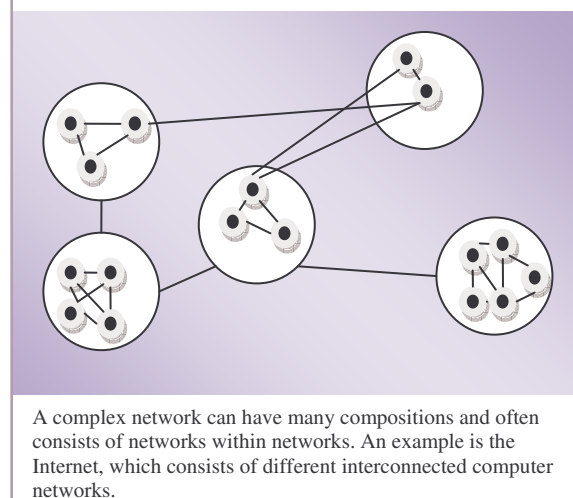


Figure 13 – Complex network



them. If an actor has a set of ties, he/she has a social network (Garton, Haythornthwaite and Wellman, 1997; Haythornthwaite, 2000; Newman, 2003).

Researchers often refer to a social network as a group of people that have a certain pattern of contact or interaction. The pattern, or tie, may be that of friendship between individuals, business relationships between companies, geographical proximity or a professional acquaintance. The ties can also be based on one or more connections (also known as *strands*). Two people can be connected solely as members of the same organization, but they might as well be connected through a number of other relations, such as working together on projects, sharing information or car-pooling. Such ties are generally referred to as *multiplex ties*. The more connections that exist within a tie, the more multiplex the tie is (Garton, Haythornthwaite and Wellman, 1997).

Because of the many elements that build a person's social network, it will usually be quite complex. It will probably consist of both weak and strong ties<sup>15</sup> that are intertwined in a number of ways and, in addition, each tie may consist of several multiplex connections of their own. In other words, the connections within a social network might vary from weak acquaintances to strong friendships depending on the tie and the actors' desire to connect with each other (Haythornthwaite, 2000).

The complexity of ties that connect individuals makes it difficult to divide a person's social network into different categories. A social network is often described as a dynamic system that varies according to time and circumstances, something which makes it flexible according to size, strength and situation (Haythornthwaite, 2000). A person may, for example, decrease or increase communication within existing ties and/or loose or gain contact with actors. Still, researchers often make a distinction between what may be described as *personal* and *professional* networks (Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz, 2002).

An individual's personal network is generally characterized as a combination of strong and weak ties that are primarily oriented towards a personal motive during the exchange of resources. Social support, companionship, emotional aid and advice are typical exchanges within a personal network (Haythornthwaite, 2000). The personal network is usually not

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<sup>15</sup> Strong and weak ties are dealt with more carefully in chapter 3.4.

intentionally built for explicit purposes, and is generally a result of common interests and ideas (strong ties) or geographical proximity and random interaction (weak ties) (Haythornthwaite, 2000). A person's professional network, however, is generally characterized through an exchange of resources directed explicitly at professional tasks, and are activated when such needs emerge. The professional network generally consists of strong and weak ties that are activated when the individual is in need of resources on a professional level. The professional network is primarily built with intention of supplying this need. Consequently, professional networks are generally more ego-centered than personal networks (Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz, 2002). It is, however, important to note that the complexity of ties in general also makes the boundaries between personal and professional networks hazy. An individual's personal and professional networks often complement each other and, as Nardi Whittaker and Schwarz emphasize, people may be activated as a representation of both networks, depending on the situation.

### **3.2.1 Professional networking**

In their article "NetWORKers and their Activity in Intentional Networks" (2002) Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz use the concept *intentional networks* when referring to personal social networks in the workplace (this will be referred to as *professional networks* in this thesis). They stress that employees' own social networks play an increasingly important role in the workplace and that professional networking has become crucial to a great number of businesses, especially in relation to project- and team-related work. They also point out that new technologies "(...) have led to changes in established work-based communication practices" (Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz, 2002: 206) and that the importance of creation and maintenance of intentional networks has changed the way employees relate to each other. According to Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz (2002) employees deliberately create and maintain new ties in order to establish social networks that may be useful to themselves and their companies. Earlier studies also support this view. For example, Ancona and Caldwell's article "Beyond task and maintenance: Defining external functions in groups" (1988), states that their study revealed how groups often relied on outsiders for resources or information, and that such resources were related to high team performance.

Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz (2002) point at three main tasks that they believe networkers need to attend in order to keep a successful professional (intentional) network: *building a*



*network, maintaining the network and activating selected contacts.* They stress that networkers need to continue to add new contacts to their network in order to access as many resources as possible, and to maintain their network through staying in touch with their contacts. This is so that the contacts are easy to activate when the networker has work that needs to be done.

Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz emphasize that the professionals in their study stressed the significance of certain actions in order to construct and manage professional (intentional) networks. Matters such as remembering who were part of their professional network, staying updated on their connections' location and work-status, and carefully choosing how to communicate efficiently with them, were of great importance. Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz also stressed that much effort was put into the creation and maintenance of a professional network.

When Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz presented their article on professional networking in 2002, Internet services that supported professional networking, such as LinkedIn, were rare and not very widespread. Since then, however, there has been a rapid expansion of such services and the number of social networking services<sup>16</sup> that focus on professional networking online has become extensive (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Examples of popular social networking services that support professional networking include CareerBuilder.com<sup>17</sup>, Ecademy<sup>18</sup>, Xing<sup>19</sup> (former OpenBC), Plaxo Pulse<sup>20</sup> and Ryze<sup>21</sup>.

### **3.3 CMC and social networking**

It has often been said that when a computer network connects people as well as machines, it becomes a social network (Garton, Haythornthwaite and Wellman, 1997; Newman, 2003; Wellman et al. 1996), and assuming that the Internet is a social space, this is a plausible notion. There are many ways of interacting through CMC and the Internet gives people access to a number of different applications designed explicitly for interpersonal communication and social interaction.

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<sup>16</sup> The term *social networking service* is described in chapter 3.3.1.

<sup>17</sup> CareerBuilder.com ([www.careerbuilder.com](http://www.careerbuilder.com)) was founded in 1995.

<sup>18</sup> Ecademy ([www.ecademy.com](http://www.ecademy.com)) was founded in 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Xing / Open BC ([www.xing.com](http://www.xing.com)) was founded in 2003. The service changed its name to Xing in 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Plaxo Pulse ([www.plaxo.com](http://www.plaxo.com)) was founded in 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Ryze ([www.ryze.com](http://www.ryze.com)) was founded in 2001.



The definition of a social network as a group of people that has a certain pattern of contact or interaction (see chapter 3.2) makes it a concept which is both comprehensive and open to interpretation. Researchers point to many different ways of social networking through the Internet and, in many ways; it all seems to depend on one's individual goal when interacting. As Baym, Zhang and Lin point out in their article "Social interactions across media" (2004), the use of the internet is shaped by user choices. A number of people actively use the Internet to build and expand their social networks, with personal and/or professional intentions. As mentioned previously, Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz found, in their article "NetWORKers and their Activity in Intentional Networks" (2002), that employees intentionally built personal networks through the Internet as a way of gaining resources for their organization as well as improving their own career. On a more personal level, Baym (2006) argues that many people use the Internet with the intention of affirming and/or exploring their own identities. For example, they may form new relationships through joining online groups in the search of a sense of belonging, information, empathy and social status.

Given the Internet's multiplex character and ability to adapt itself according to its users needs, a person will often be able to find an application that suits him/her (Baym, 2006). At the same time many people may be building, expanding or maintaining their social network through the Internet without even thinking about it, or even realizing it. As Haythornthwaite (2000) emphasize, a person's social network will usually change and develop during a person's life-course, and this is seen as a natural part of people's social life. Seeing that the Internet is becoming increasingly integrated into people's lives (Vaage, 2007), the process of social networking through the Internet does not necessarily require much deliberation. As several researchers point out (Baym, 2006; Baym, Zhang and Lin, 2004; Haythornthwaite, 2000), the way people establish new ties, maintain existing ones, develop relationships and, hence, manage their social networks often change according to the available possibilities of interaction. This does not necessarily mean that the Internet, or other tools of communication, have any impact on a person's social network as a whole, but it emphasizes that the way people communicate within their social networks might change (Baym, 2006; Woolgar, 2002).

Nevertheless, the fact that social networking through the Internet might not have an impact on a person's social network, does not exclude the idea entirely. In regard to the development and maintenance of social networks the Internet is believed to have become increasingly effective, especially in connection to work-related situations. Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz

(2002) stress this view as they believe that the Internet makes it possible to communicate more frequently and thus contribute to increased support in relation to social, cultural and organizational knowledge. Pickering and King also support this view in their article “Hardwiring Weak Ties” (1995), as they find that the Internet provides new possibilities in relation to the maintenance of both strong and weak ties.

It is important to note that CMC is only one way of maintaining ties within a social network, and research has shown that CMC is seldom the only form of communication between individuals (Baym, Zhang and Lin, 2004). In general, people tend to communicate through a number of different mediums. For example, Baym, Zhang and Lin’s (2004) research demonstrated that people used a minimum of two, and often three, channels of communication in their social lives. The research also suggested that most online interaction was conducted between people who had talked on the telephone or met face-to-face.

### **3.3.1 Networks and communities on the Internet**

In recent years it has become increasingly popular to talk about different types of online social network services and/or communities (Baym, 2006; Baym, Zhang and Lin, 2004; Haythornthwaite, 2000). Exactly what constitutes a network service and what constitutes a community is somewhat ambiguous, as the terms tend to implement many of the same structures and functions. Both expressions are often used to describe the same phenomenon, and are in many cases combined and labeled *social community networks*. Although the terms overlap, they both deserve a further explanation.

A *social network service (SNS)* is generally defined as an online service that focuses on the building and maintenance of online and/or offline social networks. In general it joins people with common interests or activities through the use of some sort of software<sup>22</sup>, and members may communicate through different applications such as e-mail, chat, sharing files, blogging, discussion groups and so on. A main characteristic of social network services is that members have means of connecting with friends, searching for former colleagues or classmates, as well as getting in touch with new people (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007). Social networking services often gather information about their users’ social contacts and use this information in

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<sup>22</sup> This software is often referred to as *social software* (see chapter 3.3.2).

order to create an interconnected social network. Often, the services also reveal to users how they are connected to other users in their network (Adamic and Adar, 2005).

The concept of *community* may be seen in either a functional or a symbolic view (Fernback, 1999). It might be defined as a *place* where social relationships are created (such as a small hometown or maybe a suburb in a large city) or as a *symbol* of common ideas and sentiments (such as a common lifestyle, identity or religion). An online community may be seen as a place in the sense of it existing in cyberspace, or as a symbol in the sense of common interest and identity through online groups etc. Communities on the Internet are often described as *virtual communities* (or *cybercommunities*). However, the boundaries that help to define a virtual community are often in a constant state of change, making its definition both fluent and dynamic (Fernback, 1999; Fernback, 2007). Fernback explains this further in his article “There Is a There There” (1999: 217):

*“Cybercommunity is not just a thing; it is also a process. It is defined by its inhabitants, its boundaries and meanings are renegotiated, and although virtual communities do possess many of the same essential traits as physical communities, they possess the “substance” that allows for common experience and common meaning among members”*

In relation to CMC and the Internet, the term community can be especially hard to define, as this type of communication tends to change the rules of social interaction. Issues concerning the Internet as a social space as well as the loss of boundaries in regard to geography, time and space often result in different opinions and definitions (Baym, Zhang and Lin, 2004; Fernback 1999; Fernback, 2007; Haythornthwaite, 2000). The definition of what a community is has traditionally been based on offline face-to-face interaction, and when this interaction is conducted through computers it adds an interesting, but perhaps confusing, element to the mix.

Fernback (2007) deals with this issue, to some extent, as he states that the concept of community has become weak.

*“The term community has lost much of its meaning in western culture because the discourse about it tends to be totalizing. Community is a political, cultural, economic and technical buzzword. Community is descriptive and prescriptive, local and global,*

*spatially bound or boundaryless, public or private, organic or mechanical, intentional or accidental, purposive or aimless, oppressive or liberating, functional or dysfunctional. It can be a shared interest, shared kinship or shared space” (Fernback, 2007: 52)*

Instead he proposes alternative ways of defining social relations on the Internet, and states that a community should rather be seen as a *process* which is constantly evolving.

One of the things that all definitions of social network services and online communities have in common, however, is that they are all based on some sort of social structure or organization. It is something people share and it generally entails the usage of different types of software. In many ways, the term community refers to a description of a social structure that takes place when people interact online, while the term social network service refers to a utility that might make this happen.

### **3.3.2 Social software**

The term *social software* is usually applied to software programs that enable people to interact and share data with each other. This type of software is often seen as quite dynamic, in the sense that its users generally create the content. Green and Pearson (2005) define the concept as referring to “(...) various, loosely connected types of applications that allow individuals to communicate with one another” (Green and Pearson, 2005: 2).

There are many different types of social software programs that are available through the Internet. The list is long and comprehensive, and technology improvements ensure that new applications emerge constantly. Among the most popular types of social software are weblogs, e-mail, wikis, instant messaging, chat, discussion forums and networking websites (Fig. 14) (Green and Pearson, 2005).

**Figure 14 – Different types of social software**

<b>Weblogs</b>	A weblog is a personal webpage where the author, a blogger, writes about different themes that interest him/her. The blog is usually available to be read and commented on by anyone, and the blogger may often link to other weblogs. The weblog usually functions as a sort of diary at the same time as it enables the blogger and his/her readers to interact.
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<b>E-mail</b>	E-mail is a conversation tool used for communication between two or more individuals. A user may choose to send e-mails one-to-one or one-to-many.
<b>Wikis</b>	A wiki is a program that manages a set of web pages which are created and developed through a multi-user system. The users not only create the content, they also modify other users' content. A popular example is Wikipedia <sup>23</sup> , which is the largest wiki available online.
<b>Instant messaging and Chat</b>	Instant messaging and chat is a communication program that enables its users to communicate in real-time. Users may communicate one-on-one or as a group.
<b>Discussion forums</b>	Discussion forums generally consist of different threads that are organized into themes and categories. Users post a comment and then wait for others to reply. The threads are normally available for a certain period of time, with a variety from days to several months or even years.
<b>Networking websites</b>	Networking websites connect people who share common interests through an advanced communication platform which enables its users to interact. The website might focus on meeting new people, communicating with friends or colleagues, expanding one's social network and/or getting in touch with professionals. Many networking websites also combine several of these aspects.

Most of these applications are not new to the Internet, but on the basis of recent development social software has received massive interest among researchers. The interest is especially rooted the expansion of networking websites. These types of websites have become increasingly popular among Internet users, and are in some cases responsible for connecting millions of people from all over the world. Among the most popular networking websites are Facebook, YouTube, MySpace and Friendster (Bolous and Wheelhert, 2007; Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Green and Pearson, 2005). Between 2001 and 2006 over 20 different networking websites, focusing on both personal and professional relations, were launched (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Networking websites are often described as social networking services, which were presented in chapter 3.3.1. These networking websites, and other types of social software, may also be referred to as Web 2.0 technology.

### 3.3.3 Web 2.0

In relation to web-technology the concept of Web 2.0 has become a buzzword frequently used among both researchers and service providers (O'Rielly, 2005). Though it might sound like Web 2.0 is an improved version of the World Wide Web, the expression has little to do with any technical advancements. Instead it refers to a whole new way of using the web.

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<sup>23</sup> Wikipedia is a free, web-based encyclopedia project which is written by volunteers world-wide in more than 250 languages. It mainly consists of links that guide the user to pages containing additional information about the topic of interest (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About>).

Traditionally the World Wide Web has been used to either search for or publish information, with little collaboration between readers and writers. According to O’Rielly (2005) this changed in 2001 as the dot.com collapse<sup>24</sup> triggered an emergence of new applications and sites that emphasized sharing and cooperation between web users. The concept was launched at a web conference held by O’Rielly and MediaLive International<sup>25</sup> in 2004 and quickly spread from there.

The essence of Web 2.0 is that participants contribute to the shaping of the software, meaning that the data is controlled by its users. Also, the web is seen as a platform of communication rather than actual software. Seeing that the concept has never been officially declared its definition remains somewhat unresolved. O’Rielly (2005) does, however, stress some core principles of Web 2.0 applications/sites:

- Services, not packaged software, with cost-effective scalability.
- Control over unique, hard-to-recreate data sources that get richer as more people use them.
- Trusting users as co-developers.
- Harnessing collective intelligence.
- Leveraging the long tail through customer self-service.
- Software above the level of a single device.
- Lightweight user interfaces, development models, AND business models.

(O’Rielly, 2005)

Web 2.0 environments are fundamentally flexible, meaning that they are always open to changes, updates, remixing and re-use. As such, Web 2.0 encourages its users to interact through applications such as photo- and video-sharing, social bookmarking<sup>26</sup> and tagging<sup>27</sup>. Social software such as wikis, weblogs and networking sites are among the most popular Web 2.0 environments (Boulos and Wheelert, 2007; O’Rielly, 2005).

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<sup>24</sup> The dot.com collapse was a result of the founding of several Internet-based companies (also referred to as dot.coms) in the period between 1995 and 2001. Many of the companies had similar business-plans and strategies, something which eventually led to a crash in 2001 as most of the companies did not manage to fulfill their strategies.

<sup>25</sup> MediaLive International ([www.medialiveinternational.com](http://www.medialiveinternational.com)) is a privately held media and marketing company that focus on technology advancement.

<sup>26</sup> Social bookmarking is when users, generally through a bookmarking-service, save links to different web pages that they want to remember or share with others.

<sup>27</sup> To tag something is when a person adds keywords or terms to a piece of information (picture, text, video etc.), thus giving a further description of the information.

### 3.4 Strong and Weak Ties

As described in chapter 3.2, social networks are held together by ties. These ties are generally very complex and may be based on a number of different strands. Ties are, however, generally divided into two main categories: strong and weak.

It is hard to define exactly what a strong or weak tie is, as the boundaries are difficult to identify. In general, however, a tie is considered as strong when there is an emotional exchange through social support, advice, confidence and so on. People who are connected through strong ties will usually help each other with personal problems, share resources and meet face-to-face at the same time as communicating through other forms of communication (such as telecommunication or CMC). A weak tie is, on the other hand, a tie where there is a low level of intimacy and little exchange of personal information. Weak ties are often bound through work, school or perhaps geographical proximity (Garton, Haythornthwaite and Wellman, 1997; Haythornthwaite, 2000). As sociologist Mark S. Granovetter puts it:

*“(...) the strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie”* (Granovetter, 1973: 1361)

#### 3.4.1 The Strength of Weak Ties

In human communication research, studies on interpersonal interaction have traditionally concentrated on the analysis of individuals and their psychology. Research on personal influence and the psychology of interpersonal relations has been extensive, and the notion of strong and weak ties was well known in the 1950s (Granovetter, 1973). In the 1960s, however, there was a shift in the perception of interpersonal interaction. Researchers became more occupied with the connections that existed between individuals, and especially the strength of these connections (Flichy, 2006; Granovetter, 1973).

In 1973 Mark S. Granovetter published an article in the *American Journal of Sociology* called “The Strength of Weak Ties”. Previous to Granovetter’s article most sociologists had focused on strong ties, giving weak ties little or no importance in relation to a person’s social network. Granovetter argued, however, that weak ties definitely had their strengths, especially as



bridges between small-scale interaction and large-scale patterns<sup>28</sup>. The theories and observations in Granovetter's article are often considered as common knowledge today.

What Granovetter pointed out was that when two people are connected through a strong tie, there is a greater chance of their ties overlapping. This means that people who share strong ties will probably move within the same social circles, and thus share most of each other's connections in one way or another. While strong ties are more likely to share their resources than weak ties, the fact that strong ties belong to the same social circles also limits the resources they have to share. Granovetter based much of his hypothesis on empirical evidence which demonstrated that people who were similar were more likely to develop strong ties. This also meant that they would be more likely to socialize with the same types of people (and with that: access the same resources). When a tie is weak, however, there is a much better chance of their social circles not overlapping and consequently of gaining access to new resources.

Granovetter compared weak ties to *bridges*, the only path connecting two points, providing a route of resources between people. In larger networks there might be several bridges between two points. Though all weak ties may not function as bridges, all bridges (with very few exceptions) are, according to Granovetter, weak ties. In addition, Granovetter pointed out that each tie does not only provide direct access between individuals, but indirectly also to all of each other's connections. As such, weak ties provide the possibility to connect with new individuals. Because weak ties are the ones who are most likely to give access to new connections, the potential of a weak tie might be monumental. Thus, the loss of an average weak tie could actually do more damage to a person's social network than the loss of an average strong tie. The removal of a strong tie may result in the loss of a confident, but it will usually not result in the loss of many other ties within one's network. The loss of a weak tie, however, might result in the loss of a number of connections the person is not connected to otherwise. In other words, more people can be reached through weak ties (Granovetter, 1973).

It is also important to note that while Granovetter found it unlikely that one specific tie would function as the only path between two points in larger networks, he nonetheless introduced the concept of *local* bridges. A local bridge is described as the shortest, more likely and most

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<sup>28</sup> In short, this means that the way people interact in small groups influence a larger group: their overall social network (Granovetter, 1973).



efficient route between two points, in most cases also representing the only alternative (Granovetter, 1973). Still, local bridges are only found as the degree between two individuals increases, at a minimum degree of three (Friedkin, 1980; Granovetter, 1973). This does, however, make local bridges the most significant weak ties and the one's that will cause the greatest damage to a social network if they are broken.

### **3.4.2 Working weak ties**

In 1983 Granovetter reviewed his article "The Strength of Weak Ties" (1973), taking into account empirical studies that had tested his hypothesis during the previous ten years. Many of the studies had focused on weak ties and their role in the search for new jobs. In retrospect, this has proved to be one of the areas where weak ties might best be exploited, or at least play a significant role (Granovetter, 1983; Haythornthwaite, 2000; Pickering and King, 1995).

As previously suggested, weak ties are often found through school, work or other arenas where people from different social circles meet and communicate on a fairly regular basis. Seeing that the workplace is a natural space for weak ties to occur, it is also natural that many of the studies concentrating on weak ties have been performed at the workplace. It also makes it natural to assume that weak ties play a larger role in these types of settings. Studies have shown, among other things, that weak ties are frequently used when trying to get a new job or get access to new information (Granovetter, 1983; Haythornthwaite, 2000; Pickering and King, 1995). In addition, a number of studies have found that professionals are generally heavy users of weak ties, also indicating that weak ties are frequently used among people with higher education. This is considered to be a result of the fact that highly educated people are likely to become professionals and take on jobs that require socializing in many different circles (Granovetter, 1983). However, it is important to note that strong ties are also believed to be quite useful in work situations, especially in relation to finding jobs for the first time. Although a weak tie might give a person access to many new resources, it is the strong tie he/she will go to for help. Weak ties are thought to be more useful when climbing up the career-ladder or changing jobs within a certain environment (Granovetter, 1973; Granovetter 1983).

In relation to strong and weak ties Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz (2002) stress that these are very ambiguous terms which are hard to define, as definitions vary according to both

researchers' and informants' interpretations. Although their informants spoke of different ways of keeping track of and maintaining their contacts (possibly suggesting weak ties), they also mentioned bonding and friendship (possibly suggesting strong ties), indicating a vast area of grey concerning the subject. This point has been equally emphasized by other researchers (Pickering and King, 1995).

### 3.4.3 Six degrees of separation

In 1967 Stanley Milgram, a social psychologist, conducted what is known as the 'small world' experiments. In his experiments he focused on network structure and, among other things, asked people to pass on a letter in an effort to reach a targeted individual. Although very few of the letters reached its destination, the ones that did had only passed through about six people. It is this number of links that determines the smallness of the world, making the world smaller or larger depending on how many links that separate two random people. Milgram's experiments later became the basis of the notion *Six Degrees of Separation*<sup>29</sup>. Although Milgram never used the phrase himself, he is usually credited the idea (Garfield, 1979; Newman, 2003).

In retrospect, a number of researchers have conducted experiments resulting in similar conclusions. For example, Dodds, Muhamad and Watts (2003) conducted an experiment<sup>30</sup> testing the degrees of separation as participants tried to reach certain targets through the use of e-mail. They estimated that the number of chains varied from five to seven people, in addition to pointing out that the success was very dependent on the activity and motivation of the participants. Furthermore, Killworth et al. (2006) made a study of the accuracy in small world chains, suggesting that chains vary from two or three to 14 chains depending on whether or not people chose the 'right'<sup>31</sup> paths in their social network. If the right paths were to be chosen, however, they estimated a maximum total of 5 chains. It is important to note that the study was based on telephone surveys<sup>32</sup> in addition to being work-related, meaning that the

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<sup>29</sup> In short, the theory of Six Degrees of Separation is that, on average, the number of weak ties that link two random people is six (Garfield, 1979; Newman, 2003). The phrase 'six degrees of separation' became a popular notion after playwright John Guare introduced his play *Six degrees of Separation* in 1990 (Newman, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> The experiment is called the 'Small World Project' and is an online experiment. People can visit the website <<http://smallworld.columbia.edu/>> and sign up as participants.

<sup>31</sup> According to Killworth et al. (2006) the 'right' choice is defined as choosing the shortest possible path.

<sup>32</sup> The network that was analysed consisted of 105 members of an interviewing bureau, with a total of 10,920 possible paths. The participants had full knowledge of all available chains and were not asked to make choices about the next step in the chain (Killworth et. al., 2006).

results might not be representable in relation to global social networks (Killworth et. al., 2006).

Granovetter's hypothesis of weak ties, and especially local bridges, was also tested by Noah Friedkin in his article "A Test of Structural Features of Granovetter's Strength of Weak Ties Theory" (1980). What Friedkin found was that all local bridges indeed consisted of weak ties and that the removal of such bridges would cause the most damage to the possibilities of a person's social network, supporting Granovetter's theory from 1973. The removal of an equivalent number of strong ties was, on average, was found to have no consequence regarding the size of a person's social network (Friedkin, 1980). However, Friedkin also emphasized that even though local bridges theoretically represent the shortest path between two people, they do not necessarily represent the most likely path.

*"Granovetter's theory, to the extent that it is a powerful theory, rests on the assumption that local bridges and weak ties not only represent opportunities for the occurrence of cohesive phenomena (e.g., information and influence flows, intergroup coordination and mobilization, etc.) but that they actually do promote the occurrence of these phenomena"* (Friedkin, 1980: 421)

The fact that any two individuals might be connected through six degrees does not necessarily mean that they benefit from their connectedness.

It has been said that the Internet might decrease the number of weak ties. This is based on the assumption that the Internet makes it easier to get in touch with people from all over the world due to the loss of social cues such as geography, social status and so on. Low cost applications like e-mail and instant messenger also makes it easier to keep in touch (Adamic and Adar, 2005; Baym, 2006). In addition, through social networking services, the Internet might make it easier to map out one's connections and discover how many chains that separate individuals. People might only be a few steps away from each other without even realizing it, and these services allow them to discover how they are connected and through whom (Adamic and Adar, 2005). As such, the Internet does not necessarily diminish the number of chains, but it makes them more visible, which makes it easier to choose the 'right' paths. Boyd and Ellison (2007) also emphasize that social networking services, such as LinkedIn, may provide a bridge between online and offline social relationships, and that they are

particularly useful in relations to the maintenance of weak ties (such as former classmates or colleagues). They also report that this is one of the main differences between social networking services and other forms of CMC.

It is important to note that Granovetter's theory of weak ties will probably never be proven or discarded due to issues of how to define a weak tie and measuring difficulties (it is probably impossible to measure all the global chains a person has). Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that the theory of six degrees is based on weak ties, meaning that when two people are six weak ties apart they are usually also six social networks apart (Adamic and Adar, 2005; Pickering and King, 1995). The distance is therefore of much greater length than it might sound like. As Adamic and Adar (2005) emphasize, the number of random acquaintances a person has is estimated to vary from 500 to 1500. With an average of 1000 acquaintances it would only take about 2 intermediates in order to reach a network at the size of the United States (Adamic and Adar, 2005).

In this chapter theories and perspectives relevant to the study have been presented. The next chapter will present how the empirical basis to the thesis has been collected.

## 4 METHOD

In this chapter there will be a short introduction to the qualitative approach and the methods that have been used in relation to the selection of sample, collection of data and analysis of the data.

### 4.1 A qualitative approach

There are basically three different approaches that are employed when conducting social science research: a qualitative approach, a quantitative approach or a combination of the two. The approach is usually dependent on what type of information the researcher is seeking. It is a strategy; a way of thinking when doing research. It relates to the purpose of the research, what function the researcher has, how the research is conducted (method) and how to perform the data analysis (Creswell, 2004; Grønmo, 2004; Silverman, 2006).

The differences between the qualitative and quantitative approach are sometimes hazy or ambiguous. However, Creswell (2004) points at some general guidelines that may help to explain the main differences, as shown in Fig. 15.

**Figure 15 – Use these practices of research, as the researcher:**

<b>Qualitative Approaches</b>	<b>Quantitative Approaches</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Positions himself or herself</li><li>• Collects participant meanings</li><li>• Focuses on a single concept or phenomenon</li><li>• Brings personal values to the study</li><li>• Studies the context or setting of participants</li><li>• Validates the accuracy of findings</li><li>• Makes interpretations of the data</li><li>• Creates an agenda for change or reform</li><li>• Collaborate with the participants</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tests or verifies theories or explanations</li><li>• Identifies variables to study</li><li>• Relates variables in questions or hypotheses</li><li>• Use standards of validity and reliability</li><li>• Observes and measures information numerically</li><li>• Uses unbiased approaches</li><li>• Employs statistical procedures</li></ul>

*Source: Creswell, 2004: 19 (table 1.4)*

The quantitative approach is often used when trying to say something about the world (generalize) or testing hypotheses, and has the advantage that the researcher is able to reach

many people through methods like surveys or questionnaires. The qualitative approach is often used when trying to get a more complete understanding of a certain phenomenon, and methods such as observation and interviews are commonly used in this type of research (Creswell, 2004; Grønmo, 2004; Silverman, 2006).

This thesis is based on a qualitative approach. When studying an online phenomenon like LinkedIn, the qualitative approach provides many advantages when trying to understand how the informants make use of LinkedIn, and how their relationships are created, maintained and developed through that use. This is especially true in relation to methods of data collection. The qualitative method's flexible and unstructured features makes it possible to interpret the data in its context, as well as contributing to a more thorough description, and perhaps a deeper understanding, of the problem at hand (Silverman, 2006).

## **4.2 In-depth interview**

When studying an online network such as LinkedIn, it is necessary to establish contact with people who use LinkedIn. Recognising that LinkedIn is a tool that is basically grounded on communication between individual actors, it would probably be difficult to gain access to information through any other method than in-depth interviews. Also, interviews are considered as the most frequently used method for qualitative data-collection (Jacobsen, 2005; Ryen, 2002). In-depth interviews also give the informants the possibility to reflect upon their own experiences and choices, as well as offering the researcher a chance to explore the informants' answers more thoroughly. In addition, interviews are generally "(...) relatively economical in terms of time and resources" (Silverman, 2006: 113), and in relation to this thesis both time and resources have been fairly limited.

### **4.2.1 Semi-structured interview**

Semi-structured interviews typically consist of conversations between the researcher and the informants based on an interview guide (see section 4.2.2). The main topic is given beforehand, the questions are prepared in a broad and open manner, and sequel questions are dependent on the conversation (Silverman, 2006). This has been very effective in relation to this study, as it gives the researcher the opportunity to steer the conversation and focus on the topic at hand, at the same time as the informant is free to express opinions and let new topics arise. Consequently, each interview will often reflect the informants' views and inside

perspectives at the same time as its main topics remain the same, and the informants' answers are manageable and relatively easy to compare. A possible disadvantage to semi-structured interviews, however, is that the creation of topics and questions beforehand may result in an exclusion of certain topics from the very beginning (Jacobsen, 2005). Still, the advantage of being able to steer the focus towards topics that were considered as relevant to the thesis, was considered to outweigh the possibility of excluding certain topics. The informants were also given the opportunity to add new topics at the end of the interview, if they felt that there was something that deserved to be mentioned (see appendix 9.1).

#### **4.2.2 The interview guide**

One of the most important preparations ahead of an interview is the interview guide. According to Grønmo (2004) there are three matters that need to be addressed when creating a guide: *the topics*, *the form of communication*, and *openness*. The topics provide an overview of the major issues or concerns. When conducting a semi-structured interview each topic generally consists of several open questions which are designed so that the informants have the opportunity to elaborate on the matter. The topics act as the main frame during the interview and help to divide and categorize the various dimensions that may arise throughout the conversation.

The form of communication relates to the characteristics of each informant. It is important that the researcher expresses himself/herself in a manner that is comprehensive to the informant, so that the interview can proceed smoothly and without major misunderstandings. As such, the topics and questions remained more or less the same during the interview and the manners in which the questions were presented differed in order to fit each informant.

The final matter of openness relates to how much information the informants are given about the study. According to Grønmo (2004) the researcher should be as open as possible. Consequently, the informants who were interviewed were given information about the purpose of the interviews, as well as the goals of the thesis. They were also informed about the main topics, although they did not get to know the exact questions beforehand. The complete interview guide is shown in appendix 9.1.

The interviews were estimated to last for about an hour, give or take 20 minutes depending on

the informant. The questions were also tested on a friend in order to make sure that they were comprehensible and logically constructed.

### **4.3 Sampling**

When a researcher seeks to conduct interviews it is necessary to select some eligible units from the *population* of interest, i.e. the group of people, items or units that is under investigation. Seeing that LinkedIn had over 9 million members when the sample was chosen, it was almost certain that it would be impossible to find an accurate listing of its population. In addition, the population was far too huge to handle, at least in relation to this study. Still, even the *accessible population* (which were people living in Norway within the Bergen and Oslo area) was quite big and difficult to grasp. Based on these practical challenges it was not possible to base the sampling on an actual list of the accessible population (a *sampling frame*).

There are two main categories of sampling; *probability sampling* and *non-probability sampling* (Remenyi et al., 2005). Seeing that it would not be practical and perhaps impossible to perform a random sampling, a non-probability sampling was chosen. Further, a combination of *purposive sampling* (also called judgment sampling) and *snowball sampling* was thought to be the most fruitful.

#### **4.3.1 Purposive sampling (judgment sampling)**

As the concept indicates, purposive sampling is when a sample is drawn with a purpose, usually based on predefined qualities that the researcher is seeking (Remenyi et al., 2005). This was especially useful in this thesis, as the informants necessarily had to be people who actually used LinkedIn actively, instead of simply being registered as members of the networking service. When attempting to locate samples of such people it was likely that one of the main indicators would be the number of connections that a person had. Based on this criterion, and the fact that the informant had to live in the Bergen or Oslo area in order to be reached, a search for eligible informants was initiated.

#### **4.3.2 Snowball sampling**

Snowball sampling was considered to be especially useful because of the difficulty in finding informants who fulfilled the criteria (such as location and frequent use), and the fact that



there was no sampling frame to choose from. Through snowball sampling, each informant recommends someone that they believe fulfil the necessary criteria, and the sample grows from there. However, it is important to consider that snowball sampling makes it more likely that certain subgroups will be overweighed. People who are connected to each other often tend to have similar interests and it is therefore likely that they will recommend people that are similar to themselves. Consequently, the sample will probably not be representative. Still, whether or not the sample should be representative depends on the topic at hand, and based on this thesis it was not an issue.

After identifying several candidates by the use of purposive sampling, the informants received an e-mail where they were asked whether or not they would be interested in participating in the study. The informants who answered were also asked to recommend people they thought might meet the same criteria. In addition, people who were known users of LinkedIn were contacted and asked whether or not they knew anyone that might be suitable. Thus, the snowball started rolling and the sample grew. From a sample of nearly 20 informants, 11 were interviewed.

The number of informants that were interviewed was not set beforehand. This was basically because it is often difficult to estimate when the value of each interview decreases (Jacobsen, 2005; Trost, 2005). After each interview was completed the information that had been collected was assessed and new interviews were conducted as long as it was estimated that they brought something extra to the study. After the completion of the 10<sup>th</sup> interview it was estimated that nearly all valuable information about the subject had been collected. This is also referred to as the *point of saturation* (Ryen, 2002). In order to confirm that the point of saturation had been reached, an additional interview was conducted, resulting in a total of 11 interviews. The selection of 11 informants was considered to be an adequate number, as qualitative studies are generally not intended to be representative. The most important part of a qualitative study is that the informants are capable of embellishing and complementing on each other as well as the subject (Trost, 2005).

#### **4.4 Collecting the data**

As previously sketched, the data that was collected was based on information from 11 informants, contained through interviews. The interviews were conducted individually with

each informant, in an environment that ensured as few interruptions as possible. This was primarily at a location of the informants' choice or, if they did not have any preferences, another suitable location such as my office or home.

Each interview was recorded on tape and transcribed in order to make it easier to process the data later on, to detect possible misunderstandings and to make the conversation run as freely as possible during the interviews. Recordings are generally preferred when conducting interviews, as a researcher never gets access to better data than what he/she is able to register (Jacobsen, 2005). Taking notes during the interviews usually requires the ability to write, listen, interpret and ask new questions and at the same time, something that may be very demanding during long conversations (Grønmo, 2004). This is also one of the reasons why the interviews were recorded.

#### **4.4.1 The interviews**

The 11 interviews were conducted within a period of one month. The informants that were chosen consisted of nine men and two women, between the age of 25 and 55. The interviews lasted between 45 and 85 minutes, depending on each informant and his/her deliberation. None of the informants were known prior to the interviews, but previous communication through e-mail or telephone contributed to a relaxed atmosphere and a relatively unforced conversation.

After each interview, as new topics arose, the interview guide was improved and new questions were added. Interesting statements and viewpoints that were expressed during the interviews were also made note of for future use.

#### **4.4.2 Confidentiality**

According to the guidelines of the The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities informants are entitled to protection (De Nasjonale Forskningsetiske Komiteer, 2006).

Prior to the interviews, the informants were informed that their answers would be treated with confidentiality and that they would remain anonymous in the transcripts and the thesis in general. As stated in section 4.2.2 the informants were treated with openness about the thesis

and its agenda, in order to generate mutual trust.

Previous to the interviews the informants were asked to sign an approval that contained information about the project, their consent to contributing and to state whether or not they wanted to remain totally anonymous or not (i.e. there would never be any record of their names in any of my personal notes). This is shown in appendix 9.2. The recordings and the transcripts were also kept unavailable to anyone but the researcher and the recordings will be destroyed when the project is finished.

#### **4.5 Analyzing the data**

After conducting the interviews, the information was processed through transcription and data was collected from the transcripts. Because the interviews were conducted with little space between, the transcription was commenced upon the completion of the interviews. A summary of each interview was, however, conducted consecutively. During the transcripts, questions and answers were sorted in order to create a better understanding and impression of the material, and to make it easy to explore the findings in relation to theories and related studies. The data was also sorted into different categories related to the users and their use. This was done in order to structure the data that had been collected and to help put the data into context. The analysis of the data continued throughout the construction of the thesis, as new concepts and ideas emerged.

The process of transcription was laborious and time-consuming, but this also led to intimate knowledge about the data. During the transcripts each word was carefully noted, although some sentences or expressions were not possible to decipher clearly. This was mainly due to noise in the surroundings or other interferences. This did, however, have little impact on the transcripts as a whole. The interviews were transcribed as carefully as possible, but the transcripts still represent a certain interpretation, as people usually perceive matters somewhat differently (Silverman, 2006).

#### **4.6 Reliability and validity**

*Reliability* refers to the trustworthiness of the information that has been gathered. This means that the data has to remain consistent if tested repeatedly under the same conditions. In relation to qualitative data it is not always possible to perform these kinds of tests, mainly

because of the fact that many phenomenon change according to society and because of the flexibility or complexity of the qualitative approach (Grønmo, 2004).

In addition, when conducting a study based on humans, there are several issues that need to be addressed. The human nature is known for its inconsistency as people are distracted, they misinterpret and sometimes they lie. This also means that it is impossible to calculate reliability, it can only be estimated. On top of that, the interpretation of the data might not be entirely reliable as the researcher him/herself may interpret situations in a different manner than the informant intended:

*“(...) even when people’s activities are audio or video recorded and transcribed, the reliability of the interpretation of transcripts may be gravely weakened by a failure to note apparently trivial, but often crucial, pauses, overlaps or body movements”* (Silverman, 2006: 46)

Still, taping the interviews does improve the reliability and makes it easier to test the trustworthiness of the information that has been gathered. The transcripts have been performed thoroughly and eventual misunderstandings have been followed-up with elaborating questions. In addition, the transcripts make it possible to detect inconsistencies.

*Validity* is related to whether or not the research design is suitable for collecting data relevant to the thesis, and to which degree what has been measured match what was supposed to be measured (Remenyi et al., 2004; Silverman, 2006). It is often associated with the credibility and dependability of the qualitative research. In short: are the results believable? In many ways, this is a question that can only be answered by the informants themselves, as they are the only ones who know whether or not the researcher's interpretations are correct. Still, the researcher can enhance the validity by describing the research and its context thoroughly. Transcribing the interviews, reviewing and rechecking the data etc. improves the validity, and has been central throughout this study.

#### **4.6.1 Research ethics**

During the choice of subject and research questions there has been no collaboration with, affiliations to or revenues from any actors that may benefit from or have any interest in the study. Previous notions, and experiences, of social networking services probably had some

influence on what type of findings that were expected, but the fact that LinkedIn had not been previously employed also led to openness in regard to how the constellation was perceived and used. Previous notions and conceptions were also challenged during the interviews and the transcription, as the informants clearly expressed their viewpoints and experiences.

There has been no change in the researcher's function in relation to the thesis.

In this chapter the methods that have been used for data collection have been presented. The next chapter will present an analysis of the data that was collected.

## 5 ANALYSIS

In this chapter the results and analysis of the collected data will be presented. The 11 professionals that have been interviewed will be introduced briefly and themes and topics that have risen throughout the collection of data will be reviewed and elaborated. The findings will be analyzed according to the users themselves, their approach to social networking and how they make use of LinkedIn. In relation to the informants' reasons for using LinkedIn, the findings have been divided into three main categories: *Visibility on LinkedIn* (chapter 5.3), *Seeking information* (chapter 5.4) and *Managing connections* (chapter 5.5).

As mentioned previously (in chapter 3.3.1), social networking services (SNSs) such as LinkedIn have a dynamic structure and generally adapt themselves according to user preferences. As such, LinkedIn can be used for various purposes that may overlap or complement each other, and this is also reflected in the topics that will be presented. These nuances are important to keep in mind and they will be further elaborated according to each topic.

In this analysis LinkedIn has been referred to as a social networking service, a tool and a place. These descriptions all highlight different aspects of LinkedIn and have been presented in different contexts. LinkedIn has been referred to as a social networking service when emphasizing its qualities as a service provider, it has been referred to as a tool when highlighting its attributes as an application and it has been referred to as a place when accentuating its function as a social space. These contrasts will be further discussed in chapter 6.1.

### 5.1 The informants

The 11 professionals that were interviewed are of various age, sex and background. Fig. 16 further illustrates these differences, also taking into account variations such as number of connections, membership and time spent on LinkedIn. These variations are interesting in regard to the informants' choices, views and use of LinkedIn, which will be discussed in chapter 5.2.

**Figure 16 – Presentation of the informants**

Informants	Age	Sex	Type of membership	Number of connections <sup>33</sup>	Registered as member for	Estimated active for <sup>34</sup>	Estimated time spent on LinkedIn
1	55	Female	Free	164	2 years, 1 month	1 year	10 min to 1 hour / weekly
2	32	Male	Free	68	2 years, 7 months	2 years	5 min to 2 hours / weekly
3	36	Male	Free	ca. 850	2 years, 9 months	2 years, 9 months	1 hour / weekly
4	54	Male	Free	480	2 years, 7 months	2 years	1 hour / weekly to 1 hour / daily
5	31	Male	Free	44	2 years, 1 month	Periodically	1 hour / monthly to 1 hour / weekly
6	25	Female	Free	86	1 year, 7 months	2 months	1 to 2 hours / weekly
7	33	Male	Free	53	1 year, 2 months	6 months	1 to 2 hours / monthly
8	34	Male	Free	83	2 years, 8 months	6 months	5 to 10 min / weekly
9	34	Male	Premium	ca. 2000	2 years, 4 months	1 to 2 years	1 to 2 hours / daily
10	46	Male	Free	ca. 940	2 years, 8 months	2 years	30 min to 2 hours / weekly
11	37	Male	Premium	108	1 year, 2 months	6 months	30 min / weekly

The interviews were conducted in November and December 2006.

Fig. 16 shows that the majority of the informants were male, in their 30s and had a free subscription to LinkedIn. Out of the 11 people that were interviewed, two of them were female and represented both the youngest and the oldest of the selection. The informants' positions ranged from consultants to head-hunters and executives, and they all had higher education. The number of connections ranged from 44 to about 2000 and all of the informants had been LinkedIn members for more than one year. All but one of the informants waited some time from registering until they started to use LinkedIn actively<sup>35</sup>. The time spent on LinkedIn varied between 1 hour monthly to 2 hours daily and the users with the most connections generally spent more time on LinkedIn than those with fewer connections.

<sup>33</sup> This is the number of connections that each informant had at the time of the interview. The numbers were collected beforehand and informants who had over 500 connections gave an estimate during the interview.

<sup>34</sup> This is the period of time that each informant estimated that he/she had actively used LinkedIn at the time of the interview, contrary to simply being registered as a member.

<sup>35</sup> In this setting *actively* refers to when the informants started to log on to and spend time on LinkedIn regularly.

There is interesting knowledge that might be drawn from this presentation. For one, the informants' age vary between 25 and 55, indicating that LinkedIn is a social networking service which is seen as valuable across generations. Secondly, nearly all of the informants subscribed to the free version of LinkedIn, indicating that there is no need to pay in order to benefit from its membership. This may also decrease the threshold for starting to use LinkedIn actively. The fact that only two of the informants were female may reflect a male domination on LinkedIn, but the size of the selection is not adequate to make such an assumption. The variation in number of connections indicates that the informants approach LinkedIn differently, and with different purposes. Further, there seems to be some correlation between the informants' number of connections and the time they spend on LinkedIn. This correlation and related topics will be dealt with more carefully in chapters 5.2.1 and 5.2.2.

One common factor that is important to note, however, is that all of the informants were associated to IT either through work, studies or both. Given that LinkedIn is a professional network based on an IT-tool this is to some degree to be expected, as it is destined to attract people with an interest for this type of technology. The method that was used during the selection of informants, snowball sampling, also increases the chances of a sample of informants with similar interests. This demerit has previously been elaborated in chapter 4.3.2.

## **5.2 Networking on LinkedIn**

All of the informants had none or low expectations upon joining LinkedIn. They all had experience from other social networking services (Ecademy, Xing, Plaxo, MySpace, YouTube etc.) and many of the informants regularly joined such services simply out of interest or curiosity. The informants did, however, stress that although they joined many different social networking services they only remained active at a very few of them.

As one of the informants puts it:

Extract 1:

*“You sign up to maybe 20 places and end up using two of them”* (Interview 6)

In this case one of the two places the informant ended up using was LinkedIn. Compared to other professional networking services several informants pointed at LinkedIn's design as



crucial to why they chose LinkedIn. The fact that LinkedIn is built similar to a résumé, with focus on professional experience contrary to personal interests, was generally seen as enforcing a seriousness that other services might lack. In addition, many of the informants saw LinkedIn as the most wide-spread professional networking service in their industry.

The informants' experience with other social networking services and interest towards this type of social networking reflects the fact that most of the informants had a conscious relationship to professional networking previous to joining LinkedIn. One of the informants stressed that she had always been conscious of networking:

Extract 2:

*“From the age of 16 I knew that having a network was the most important thing you had to have”* (Interview 1)

She couldn't really say that someone had told her or taught her how to network – it was simply something she had picked up and became aware of at an early age. Similarly, many of the informants were used to actively seeking of new ways to expand their professional network, some to a degree where it had become an integrated and unconscious part of their professional and social lives. As another informant expressed when asked about his relationship to professional networking:

Extract 3:

*“It has become natural to have it in the back of my mind”* (Interview 9)

This meant that whenever he would meet someone privately or through work he would always be conscious of professional networking and the opportunities that new acquaintances might enable. Although professional networking might not be his primary interest when making a new acquaintance, he would always think about it. The informant expressed this further by stressing that he was constantly looking for ways to improve his life and that he used his social network both subconsciously and consciously in order to do so. He continued by stating that professional networking helped him to improve himself:

Extract 4:

*“You’re always looking for new ways to improve your work, get better connections, a better circle of acquaintances, (...) new friends or better ideas”* (Interview 9)

In the informant’s view he never stopped networking. He would always be looking for something and by being conscious of the opportunities that new and old acquaintances might bring he experienced it as much easier to make improvements to his life. This was especially true in regard to his work. The idea that a person never stops networking is also related to the core principles of social networking (see chapter 3.2) stating that a social network is basically two or more people with a certain pattern of contact or interaction. In this sense all people constantly have and use a social network. However, although some people may consciously and/or subconsciously seek of ways to improve themselves and their personal or professional network, the degree in which this is done vary greatly. Most of the informants that were interviewed had a very conscious relationship to professional networking and actively sought of ways to improve their professional network.

Regardless of the informants’ background, notions about professional networking and intention when joining LinkedIn, all of the informants quickly determined that LinkedIn could become a valuable networking tool. Nonetheless, some of the informants did express an that professional networking was something that they generally did not focus on and that they had joined LinkedIn simply out of curiosity. They knew that professional networking was in the wind and thought they might need it at some point, but they did not really see the value or know how to go about it at the present time.

For example, three of the informants stated that:

Extracts 5 - 7:

- *“LinkedIn isn’t anything special, it’s just a place where we stay in touch”* (Interview 11)
- *“It’s not something that’s urgent right now”* (Interview 7)
- *“It hasn’t been decisive in any context what so ever”* (Interview 5)

None of the three informants had experienced that LinkedIn had helped them professionally or that it had been of any other importance to them. Neither did they consciously expand their professional network or actively seek to improve it. They did, however, think that LinkedIn

might become useful in the future and that it was fun to be a part of. The informants also enjoyed qualities besides professional networking that was supported through LinkedIn, something all of the informants that were interviewed shared. For example, one of the other informants commented that, in addition to gaining access to new connections, LinkedIn had several benefits in relation to his existing professional network:

Extract 8:

*“I quickly noticed that it was a useful tool for establishing new contacts, but I also had a place where there is updated information about existing contacts, so that I have an overview of my relations”* (Interview 8)

The idea of having an overview of existing connections as well as gaining access to updated information was something that all of the informants valued greatly, regardless of their intention about using LinkedIn or how many connections they had. This topic will be further elaborated in chapter 5.4.1. Many of the informants also expressed an increased attention towards professional networking and its possible benefits following their membership.

As one of the informants explained when asked about the idea of having a professional network:

Extract 9:

*“LinkedIn has made this more explicit and I have a more reflected relationship to it now because I use LinkedIn”* (Interview 7)

The fact that the informant had joined LinkedIn and discovered various possibilities that professional networking might enable also led to an increased awareness and a more conscious relationship to professional networking as a whole. Several of the other informants expressed similar views as their membership on LinkedIn had opened up to a whole new world. As one of the informants explained when asked about his experience with LinkedIn:

Extract 10:

*“The winner takes it all. Once you start to get active (...) it’s just like fishing in stirred water – you get in touch with other people that are active”* (Interview 4)

Once the informant started to network actively he got in touch with other people who were interested in professional networking, something which increased his interest and also led him to become even more active. As such, his overall network on LinkedIn continued to grow, almost on its own, as the people he became connected to actively increased their own professional network. This also meant that he had gained many new acquaintances, more knowledge about networking and a larger professional network after joining LinkedIn.

**5.2.1 Types of networkers**

During the interviews it became clear that there were two main types of networkers on LinkedIn: *active* and *passive*. The various types are based on the informants’ interest towards professional networking and their activity on LinkedIn.

**Figure 17 – Types of networkers on LinkedIn**

<b>Active</b>	Power networker	This type of networker is extremely active and interested in having as many connections as possible. The power networker will enthusiastically send out invitations, search for people and go through friends’ connections in order to expand his/her professional network. The networker will generally spend much time on LinkedIn.
	Productive networker	The productive networker will actively send out invitations and search for connections, but not with the same enthusiasm as the power networker. The productive networker enjoys expanding his/her professional network and will spend the necessary time on LinkedIn in order to do so.
<b>Passive</b>	Unproductive networker	The unproductive networker does not spend much time on sending out invitations or searching for new connections. The networker may log on to LinkedIn in order to accept connections, do changes to his/her profile or get updated on existing connections, but this type of networker generally does not bother to do much about his/her membership.
	Dormant networker	Dormant networkers are people who have registered as members on LinkedIn, but have not yet started to use it. They hardly ever log on to LinkedIn and do not spend any time inviting or searching for connections.

Nearly all of the informants started as dormant networkers and developed into one of the other three types. Which of the three networker types the informants developed into, was generally based on the informants’ networking strategy (chapter 5.2.2, Fig. 18), their own professional

situation and affirmation from their professional surroundings. Networkers who were in need of new resources and/or were surrounded by other professionals that valued professional networking were generally inclined to become active networkers. Those who did not know many professionals that focused on networking and/or were satisfied with the resources they had were more inclined to become passive networkers. It is also possible to go from one type of networker to another during one’s membership. An unproductive networker may, for example, be in search of a job and as a result become more active on LinkedIn, thus becoming a productive networker. After the member has found a new job this may lead to a further increase in the activity if, for example, the new job requires the person to network actively. It may also lead to a decrease in the activity as the job-search is over and there is no longer a need to stay active. The informants did, however, generally remain active once they had become so.

**5.2.2 Selection of contacts**

Regardless of what type of networkers the informants were, they had different strategies in regard to how they built their professional networks. Their different approaches to networking on LinkedIn reflected the choices they made as well as how they experienced LinkedIn. In general, there were two main types of strategies that the informants used. These have been defined as *open* and *closed* networking strategies. These strategies relate to the informants’ selection of contacts on LinkedIn.

**Figure 18 – Types of networking strategies on LinkedIn**

<b>Open</b>	Unrestricted	Networkers that will accept anyone as a connection. The networker is more concerned about being able to reach as many people as possible, than knowing the people he/she is directly connected to.
	Regulated	Networkers that will accept anyone as long as they see it as beneficial in relation to their own career. The networker screen on the basis of who he/she thinks could become useful in the future, or could represent interesting business opportunities. This type of networker does not need to know the people he/she is connected to, but there must be some common interest.
<b>Closed</b>	Regulated	Networkers that will only accept connections that they have had some previous contact with or that are respected in their industry. The networker does not need to have met a person in order to connect to them, but the connections need to be respected individuals in the same industry or

	someone he/she has communicated with previously (e-mail, phone etc.).
Restricted	Networkers that will only accept connections they trust or know. The networker is more concerned about knowing the people he/she is connected to than the overall size of the professional network. The connections can, however, be people the networker has met briefly or only exchanged a few words with.

There are positive and negative aspects to both open and closed networking strategies. With an *open* networking strategy, one of the most encouraging aspects is that it becomes possible for the networker to reach a vast number of people in different industries. As discussed in chapter 3.4.1 on weak ties, it is generally through acquaintances and their social networks that people get access to new resources. This was also the main reason why several of the informants valued their overall network size as opposed to the quality<sup>36</sup> of their 1<sup>st</sup> degree connections on LinkedIn.

As one of the informants with an open unrestricted networking strategy put it:

Extract 11:

*“To me LinkedIn is just a tool for connecting to more distant contacts so that I can gain access to their network as well”* (Interview 3)

The informant’s main goal was simply to get access to as many people as possible, preferably people he otherwise would not be able to reach, through LinkedIn. Several of the other informants expressed similar views, stressing that they used LinkedIn mainly so that they could get access to new connections. One of the informants also stated that he did not necessarily consider everybody he connected to on LinkedIn as part of his professional network, even if they were part of his network on LinkedIn.

Extract 12:

*“I have no criteria for who I connect with on LinkedIn, but I wouldn’t say that they’re automatically a part of my network”* (Interview 9)

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<sup>36</sup> In this setting the concept of *quality* refers to the knowledge the informants have about their connections’ trustworthiness, seriousness and overall network.

The informant did not see his network on LinkedIn as his existing professional network, but as a place where he could get access to new connections and grow his professional network. In order to reach as many as possible, as quickly as possible, he operated with an open unregulated networking strategy. He saw LinkedIn as a notice board where he could gain access to information and people he otherwise would not be able to reach. This aspect will also be further elaborated in chapters 5.4 and 5.5.

Despite the advantage of being able to reach a vast number of people, an open networking strategy also has its disadvantages. For example, one of the open networkers explained that he found himself much more exposed because he had so many connections:

Extract 13:

*“I think that, because my network is as big as it is, I get more enquiries now. Because I put myself at disposal, I am on stage”* (Interview 4)

At the same time as he was connecting with as many people as possible in order to get access to their professional networks, they connected with him in order to get access to his network and his resources. This also meant that he got many enquiries through LinkedIn from people seeking his help or expertise. Although this may not always be a disadvantage, it often meant that he felt obligated to spend time helping people that may never give him anything back. Some of the other informants expressed similar experiences and one of the other informants even had to delete one of his connections because he received too much spam<sup>37</sup>.

As mentioned previously, an open networking strategy often results in a lack of knowledge about the quality of the networker's connections. This also means that the networker has little control over who he/she lets into his/her professional network, how serious the connections are or what they actually bring to the table. Many of the informants stressed that this was one of the main reasons why they had chosen a *closed* networking strategy. They thought that having unknown connections on LinkedIn weakened their professional network and would make them look unserious. One of the informants explained that he often looked at people's connections as an indication of who they were professionally:

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<sup>37</sup> In this setting *spam* was defined as constant enquiries to help with projects and matters that were not within the informant's professional field, and/or that there was no reason why he should know something about it.

Extract 14:

*“Who people know also says a lot about what type of person they are. I see that personally, when I look at people in my network and who they know, it definitely matters”* (Interview 2)

The informant would look at the professional network of his connections as an extension of their own résumé, and their connections to other professionals would help him to get an idea of his connections professionally. Consequently, he also wanted his own professional network to reflect his professional achievements and identity, as he wished it to be presented. This idea was supported by all of the informants with a closed networking strategy, and it also meant that they generally wanted to know the people they were connected to:

Extract 15:

*“I have to know who they are and that they stand for something I think is alright both professionally, and to the extent I know, on the human level”* (Interview 7)

The informant knew that he would probably not be able to know all about the qualities of his connections, but he wanted to have an idea about who they were and that he felt comfortable being associated with them. Another informant also stated that she wanted her connections to be people she could trust with the information that she displayed on her profile:

Extract 16:

*“I kind of went through and I wanted to make sure that I had a connection to everyone that’s on my list. Even if it’s weak, but I wanted to make sure that there were no strangers”* (Interview 1)

The informant did not want anyone to be able to get access to her information and she did not see any reason why they should be able to either. To her it was a matter of privacy and being able to trust her connections. The two informants believed that their professional network, in various degrees, was a reflection of themselves and their career. In order to control this reflection they wanted to be sure that they had a connection to everyone in their professional network and that they had some idea of what their connections were about. With a closed networking strategy they would generally be able to reach fewer people than with an open



networking strategy, but they would also have the advantage of knowing who they were connected to and how their connections could contribute.

Another aspect that is important to keep in mind is that although LinkedIn is mainly a professional network, the informants were also connected to close friends and family. One of the informants explained this quite well:

Extract 17:

*“LinkedIn is mainly professionally oriented. That doesn’t mean that I’m not connected to close friends, because I am, but they’re there in a professional capacity”* (Interview 7)

This meant that although the connections were friends or family members they represented something else on LinkedIn. They became part of the informant’s professional network. As such, the informant did not invite friends or family he knew would not have any interest or benefit from LinkedIn themselves. All of the informants had people that they knew privately and/or professionally that were not part of their LinkedIn network and that probably never would be. Many of the informants also knew about professionals they would love to have in their LinkedIn in network, but who quite simply were not interested in joining.

The issue also relates to chapter 3.2 on social networks, where it is emphasized that personal and professional networks often correlate and that boundaries are difficult to identify. Many connections are part of both networks.

### **5.3 Visibility on LinkedIn**

LinkedIn makes all of its members visible through their profile. Depending on one’s settings<sup>38</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> degree connections generally get a fuller view than other members, but most members have a public profile that displays their basic qualities through the features *general info* and *professional summary* (as presented in chapter 2.2.1). All of the informants that were interviewed had a public profile that displayed these basic qualities at minimum.

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<sup>38</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> degree connections always get access to the member’s full (complete) profile. Each member on LinkedIn can, however, choose which profile features they want to be visible to other LinkedIn members (as presented in chapter 2.2.1).

One of the main reasons why the informants wanted to be visible was in relation to both existing and potential connections. All of the informants valued the idea of being visible to possible employers, partners or other LinkedIn members that might be interested in contacting them professionally. Through having a profile on LinkedIn the informants made themselves available to new connections that might be useful at present or in the future. For example, one of the informants explained that he had been approached by people who would not have contacted him if he had not had a profile on LinkedIn:

Extract 18:

*“I’ve gotten in contact with one of those head-hunters, who contacted me because I had a profile on LinkedIn (...) It was actually about a job-offer”* (Interview 2)

The informant was not offered the job that the head-hunter had approached him about, but he had been to a couple of interviews. This was exclusively a result of his membership on LinkedIn. The informant was confident that he would probably be approached with other job-offers because he had a visible profile on LinkedIn.

In addition to being visible to new connections the informants also got to present themselves and their professional goals to existing connections through their profile on LinkedIn. This meant that their existing connections got to know them better professionally and the informants thought that it increased their chances of being contacted by people they already knew. The concept of being visible just in case they had the resources or qualities that other professionals were looking for was a strong motivation for nearly all of the informants. As one of the informants stated:

Extract 19:

*“More people know who I am because I’m a member there”* (Interview 11)

The informant’s membership on LinkedIn made him a lot more visible to the connections in his own professional network, their connections and other members on LinkedIn that had the opportunity to contact him. Even if he was not in direct contact with someone they would be able to reach him through his connections. The informant had never received any job-offers through LinkedIn, but staying active and having a profile at least gave him the opportunity. An opportunity he might otherwise not get. Similarly, one of the other informants had

forwarded contact between some of his LinkedIn connections, thus creating opportunities for them:

Extract 20:

*“I’ve helped others to facilitate transfer of competence. I’ve gotten enquiries from people asking if I can forward their contact to other people, so I feel that I’ve helped others in getting things done”* (Interview 8)

Although the informant was not sure what the outcome had been, he knew that some of his connections had been in contact with potential employers as a result of receiving forwarded messages through him. This is something that would not have happened if they had not been members of LinkedIn.

The idea of being visible to potential employers also relates to another main reason why many informants wanted to be visible through LinkedIn: to promote themselves and to create a professional reputation. As LinkedIn members the informants got to market themselves and their qualities through linking their names to their talents, other professionals and their industry. One of the informants stated that he regularly improved his profile on LinkedIn just in case someone would see it and be interested in his qualities:

Extract 21:

*“I try to keep it updated all the time, even though I’m not really searching for jobs. Frankly so that others may know who I am”* (Interview 2)

The informant wanted to create a professional reputation and LinkedIn helped him to do so by displaying his professional expertise and connections. In addition he thought that if he was an active member on LinkedIn, and other professionals in his industry got to see that, it would enforce their impression of him as a serious and desirable professional. One of the other informants expressed the same view when asked about his reason for having a profile on LinkedIn:

Extract 22:

*“It’s about getting known in an industry. Making my name known and tying myself to the content of my profile”* (Interview 11)

The informant assumed that most of his connections would look at his profile at some point and get an impression of what he was interested in strictly professionally. If any of his skills caught their interest, they might remember him and contact him if they needed that type of talent in the future. He wanted to be part of a professional environment on LinkedIn and make connections that might be important to him in the long run. This was also the main reason why several of the informants had remained active on LinkedIn.

As stated previously, many of the informants believed that LinkedIn made them look more serious and that it gave them some leverage, an advantage, they might otherwise not have. This was also considered as one of the major advantages of being visible through LinkedIn. One of the informants expressed this clearly when asked about her reasons for being a member on LinkedIn:

Extract 23:

*“It’s that seriousness – the feeling that you’ve been raised a few notches”* (Interview 6)

All of the informants saw LinkedIn as a relative serious networking service and their membership reflected themselves as serious networkers and/or professionals. The informant believed that LinkedIn gave her an advantage in her industry and that the requests she had received through LinkedIn was mainly because people had read her profile, browsed her connections and acquired a better impression of her professionally. The fact that other professionals could find her on LinkedIn made her look more serious about her work, something she thought made her more desirable as a professional.

## **5.4 Seeking information**

The main reason why nearly all of the informants used LinkedIn had to do with seeking information. LinkedIn can provide information on many different areas concerning people and companies, and some of the informants also used LinkedIn in ways that was not related to professionalism at all. In general, there were four main areas that the informants used LinkedIn to get information about: *overview of connections, accessing updates, information about people/companies* and *who knows who*. The informants accessed the information for

present and/or future use, meaning that they saw LinkedIn as beneficial for both present and future activation.

#### **5.4.1 Overview of connections**

Many of the informants thought that LinkedIn offered a very good overview in relation to their connections. LinkedIn provided a place where it was easy for the informants to get access to detailed information about their connections and to attain a summary of their professional background and experience. This was expressed clearly by one of the informants when he was asked why he used LinkedIn:

Extract 24:

*“You have a place that gives an overview of information about what they do, what they know, what functions they have – so that you can use them if you need to”*  
(Interview 8)

LinkedIn provided an opportunity for the informant to get access to information about his connections, especially weak connections, and to get an overview of who they were and what they did professionally. The informant might have met some of his connections once or twice and in such situations he often used LinkedIn in order to get access to more information about the person. LinkedIn was seen as very useful to the informant in situations where he might be in need of specific competence or knowledge and wanted to find out whether or not a connection had what he was looking for. This view was also supported by some of the other informants:

Extracts 25 – 28:

- *“LinkedIn sorts it for you, well not sorts, but makes it searchable for you, systemize it, see who is whose contact so that you get a nice map”* (Interview 9)
- *“LinkedIn is more like a CV-database, you have a better overview of what people actually do”* (Interview 11)
- *“LinkedIn is (...) a very advanced address book”* (Interview 10)
- *“It has the overview that I need in a network. And I don’t have that in any other way, really”* (Interview 2)

The fact that LinkedIn was built similar to a résumé made it easy for the informants to get an overview of their connections and what they were about, something they did not get access to elsewhere. Through LinkedIn the informants could search their professional network for people with certain skills and get to know how they were connected to them. For example, one of the informants used LinkedIn in order to get an overview over people he had worked with previously and to identify their competence:

Extract 29:

*“If I lack competence in an area and I, for example, know that people in Oslo that I’ve had contact with through my company, and through LinkedIn, have experience from the things we are going to do – then I contact them and ask if they can come and help us (...) I recently did and it’s very alright that way”* (Interview 11)

The informant got a better overview of what people did on a professional level through LinkedIn and used this information in order to get easy access to specific competence if he or his company needed to. If he knew about or had worked with someone previously and wanted to be sure of their qualifications he could easily get an overview of that through LinkedIn. Many of the informants also thought that LinkedIn provided a good overview of their professional network as a whole, but this was not as useful to the informants with over 200 connections. They had too many connections for LinkedIn to sort them in a way that gave the informants a sufficient overview.

#### **5.4.2 Accessing updates**

In addition to gaining an overview, all of the informants noted that LinkedIn made it very easy to stay updated on their connections, especially in relation to connections they generally did not have much contact with. On LinkedIn each member updates his/her own information, something which means that the professional network in many ways updates itself. As one of the informants put it:

Extract 30:

*“They do all the typing and I get all the reading”* (Interview 1)

The informant got an e-mail from LinkedIn every week<sup>39</sup> containing updates about her connections so that whenever someone in her LinkedIn network would change jobs, add connections or update their contact information she would get to read about it. To her LinkedIn primarily represented an address book that was easily accessed and that updated on its own. This view was supported by several of the other informants:

Extracts 31 – 34:

- *“I found a place where I didn’t have to maintain my own contact list all the time. All of the people in my network updated their own contact-information (... ) and I saw it as very time-saving to have such a central place where you updated your contact information”* (Interview 8)
- *“Before you used to send an e-mail and say that I’ve gotten a new job (...) but now you can stay updated through this”* (Interview 8)
- *“You have a very nice way of staying updated, at least on people’s e-mail address”* (Interview 5)
- *“The great thing now is that I get daily updates on what happens in my network, who changes jobs and so on. So that’s genius!”* (Interview 9)

Most people change jobs or positions and get new e-mail addresses or telephone numbers. With LinkedIn the informants could receive knowledge about this information automatically. This meant that if they needed to contact someone or wanted to know if they still worked at the same place, that information was easily accessed through LinkedIn. The informants saw this as very beneficial in relation to connections they had lost touch with (former schoolmates or colleagues, business-partners etc.), acquaintances they might want to do business with, as well as connections that they were in frequent contact with. The fact that all of these connections updated their profile themselves made it easier for the informants to keep track of the people in their network on LinkedIn. One of the informants stressed this view as he explained that it was easier for him to get hold of acquaintances or people he did not have that much contact with if they were part of his network on LinkedIn:

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<sup>39</sup> Members on LinkedIn can subscribe to either immediate or weekly network updates through e-mail.

Extract 35:

*“Now at least I know where in the world he is, that person. I know where he works and if I need to talk about something with that person I can contact him because I have his contact information”* (Interview 8)

As several of the informants pointed out LinkedIn was seen as effortless, uncomplicated and time-saving. Combined with easy access and an e-mail service where members can decide how often they want to receive notifications about their network, LinkedIn provided a service that many of the informants did not have elsewhere.

Several of the informants also saw the updates as rewarding on a personal level. They got to see what people in their network on LinkedIn were up to and make note of changes in their lives (changing jobs, moving etc.) They could get updated on people they had lost touch with were doing, how their career was going and what they were interested in strictly professionally. Consequently, many of the informants felt that they got a stronger bond to people they might otherwise not have a conscious relationship to. As one of the informants stated when asked about her connections on LinkedIn:

Extract 36:

*“It’s been brilliant! I mean, people that I maybe heard from once every two years - now, through LinkedIn, as they update their profiles, I get to know (...) this is what’s happening in their life now”* (Interview 1)

All though the informant had joined LinkedIn in search of professional support she had also found that LinkedIn provided beneficial information of a more personal character. As such, one of the greatest advantages that LinkedIn had provided the informant was of a personal character. This also relates to chapter 3.3 on CMC and social networking where it is suggested that the Internet might make it possible for people to communicate more frequently, and that this may contribute to increased possibilities regarding maintenance of strong and weak ties. This concept will be dealt with more carefully in chapter 5.5.2.



### 5.4.3 Information about people and companies

One of the main reasons why the updates on LinkedIn were valued so highly was that the profiles on LinkedIn contained a lot more information than the informants would otherwise make note of. Instead of collecting business-cards that might eventually become outdated the informants had access to a social networking service that gathered their connections, was updated by the connections themselves and that contained extensive information about each connection's professional experience and knowledge. Consequently, many of the informants used LinkedIn as a way of finding out more about the people they were in contact with professionally. For example, one of the informants explained that he used LinkedIn in order to get more information about people before he met them:

Extract 37:

*“In every meeting I've attended, also if it's outside of IT, I've searched for them in the network. I check out people on LinkedIn before I meet them, and that's like all the time”* (Interview 9)

The informant actively used LinkedIn as a way of gathering detailed information about people he wanted to do business with. He worked in sale and part of his research before meeting with potential business-partners was to find out more about them through LinkedIn. The concept of finding out more about potential business-partners, employers or employees through LinkedIn was something several of the informants made use of. One of the other informants had, for example, spent much time searching for information on LinkedIn when he was applying for jobs:

Extract 38:

*“When I started to wonder about changing jobs I used it quite actively to find out who worked where and stuff like that, without it being anything crucial or that I used it for applying for jobs”* (Interview 5)

Although the information that the informant had gathered had not been decisive when he applied for jobs it had given him a better impression of the companies and the people who worked there. Similarly, several of the informants used LinkedIn in order to get an overview of organizations, who worked there and who they already knew. Some of the informants also

did this actively in order to find out who to talk to internally before they approached potential partners or clients. As one of the informants stated:

Extract 39:

*“With what other tool can you manage to search for something or a particular company and find nearly everyone that, for example, works in Telenor in Norway? (...) I get to know who works there, who they are and what they are. I can make a map of the organization before I’ve even talked to any of them!”* (Interview 9)

Through LinkedIn the informant got to know if any of his connections were connected to people he wanted to reach, he could get an overview of important people in an organization and he could use this information to his advantage if he wanted to do business with that company.

#### **5.4.4 Who knows who**

All of the informants used LinkedIn in order to find out who their connections knew. Some of the informants browsed other people’s connections in order to see if they knew anyone the informants also wanted to connect with (common acquaintances, friends or important professionals), while others wanted to know if their connections knew anyone that could forward a message or provide information about a person or company they wanted to reach. The informants spent much of their time going through their connections’ connections just in case they would stumble upon someone interesting. As one of the informants put it:

Extract 40:

*“It is interesting to see who others are tied to – because it helps me to find out if there’s anyone I also know about or have a relation to”* (Interview 8)

LinkedIn made it easy for the informant to get an overview over the people his connections knew and who they had in common. Many of the informants saw this as beneficial not only as a way of expanding their professional network, but also in order to get access to people that might come in handy at present or in the future. For example, one of the other informants stressed that LinkedIn helped him to notice new resources:

Extract 41:

*“I’ve noticed that I know people who know people who know a person that might be interesting in the long run” (Interview 7)*

The informant sometimes searched for people with a certain competence through LinkedIn and even if he did not find the right candidate at the time, his searches made him notice other qualities that might be useful down the line. These searches were usually conducted through browsing his connections’ connections. Another example of the benefits of having access to other people’s connections was illustrated by one of the other informants, as he explained how it had helped him to get a better overview of a company and its employees when he applied for a job:

Extract 42:

*“In January I start working in a firm called FIRM<sup>40</sup>. I’ve had a connection that has worked in FIRM for a long time and who is also a good friend. So I looked at his contact list to see who he knew in FIRM. So when I searched for the job and got called in for an interview, I immediately checked if he knew that person and I asked the person I knew how he got on with FIRM (...) When I went to the interview and talked to the people I met in FIRM I also got their e-mail addresses and connected with them straight away on LinkedIn. I didn’t need to do it through this friend, so it sort of becomes part of a bigger thing” (Interview 8)*

The informant used his connection on LinkedIn in order to access information about the firm and the people that he met with so that it might give him an advantage during the interview. After the interview he also used LinkedIn in order to connect to the people he had met and, as such, possibly enforced his impression. Through LinkedIn it was easy for the informant to find out whether or not any of his connections knew the people he was interested in. This idea is also related to chapter 3.4.3 on six degrees of separation where it is expressed that social networking services might make it easier to map out, and make visible, the number of chains that separate individuals.

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<sup>40</sup> Due to privacy issues the firm that the informant talks about will only be referred to as FIRM.

## 5.5 Managing connections

All of the informants used LinkedIn in order to manage their connections in one way or another. They established new connections, maintained ties to existing ones and developed their relationships. The manner in which this was done was often related to the informants' strategy to professional networking. Although there were exceptions, informants with an open networking strategy mainly focused on making new connections, while the informants with a closed networking strategy generally focused on maintenance and development of existing connections.

### 5.5.1 Establishing new connections

One of the reasons why many of the informants had joined LinkedIn was in order to get access to new connections that might help them to make advancements in their career or to improve their businesses. The informants saw LinkedIn as a valuable tool when building and/or expanding their professional network and consequently get access to new resources. As one of the informants stated when he was asked why he joined LinkedIn:

Extract 43:

*“The professional network – there are two reasons why you build it. One is to make the job you do easier and the other is to get the job of your dreams”* (Interview 9)

The informant had joined LinkedIn with one goal in mind and that was to expand his professional network through making new connections. LinkedIn gave him access to people that might help him to do a better job at the same time as he made himself accessible to networkers that might give him the opportunity of his dreams. This was an idea that was shared by several of the other informants. For example, one of the other informants had found a publisher for his book through LinkedIn. He had started with the intention of searching for people that could give him advice on how to present his book and ended up with a connection that wanted to publish his book as well. As the informant stated:

Extract 44:

*“There are a lot of people I wouldn't have gotten to know without LinkedIn”*  
(Interview 3)

The informant would probably never have found his publisher, who was an American, without LinkedIn. The informant regularly used LinkedIn in order to get access to resources through establishing contact with new business-associates and maintaining what he referred to as periphery connections. The latter will be dealt with more carefully in chapter 5.5.2.

The informants had very different ways of accessing new connections. Some of the informants searched for and connected to anyone that seemed willing solely in order to gather as many connections as possible. For example, one of the informants deliberately contacted people that put their e-mail address in their professional headline, because he knew that they would be open to accepting new connections:

Extract 45:

*“Sometimes at night when I just sit around and play and have nothing else to do, I find people who for example are listed with the same interests or background as me. And then I just send them an e-mail, because their e-mail address is right there. And people like that answer in about 10 minutes, and then you’re connected”* (Interview 4)

The informant did not know the people he connected to and simply did so because they increased his professional network on LinkedIn. He referred to networkers that put their e-mail address in their professional headline as *contact whores*, meaning that they wanted and would accept anyone as a connection. The informant himself did not display his e-mail address, but he generally accepted anyone that wanted to connect to him. Many of the informants also joined groups that were associated to LinkedIn and which’s main purpose was for its members to increase their number of connections. Two of the most widespread groups were the Yahoo group *LinkedIn Lions*<sup>41</sup> and *Toplinked.com*<sup>42</sup>. Several of the informants, who all had an open networking strategy, were members of such groups and regularly received invitations to connect through them.

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<sup>41</sup> LinkedIn Lions is a Yahoo group for open networkers. Members post an introduction and allow other members to send requests to connect. Although members are not obliged to accept requests the general idea is to grow as huge a network as possible. The membership is free.

<sup>42</sup> TopLinked.com is a website that displays links to the top linked people on LinkedIn. Members are not obliged to accept requests, but they agree to receive them. LinkedIn members that are not members of TopLinked.com are not displayed on the website. Members can choose between private (annual fee) and public (free) membership.

The informants that had over 200 connections generally received several invitations to connect with people that were unknown to them. This was partly because they had an open networking strategy and had very many connections, and partly because they themselves, or some of their connections, were important to others. In addition, the informants that had the most connections in the study were generally people that had executive positions and that already had a professional reputation. They did not need LinkedIn to make them look serious or important, as they already had established a professional reputation. One of the informants that received many invitations deliberately took advantage of this situation and used it actively as a way of improving his professional network:

Extract 46:

*“I go through the profile and see what types of people that send me an invitation. If it’s a recruiter I take more depth-contact. If it’s a person that’s interesting in some context, and I see that there is something to that profile, I send the person a mail and ask what’s up and stuff like that. If it’s just a connection in order to get a connection I accept them as well, even if I don’t have anything in common with them at all, just to get the biggest possible volume”* (Interview 9)

The informant would accept anyone, as long as they had written something in their profile on LinkedIn, in order to achieve as large a professional network as possible. At the same time he would browse their profile just in case the connection could be useful to him at present or in the future. Similarly, one of the other informants with an open networking strategy approached new connections if he thought they might have something to offer him:

Extract 47:

*“There are some that I’ve had a special interest of getting in touch with, and after they’ve accepted, I’ve gotten in contact with them and sent them a mail back and said thank you for accepting my invitation (...) and what I want from them”* (Interview 4)

The informant regularly sent out invitations to connect with networkers that had 500+ connections. If he thought that some of them might contribute with more than their number of connections he would contact them. The idea of connecting with people on LinkedIn that might be of importance was supported by several of the informants, and was not exclusive to networkers with an open networking strategy.

Many of the informants searched for connections they considered as important within their industry (closed regulated networking strategy) or that could bring them interesting business opportunities. For example, one of the informants explained how a friend of his had used LinkedIn in order to search for valuable connections when he was moving to another country:

Extract 48:

*“A buddy of mine that lives in Bergen is now moving to Miami. He has quit his job and everything in Bergen and I gave him some pointers on how to use LinkedIn, and he started to search for recruiters in Miami. He’s leaving now on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December and already he has four or five interviews down there completely created through contact via LinkedIn”* (Interview 9)

The informant’s friend had used LinkedIn in order to get easy access to resources that otherwise might have been difficult to attain, especially as he was trying to establish connections in another country. Several of the other informants also emphasized this concept and stressed that LinkedIn was particularly useful if they needed to get in contact with anyone outside of their own geographical area or industry. As one of the informants pointed out:

Extract 49:

*“If you want to reach people in Europe, and furthermore USA, you don’t start in the phonebook. Then you have your work cut out for you. If you instead can get in through people you know who know someone (...) the LinkedIn channel is superior to all other ways of getting through”* (Interview 4)

The informant saw LinkedIn as a door-opener, especially in relation to people in different industries, countries or in prestigious positions. Several of the informants supported this view of LinkedIn as a valuable tool for reaching connections that otherwise might seem unreachable, and to connect easily to people that mattered to them professionally. They believed that LinkedIn effectively revealed the number of chains that separated individuals so that it became transparent how small or big the world was (ref. chapter 3.4.3 on six degrees of separation). One of the informants illustrated this by stressing that one of the ideas that attracted him the most about LinkedIn was the idea of being able to reach people that initially appeared to be inaccessible:

Extract 50:

*“I like to have the possibility to think that wow, the world is so small that there’s suddenly only two links between me and Steve Jobs and, by extension, Bill Gates”*  
(Interview 9)

Through LinkedIn, the informant was theoretically two degrees apart from Steve Jobs, meaning that this person was part of his network on LinkedIn. He knew that this was not equivalent to him actually establishing contact with Steve Jobs or Bill Gates, but the idea that, given the right circumstances, it could actually be possible threw him for a loop.

One of the main reasons why many of the informants thought that LinkedIn was a unique tool for establishing new connections was that they experienced LinkedIn as a serious networking service that denoted a sense of commitment. One of the informants expressed this opinion very clearly:

Extract 51:

*“I use LinkedIn in order to get hold of contacts that I am not connected to (...) and I experience that if I approach someone, through LinkedIn, and they have a look before they eventually choose to contact me or respond, and see that I am there and who I am and that this looks serious, I find that it opens doors”* (Interview 4)

The informant believed that his profile on LinkedIn demonstrated that he was a serious professional and that it would be safe to establish contact with him. Several of the other informants also stressed that they experienced it as easier to approach people who were members on LinkedIn and/or part of their professional network. For example, one of the informants stated that the threshold for contacting acquaintances was equal to none if they were part of his network on LinkedIn:

Extract 52:

*“Especially in relation to the people I don’t know that well (...). I have established a relation to them because they’re in my network (...) I have less trouble contacting them, when they’re in my network, than if they hadn’t been there. I feel that I am very free to contact everyone in my network”* (Interview 2)



The informant experienced that once he was connected to people through LinkedIn he felt that they had approved him as a connection and accepted that he could contact them if he needed to. They had built a bridge (as described in chapter 3.4.1). All of the informants, regardless of their networking strategy, shared this sentiment and acted accordingly. When the informants connected to other people through LinkedIn it was understood as a token that they would assist their connections as best they could, as long as it was reasonable. One of the other informants illustrated this understanding as he explained how he had helped one of his acquaintances to get connected to another connection, from Australia, that he knew explicitly through LinkedIn and a business-letter that the Australian generated once a month:

Extract 53:

*“An acquaintance of mine was thinking of moving to Australia and wondered if I had any connections in Sydney. So I sent him a mail and said that an acquaintance of mine is actually thinking about moving to Sydney. Can you help him with some local knowledge, schools, jobs and how you search for jobs, in what order do you go about things? And he replied immediately and said that you can just forward all of my contacts and we’ll get in touch and I’ll be there. And this is a guy that I’ve never met at all. We only have contact through the net”* (Interview 10)

The informant had simply contacted his connection in Australia, whom he had never met, and asked if he could help out an acquaintance of his – and the response was all together positive. One of the other informants also expressed that she experienced a closer connection to people if they were part of her LinkedIn network:

Extract 54:

*“I’ve felt a tighter connection even though (...) it hasn’t necessarily made us tighter than what we would have been without LinkedIn per se, I don’t suddenly know that much more about the person as a person. But I feel better connected!”*

The informant had not necessarily communicated with the person that she had connected with, but she experienced that the connection itself, supported through updates, acted as a form of communication on its own. She knew more about them and was more conscious of their existence as a result of connecting on LinkedIn.

## 5.5.2 Maintaining connections

Even though many of the informants basically joined LinkedIn in order to get access to new resources, several of them also experienced that it was a valuable tool in relation to maintenance of connections. This concept has been mentioned casually in chapter 5.4, as several areas related to information (visibility, updates, people/companies) also support maintenance of connections. This chapter expands on the areas of use that were presented in chapter 5.4 and introduces additional influences.

All of the informants had established contact with acquaintances or people that they had lost touch with following their membership on LinkedIn. Many of the informants invited or searched for people that they had studied with, former colleagues or other acquaintances that they occasionally interacted with. In addition, several of the informants received invitations to connect from people that they barely knew or had not interacted with for a long time.

Many of the informants experienced that LinkedIn made it easy for them to maintain relationships to people that they were not in regular contact with, but still wanted to have a connection to. Information about people through their profile or updates contributed to the maintenance of such connections and made it easy for the informants to get an overview. For instance, one of the informants stated that he considered LinkedIn as easy and efficient in comparison to other channels of communication:

Extract 55:

*“You can establish a network that is relatively efficient and easy to maintain through LinkedIn, than you will be able to do through phone and e-mail and stuff like that”*  
(Interview 7)

The informant knew from experience that maintenance of connections generally entailed much work, especially if you had many connections. LinkedIn, however, provided a service that was easy and efficient compared to sending out e-mails or picking up the phone, mainly because the network updated itself. Many of the other informants supported this view and LinkedIn was considered as particularly useful in relation to weak ties. This was generally because they did not have much contact with weak ties other than through LinkedIn. Still, several of the informants also used LinkedIn as a supplementary tool for maintaining contact

with strong ties. One of the informants illustrated this as she stressed that LinkedIn made it easy for her to keep in touch with friends and colleagues:

Extract 56:

*“I wanna keep in touch with friends and colleagues. For me this is a great way of knowing what’s going on in their lives without having to pry or ask a lot of personal questions, or send out 155 individual e-mails. And when I want them to know something about me all I have to do is update my profile”* (Interview 1)

The informant saw LinkedIn as a tool for staying updated on her connections and, consequently, maintain her relationship to them. Although LinkedIn was not the only tool that the informant used in order to maintain relationships, she had found that it was very useful in relation to the connections that she had established on LinkedIn. The idea of re-establishing a connection was also regarded as extra valuable and rewarding to the informant. She experienced it as very satisfactory to access information on how people from the past were doing and/or how their careers had developed. Several of the people that she had re-connected with through LinkedIn were people that she had considered as lost connections:

Extract: 57

*“I thought I’d never hear from them again, and like, here they are on LinkedIn and it’s just wonderful!”* (Interview 1)

The informant regularly searched for lost connections and often sent them an e-mail after she had re-connected in order to maintain the connections and to receive additional updates on their lives. The informant noted that the updates gave her access to movements in her acquaintances’ lives that she would otherwise not have a tight enough connection to receive. Consequently, the informant experienced a closer connection to many of her acquaintances, even though they did not have any contact beyond connecting through LinkedIn. Many of the other informants supported this view and stated that although most of their re-connections on LinkedIn never led to additional contact, they still experienced a relationship to people they would otherwise not have a conscious relationship to. To many of the informants the very idea of re-connecting through LinkedIn was a representation of their relationship in itself. For example, one of the informants stated that connecting to former students gave him relief:

Extract 58:

*“You sort of establish contact with former students and so on that you can stay in touch with, and you don’t have to go around having a constant bad conscience”*  
(Interview 7)

The informant experienced that once he had established a connection to former students through LinkedIn this link represented that they knew about each other, that they had a relationship and that they could contact each other if they wanted or needed to. This also meant that he did not have to feel guilty about not having regular contact with the person anymore, because they had a connection through LinkedIn.

### **5.5.3 Developing relationships**

When the informants established and maintained connections through LinkedIn this sometimes led to a change in the relationship that they had to their connections. Increased contact and validation through LinkedIn occasionally resulted in renewed interest and/or more frequent interaction. As a result, several of the informants experienced that they developed stronger ties to some of their connections. One of the informants, for example, stressed that when she got back in touch with people she knew it usually resulted in additional interaction:

Extract 59:

*“I see that when I refresh contact with people I already know it results in another type of contact as well. Either they send me a mail because they know me privately, and wonder how’s it going, or it’s about something concrete”* (Interview 6)

The informant experienced that contact through LinkedIn often led to increased communication through e-mail and that she interacted with her connections more frequently. The informant had, for example, got back in touch with a former classmate, that she used to know very well, after she discovered her profile on LinkedIn. Several of the other informants experienced similar patterns and one of the informants even reported that he had achieved a stronger connection to people he was acquainted with after re-connecting through LinkedIn:

Extract 60:

*“You re-establish a connection that used to be there, and as a student the connection might not have been on a personal level, but it could become so” (Interview 7)*

The informant experienced that former classmates he used to consider as acquaintances suddenly became more than that after they had connected through LinkedIn. The renewed connection let them know each other on a different basis. To many of the informants their membership on LinkedIn became like an ice-breaker. It became easier to contact acquaintances through LinkedIn because they had this thing in common. Similarly, one of the other informants experienced that people he had met and connected to through LinkedIn developed into more than just connections. This was mainly in relation to connections that also were active on LinkedIn, and that he had met in discussion-forums related to networking on LinkedIn:

Extract 61:

*“There are some of the other semi-active people that I’ve met that way and that I’ve gotten to know better as well, but that’s because of the combination of both networking online, participating in networking forums, and meeting each other. It takes a lot to keep a good contact over the net otherwise” (Interview 10)*

The informant stressed that the people that he had met on LinkedIn and whom he had formed relationships with, in some cases friendships, were people that he also had met face-to-face. The informant was also a member of the Norwegian sub-group Nettverket.org and it was through discussion-groups and meetings generated by this sub-group that he had developed friendships to people that he initially met through LinkedIn.

In this chapter an analysis of the collected data has been presented. The next chapter will present a discussion of the research questions, based on the analysis and related theories and studies. It will also include an evaluation of the study.

## 6 DISCUSSIONS

In this chapter the different research questions will be presented and discussed in relation to the findings in the study and relevant theoretical perspectives. There will also be given an evaluation of the study.

Chapter 6.1 discusses LinkedIn as a social networking service and is relevant to research question number one:

1. *What characterizes LinkedIn and how is it perceived by its users?*

Chapter 6.2 discusses LinkedIn as a professional networking tool and is relevant to research question number two:

2. *How do professionals in Norway use LinkedIn as a professional networking tool?*

Chapter 6.3 discusses the managing of connections through LinkedIn and is relevant to research question number three:

3. *How does LinkedIn support the establishment, maintenance and development of connections in a professional network?*

### 6.1 LinkedIn as a social networking service

As presented in chapter 3.3 on CMC and social networking there are many different constellations that support social networking on the Internet. These constellations often have similar characteristics, something which means that popular descriptions such as *social software*, *social network services*, *online communities* and *web 2.0* often describe the same phenomenon. They all identify applications that support social aspects of the Internet and that allow for users to communicate. In this thesis, LinkedIn has generally been referred to as a social networking service (SNS), because LinkedIn's main focus is on the managing of online and/or offline social networks. Still, the other concepts also provide interesting dimensions to LinkedIn.

As presented in chapter 3.3.2, LinkedIn's interactive features, dynamic structure and user generated content fits Green and Pearson's (2005) description of social software, and more precisely a networking website. LinkedIn's focus on establishment and maintenance of social

networks also has the characteristics that Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) emphasize when describing a SNS (chapter 3.3.1). LinkedIn's function as a place where people meet and create social relationships, brought together by common ideas and sentiments about professional networking, is consistent with Fernback's (2007) description of an online community, as presented in chapter 3.3.1. In addition, LinkedIn's flexible nature and focus on sharing information has traces of the principles that O'Rielly (2005) stressed when he characterized a web 2.0 environment (chapter 3.3.3). This complexity and flexibility in regard to LinkedIn's functions and uses is also the main reason why so many concepts may be used to describe the same phenomenon. They all highlight different aspects of it.

Fernback (2007) considers this issue, to some extent, in his article "Beyond the diluted community concept: a symbolic interactionist perspective on social relations", as he criticizes the term community and proposes a different approach when defining social relations on the Internet. Although Fernback limits his article to the term community, many of his arguments may be employed to other concepts that describe similar forms of online social interaction (such as social software, SNSs or web 2.0). Much of the difficulty when describing communities, as presented by Fernback, is based on the fact that the term may refer to a community as a *place* where social relationships are created or as a *symbol* of common ideas and sentiments. Consequently, concepts that describe various forms of constellations on the Internet, such as the term community, are generally not adequate to provide a full understanding of such a constellation. Their descriptions are often limited to one aspect of the constellation and that is why Fernback proposes an alternate view. Similarly, the concepts social software, SNS and web 2.0 generally refer to different applications that encourage some sort of social interaction, but they may also refer to a *place* where social relations are created or a *symbol* of certain social interaction.

The variation in concepts and characteristics that surround LinkedIn was confirmed by several of the informants, who randomly referred to LinkedIn as a tool, a place and/or a service. The informants portrayed LinkedIn in an oral and common sense manner and did not use scientific language during their descriptions. Still, their accounts exemplified a certain flexibility and variation. As presented in chapter 5, the informants used LinkedIn very differently and for various purposes. This also reflected in the way they referred to LinkedIn. For example, the informants who primarily used LinkedIn in order to get hold of new connections and to get access to updated contact-information generally referred to LinkedIn as a tool or a place, and

emphasized LinkedIn's qualities as an application (Extract 8, Extract 11, Extract 39). They often described LinkedIn as a CV-database (Extract 26) or as an advanced address book (Extract 27). The informants who also used LinkedIn for social purposes such as staying in touch with friends or colleagues did not use the term tool or place. Instead of concentrating on LinkedIn's qualities as an application, they emphasized LinkedIn's qualities in relation to their experiences with it (Extracts 56 – 59). This might imply that constellations such as LinkedIn often are characterized according to how they are employed. In other words: what you want out of it determines what it is. Fernback (2007) supports this view as he stresses that the meaning of the term community often evolves and/or changes according to how users employ it.

Fernback proposes that rather than trying to describe constellations such as LinkedIn through certain terms, researchers should study how users generate meaningful constructs of social interaction through the use of online technology. He emphasizes that the dynamic structures of the phenomenon community results in different ideas about the concept and suggests that focus should be redirected to the *process* of community building. He also proposes commitment as the ultimate approach:

*“Scholarship would benefit from a considered turn toward the nature of commitment in online social groups – how commitment is symbolically formed online; how commitment to online social relationships is manifested in everyday life; or to what extent the meaning of commitment to group is enacted in the social sphere”* (Fernback, 2007: 66)

In relation to LinkedIn, this means that instead of looking at characterizations concerning its structure, function or content, it might be of greater benefit to look at characterizations in relation to the processes that take place. Through focusing on how use manifests in the relations that are formed, the users' everyday life and their social network, the researcher might get a more nuanced picture of the constellation. This is, to a great extent, also what this study has focused on, as it investigates how users employ LinkedIn and how this use manifests itself. Although LinkedIn as an application may be characterized as social software, a SNS, an online community or a web 2.0 environment, inquiries into the online social interaction itself might give an even more complete description of the phenomenon.



For example, LinkedIn as an application may be characterized as a SNS that uses social software in order to create an online community that is part of a web 2.0 environment. Such a description may be of great value in regard to LinkedIn as an application, and how this application functions, as each concept reflects different aspects of it. However, this does not say much about LinkedIn as opposed to similar constellations that are found on the Internet. In chapter 3.1.1 the Internet was introduced as a social space that, according to Baym (2006), supports interpersonal communication. A characterization based on LinkedIn as a social space where users are visible to other professionals (chapter 5.3), may get an overview of their network, information about their connections and who their connections know (chapter 5.4), provides a different type of characterization. This is also exemplified through LinkedIn's ability to establish, maintain and develop connections through LinkedIn (chapter 5.5).

The duality of constellations such as LinkedIn has been visible throughout the analysis, as the different terms service (SNS), tool (application) and place (social space) have been employed in order to reflect various aspects of the phenomenon. Fernback's (2007) notion of directing attention towards the processes that occur through online social interaction provides a valuable direction in regard to the characterization of LinkedIn. This study does, however, also demonstrate that concepts, such as community, still provide meaningful contributions when characterizing the phenomenon as a whole.

## **6.2 Using LinkedIn as a professional networking tool**

LinkedIn's philosophy<sup>43</sup> states that a person's professional relationships are the key to his/her professional success. It is likely that many of the professionals who join LinkedIn agree with this philosophy, to various degrees, and several of the informants in the study supported that assumption (Extract 2, Extract 4, Extract 22, Extract 43). This was, however, not surprising considering that the informants were active users of LinkedIn. As presented in chapter 3.2.1 on professional networking, the idea of intentionally building a social network in order to activate it in a professional setting, has become increasingly popular among companies and their employees (Ancona and Caldwell, 1988; Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz, 2002; Pickering and King, 1995). Boyd and Ellison (2007) demonstrate that there has been a rapid expansion of professional networking services such as LinkedIn (chapter 3.2.1) and this may be a

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<sup>43</sup> LinkedIn's philosophy is stated on their website under the heading *About LinkedIn*. <[http://www.linkedin.com/static?key=company\\_info&trk=hb\\_ft\\_abtli](http://www.linkedin.com/static?key=company_info&trk=hb_ft_abtli)> [23.05.2008]

reflection of a general increase in the attention towards professional networking, as reported by Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz (2002).

This study supports Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz's (2002) impression of professional networking as something that has become embedded into the social lives of many professionals (Extracts 2 – 3). The study also emphasizes that professional networking services may act as useful tools when building and managing professional networks (chapter 5.5). However, Baym, Zhang and Lin (2004) emphasize that people generally employ a various number of CMC tools when they communicate, and that SNSs, such as LinkedIn, usually supplement other forms of communication (chapter 3.3). This was confirmed by several of the informants (Extract 37, Extract 42). As presented in chapter 3.2.1, Nardi Whittaker and Schwarz (2002) found that being able to remember who is part of one's professional network, and staying updated on those connections, was of great significance to many professionals. In addition, they found that the establishment and maintenance of connections required much effort and, consequently, they called for tools that might help professionals with such tasks. Existing technology, such as e-mail, instant messaging, mobile phones and personal digital assistants, was judged as inadequate. At the time of Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz's study, professional networking services existed, but they were few and not very widespread. The vast growth of SNSs since 2001 (Boyd and Ellison, 2007) indicates, however, that SNS technology may have filled the gap that Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz unveiled. LinkedIn was launched in 2003 – one year after Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz's article was published.

The idea that professional networking services helped to fill a gap that had been missing among professional networkers was supported by several of the informants in the study. They all emphasized LinkedIn as a very beneficial tool for gaining an overview of (Extract 8, Extracts 24 – 25, Extract 28) and staying updated on (Extracts 31 – 34) their professional network. Many of the informants also reported that they experienced LinkedIn as both efficient and time-saving (Extracts 30 – 31, Extracts 55 – 56) and that they got access to resources they might otherwise not have been able to reach (Extract 39, Extract 44, Extracts 48 – 49, Extract 53). The latter is also consistent with Watt, Lea and Spears' (2002) theory of the Internet as a social space that provides social contacts which might otherwise be unattainable (chapter 3). In addition, as presented in chapters 5.4.3 and 5.4.4, several of the informants pointed at other advantages to professional networking that were supported

through LinkedIn. LinkedIn provided an opportunity for the informants to access additional information about people and companies (Extracts 37 – 38) as well as gaining knowledge about who their connections knew (Extracts 40 – 42). This was experienced as very beneficial to many of the informants, and something that was unique to professional networking services such as LinkedIn (Extract 39).

As discussed in chapter 6.1, SNSs may be employed differently according to user preferences. This study revealed four different types of networkers on LinkedIn (Fig. 17) and that their strategy to networking varied greatly (Fig. 18). Some of the informants were enthusiastic power networkers (Extract 45) while others were sceptical unproductive networkers (Extract 7). While certain informants employed an open unrestricted networking strategy (Extract 12), others were closed and restricted (Extracts 15 – 16). The informants' networks on LinkedIn also ranged from 44 to about 2000 connections (Fig. 16). Still, all of the informants found areas of use that were important to them through LinkedIn. As emphasized in chapter 3.3 on CMC and social networking, Haythornthwaite (2000) stresses that people's networks constantly change and/or develop. This view was also supported by Fernback (2007) in relation to the term community, and other constructs of social interaction, as presented in chapter 3.3.1. The variety of professional networkers who employ LinkedIn may illustrate that LinkedIn is a professional networking tool that is capable of accompanying that progress.

In chapter 3.3 it was expressed that the way people communicate within their social networks, and manage their connections, often change according to the available tools of communication (Baym, 2006; Baym, Zhang and Lin, 2004; Haythornthwaite, 2000). The advancement of SNSs might support this view, as LinkedIn provides an extra dimension to existing tools that advocate professional networking (chapter 3.2.1). It is also possible that professional networking services have contributed to an increase in the practice of professional networking, simply because the idea has been introduced, and become available, to a larger audience through the Internet. Several of the informants in the study supported this view, as they expressed that LinkedIn had made them more conscious of professional networking (Extracts 9 – 10).

Based on the growth of professional networking services there are two interesting deductions about the impact that they might have on different types of networkers. LinkedIn can provide supplements to all of the networker types (Fig. 17), but the outcome is usually somewhat

different. On the one hand, the power networker would be an extremely active networker and have a large professional network regardless of his/her membership on LinkedIn. Because of this, LinkedIn is not likely to affect the attitudes or approaches that power networkers have towards professional networking. LinkedIn may, however, provide the power networker with an improved professional network as a result of the activity that he/she usually generates (Extract 46). As a contrast, the unproductive networker might become more conscious of professional networking because of his/her membership on LinkedIn. As a result, his/her attitudes and approaches to professional networking might change (Extract 9). This may, however, not provide any advantages to his/her professional network, as the unproductive networker does not bother to do much about it (Extract 6). As such, the power networker is likely to exploit the advantages that are provided through LinkedIn and to, in various degrees, experience the benefits that professional networking services might provide. The unproductive networker is likely to become more conscious of professional networking in general, but this usually does not develop into any actual experiences. The unproductive networker may, however, develop into one of the active networking types as a result of a more conscious relationship to professional networking (see chapter 5.2.1). This deduction is also something that might benefit from more careful research than what it provided by this study.

Regardless of the impact that professional networking services might have on the networkers' approaches and/or experiences of professional networking, LinkedIn was found to act as a supplement to their interaction with connections. As previously argued, LinkedIn makes it easier to connect with acquaintances and to stay updated on them, and this also makes it easier to communicate with them. As an example, some of the informants reported that they used LinkedIn's update feature as a way of communicating with their connections (Extract 56). Thus, LinkedIn may provide a simple and effective form of interaction, especially in regard to weak ties, for all of the networking types.

As presented in chapter 3.3, Baym, Zhang and Lin (2004) emphasize that CMC is rarely the only form of communication between individuals, and that most interpersonal communication occur through many different mediums. Although this study demonstrates examples of relations that have been formed solely through CMC (Extract 48, Extract 53) all of the informants expressed that they also employed other forms of communication in order to create, and activate, a successful professional network. LinkedIn was foremost used as a

supplementary tool (Extract 37, Extract 42, Extract 61) that supported professional networking and that might provide additional resources. Similarly to Baym, Zhang and Lin's (2004) research, this study demonstrated that much of the interaction conducted through LinkedIn was based on previous contact (Extract 11, Extracts 15 – 16, Extract 29, Extracts 36 – 37, Extract 42, Extract 52, Extract 56, Extracts 58 – 60). However, several of the informants emphasized that LinkedIn provided a major potential as a door-opener, something that few of them had access to elsewhere (Extracts 18 – 20, Extract 47, Extracts 49 – 51).

### **6.3 Managing connections through LinkedIn**

As presented in chapter 3.4.2, Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz (2002) stress that in order to build a successful professional network, and to get access to resourceful connections, it is necessary to regularly add new connections and to maintain the ties to them. New connections generally bring new resources to the professional network, and maintenance makes it easy to activate the selected contacts (Granovetter, 1973; Granovetter, 1983; Haythornthwaite, 2000; Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz, 2002). The importance of gaining access to new resources and maintaining ties was emphasized by all of the informants in the study (chapter 5.5). Several of the informants used LinkedIn explicitly in order to establish new connections (Extract 11, Extract 41, Extracts 45 – 46) and they all saw it as a unique tool for support and maintenance of existing ones (Extract 52, Extracts 55 – 56, Extract 58). Because LinkedIn often represented the only channel of communication to many of the informants' acquaintances, they found it to be especially useful in relation to the maintenance of weak ties (Extract 55). This is consistent with Boyd and Ellison's (2007) idea that SNSs, such as LinkedIn, often contribute to the bridging of offline and online social relations, and that such bridges are especially fruitful when establishing connections to acquaintances such as schoolmates and colleagues (chapter 3.4.3). As presented in chapter 5.5.2 the informants generally did not interact with the weak ties in their LinkedIn network through any other mediums than LinkedIn (Extract 35, Extract 57). Still, some of the informants emphasized that LinkedIn was also considered as a valuable supplement to the maintenance of strong ties (Extract 56).

In relation to the establishment of new connections, many of the informants also experienced that they were only a few degrees away from desirable resources (Extract 41). As presented in chapter 3.4.3, Stanley Milgram launched the theory of Six degrees of Separation in 1973, stating that anyone in the world is separated through no more than six weak ties (on average).

Boyd and Ellison (2007) stated that SNSs such as LinkedIn might make the degrees of separation much more visible, and this was also confirmed by many of the informants in the study. Several of the informants found that LinkedIn displayed to them how they were connected to other people in their LinkedIn network (Extract 42) and some of them even discovered that they were connected to people they would otherwise have no hope of reaching (Extract 50). LinkedIn only displays the first three degrees, but as Adamic and Adar (2005) emphasize: because the intermediates are usually weak ties, it might not take more than two intermediates in order to reach a network at the size of the United States (chapter 3.4.4). Seeing that LinkedIn has the possibility to increase the number of weak ties quite dramatically, this number may increase.

In his article “The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited” (1983), Granovetter identified how weak ties often play an important role in work-related settings and that professionals generally activate weak ties frequently (chapter 3.4.2). As Granovetter emphasized when he introduced his theory of weak ties in 1973, weak ties give access to other people’s social networks and, consequently, to resources that people might lack in their own social networks (chapter 3.4.1). However, several of the informants in the study reported that LinkedIn provided an additional advantage in relation to the activation of weak ties. Generally, although weak ties are likely to provide new resources, they are also characterized through low level of intimacy and little exchange of personal communication (chapter 3.4). A weak tie might represent access to new resources, but as there is little personal exchange between actors, there is no reason why that resource should provide any assistance. Consequently, it might require a lot of effort to establish a sufficient level of intimacy for the exchange to take place. This notion was emphasized by Friedkin in his article “A Test of Structural Features of Granovetter’s Strength of Weak Ties Theory” (1980), as he stated that although weak ties may represent new resources (bridges) this is not equivalent to the occurrence of the phenomenon (chapter 3.4.3). Through LinkedIn, several of the informants reported that they experienced a stronger level of commitment to their connections, even if they had never interacted with them (Extract 54). Some of the informants also reported of situations where complete strangers had spent a generous amount of resources on people they had no connection to (Extract 53). To some degree, this opens up for the idea that professional networking services, such as LinkedIn, might contribute to a strengthening of weak ties simply as a result of the connection that is represented through LinkedIn (Extract 54).



Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz (2002) stressed that the differences between strong and weak ties are generally ambiguous and difficult to identify (chapter 3.4). The hazy boundaries that often separate strong and weak ties, as well as the complex and dynamic structure of social networks (as described by Haythornthwaite, 2000), basically results in a constant negotiation of the strength within any tie (chapter 3.2). The informants confirmed this notion, as they pointed out that the ties to their connections often developed (chapter 5.5.3). For example, previous connections might be strengthened as a result of connecting through LinkedIn (Extract 60) or relations that were established through LinkedIn might develop as a result of increased communication (Extract 61). In addition, the connection that exists through LinkedIn might represent a form of interaction in itself, even if actors do not communicate explicitly (Extract 54). This could also contribute to a development of the connection.

The variation of ties that are represented through LinkedIn, and the uses that the informants employ, has led to the identification of three main functions that LinkedIn support. One is that LinkedIn functions as a *symbol of a connection*. Many of the connections that were supported through LinkedIn were to previously established ties that already had certain patterns of communication. The connection through LinkedIn functioned as a representation of a tie that already existed. As such, LinkedIn did not function as the primary form of communication, and instead became a supplement to existing forms. This symbol was especially apparent in relation to strong ties, as they generally are maintained through several different mediums of communication (Garton, Haythornthwaite and Wellman, 1997; Haythornthwaite, 2000). The second function is that LinkedIn supports the *re-establishment of connections*. Strong or weak ties that, for various reasons, had been lost were re-established because of the connection through LinkedIn. In such instances LinkedIn functioned as the initial form of communication, but was often supplemented with other forms of communication, such as e-mail or telephone (Extract 59), depending on the informants' desire to interact. This function was generally represented through various weak ties such as former classmates or colleagues. The third function is that LinkedIn supports the *constitution of a connection*. In such cases, the connection is established through LinkedIn and LinkedIn also functions as the primary form of communication. The ties that were constituted through LinkedIn varied in strength, but weak ties were most frequently represented. This is because most of the connections that were constituted through LinkedIn were established between professionals with large networks and that had an open networking strategy (see chapter 5.5.1).

The three functions that have been identified in this study may also support the three tasks that Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz (2002) presented as necessary in order to build a successful professional network (chapter 3.2.1). The constitution of connections adds new resources to the professional network and helps to build the network. The re-establishment of connections also assists in building the professional network, as it adds resources that had originally been lost. In addition, the re-establishment of connections may contribute to the maintenance of weak ties. The symbol of a connection contributes to the maintenance of both strong and weak ties, as it functions as a representation of ties that already exist, and might make the connections more visible to each other. All of these functions finally contribute to the activation of a connection whenever this is required.

#### **6.4 Evaluation of the study**

As presented in chapter 4.1, there are many different methods that may be employed when conducting a qualitative study. Approaches such as interviews, surveys and observations all assist in highlighting different aspects of the object of study, and could have been employed in relation to the study of LinkedIn. This study has, however, been based solely on in-depth interviews. The focus of the study was to investigate how people made use of LinkedIn and what implications this use might have. The best way to investigate this use was to go directly to the source: namely the users. In-depth interviews provided an opportunity to question the users first-hand and to explore their answers thoroughly. In relation to the number of informants, this was based on the point of saturation (chapter 4.3.2). Upon reaching the point of saturation, one extra interview was conducted, resulting in a total of 11 interviews. Additional interviews could have been carried out in order to explore various nuances, but as the study's main focus was on LinkedIn's primary uses, such an elaboration was not considered as necessary. A total of 11 in-depth interviews were also considered as sufficient for this type of study.

The selection of the sample was, as presented in chapter 4.3.2, based on snowball sampling. Such a sampling method has both advantages and limitations. The advantage was that it made it easier to locate informants that fulfilled the necessary criteria, something which would probably have been difficult and time-consuming through any other sampling method. The limitations of such a sample was that the informants were likely to have similar interests and/or background, and that this would cause the sample to represent certain subgroups rather



than a population. This was, however, not considered as a limitation to this particular study, as it is not meant to be representative. Analytical generalizations are still possible and the findings that have been presented in this study may be researched more carefully in the future, if it is desirable to say something about the population as a whole.

In this chapter three different discussions related to the analysis and relevant theory have been presented. The next chapter will provide a summary of the discussions in relation to the research questions. Possible implications of the study will also be presented.

## 7 CONCLUSION

In this thesis a study of LinkedIn, and how users employ LinkedIn, has been presented. The results of the study have been displayed in the analysis and these results have been discussed according to various theoretical perspectives. The intention of the study has been to answer the three research questions that were presented in the introduction:

1. *What characterizes LinkedIn and how is it perceived by its users?*
2. *How do professionals in Norway use LinkedIn as a professional networking tool?*
3. *How does LinkedIn support the establishment, maintenance and development of connections in a professional network?*

In answer to the first research question, it was determined that there are several different approaches to constellations such as LinkedIn and that this affects its characterization. LinkedIn was characterized as a dynamic and flexible application that supported social networking through focus on the establishment and maintenance of connections. As such, LinkedIn was foremost presented as a social networking service, but with emphasis on professional networking, making it a *professional networking service*. This characterization was, however, based on LinkedIn as a tool or an application and only reflected LinkedIn's exterior qualities. Concepts, such as professional networking services, may also refer to the constellation as a *symbol* of interaction or a *place* where the interaction is created.

The users perceived LinkedIn differently according to how they employed it. The processes that the informants engaged in when they used LinkedIn generated three main areas of perception. As such, LinkedIn was perceived as a *service*, a *tool* and/or a *place*. Neither of these perceptions excluded the others, and many of the informants referred to LinkedIn differently when they described various aspects of their use.

In relation to research question number two, LinkedIn generally functioned as a supplement to other tools that supported professional networking. The informants used LinkedIn as a tool for gaining an overview of their connections, access to updated information about their connections and who their connections knew. They also used LinkedIn in order to access information about people or companies that the informants, for various reasons, were interested in. As the informants' professional networks changed or developed, LinkedIn

accompanied that process. LinkedIn also introduced new possibilities in regard to the informants' professional practices. The advantage of being able to access information about people and companies was often used in order to gain advantages in relation to professional situations. The ability to identify the degrees of separation to people in the informants' LinkedIn network also functioned as a door-opener to new resources.

In relation to research question number three, LinkedIn was found to provide support to all areas of connection management. LinkedIn facilitated the establishment of connections through gaining access to new resources, and was particularly useful when establishing weak ties. LinkedIn also provided support to existing connections, especially in regard to maintenance of weak ties. The connection that was created through LinkedIn made it easy for the informants to stay updated on their connections and to contact them if they were so inclined. In addition, LinkedIn provided possibilities for the informants to develop relations to existing connections, through increased communication or activation of the connection. Such development was, however, usually dependent on other forms of communication as well. Although LinkedIn was seen as especially useful in relation to the management of weak ties, it also provided contributions to the management of strong ties.

When connecting through LinkedIn, this connection was found to support three main functions:

1. *Symbol of a connection*: the connection functioned as a representation of a tie that already existed.
2. *Re-establishment of connections*: connections that, for various reasons, had been lost were re-established when they connected through LinkedIn.
3. *Constitution of connections*: new connections were constituted as a result of disclosure on LinkedIn.

These functions supported both strong and weak ties, although some were more beneficial to one or the other.

When reviewing the different research questions it is important to keep in mind that although LinkedIn was used actively by most of the informants, and many of the informants experienced that LinkedIn provided valuable contributions to their professional networking,

some of the informants did not experience LinkedIn as particularly important to their professional lives. LinkedIn provided opportunities that, when exploited, was of value, but several informants did not see this as ground-breaking in regard to their career. It is important that LinkedIn is regarded as a tool for professional networking which helps to support a professional network, as part of a very complex social environment.

## **7.1 Implications of the study**

As presented in the discussions, there are several interesting aspects to the findings that have been displayed in this study. The growth of SNSs that was reported by Boyd and Ellison (2007) indicates that services, such as LinkedIn, are expanding and will probably attract more and more users. The opportunities that professional networking services may provide its users are in some instances unique to this type of technology, and may influence the way professionals build their professional networks. The visibility of the degrees of separation that is provided through SNSs may also affect the way that people do business and attain new resources. As such, the findings that have been presented in this study may indicate a development in the way professionals manage their professional networks and attain their resources.

The implications that professional networking services, such as LinkedIn, may have on the different types of networkers (Fig. 17) could definitely benefit from further research, and may be interesting in regard to how professional networking services can be employed in the future. In addition, the advancement of professional networking as a way of doing business, as presented by Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz (2002), is supported by this study, and it may also be interesting to identify that progress. This study is based on a small sample of professionals in Norway, and although the findings have identified different types of users, approaches to networking and the employment of professional networking services, there are likely to be several interesting additions to these findings. Further studies could contribute to an even more complete understanding of the phenomenon and the processes that take place as a result of it.

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## 9 APPENDIX

### 9.1 Interview guide

#### BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

##### **Ask the informant to present him/herself**

##### **Explain why I want to talk to him/her**

- Master thesis. I want to examine how LinkedIn is used and the type of relations that are created, maintained and developed through the LinkedIn network.

##### **Inform about the length of the interview**

- It will take about an hour. Is it ok if we use more time, if needed?

##### **Inform about anonymity**

- Pass out description of the study and get signature

#### THE INTERVIEW

##### **I am very interested in why you became a member of LinkedIn.**

- Education? Career? Conscious or random decision?
- How did you get to know about LinkedIn?
- What version of LinkedIn do you have? Pay/Free? Any reason for this choice?
- Have you been/are you a member of any other social networking services?
  - o YES: What kind of services? How are these services compared to LinkedIn?  
Do you use them often/different?
  - o NO: Is there any reason why you're only a member of LinkedIn?
- How long have you used LinkedIn? Do you see yourself continuing using the service in the future? In what types of situations do you see yourself using the service?
- What kind of expectations do you have to professional networking services? Why is this important to you? Does LinkedIn fulfil your expectations? Examples?
- What do you think is positive about the service?
- Is there anything negative about it?

##### **Do you get in touch with new people?**

- Do you get new contacts? How? Examples?
  - o Who do you contact? Have you ever contacted any unknown people?  
Examples?

- How do you contact them?
- What kind of relationship do you have to these contacts now?
- Is there anyone you haven't gotten a reply from?
- Who contacts you? Have you been contacted by any unknown people?  
Examples?
  - How do they contact you?
  - What kind of relationship do you have with them now?
  - Is there anyone you haven't answered?
- What kind of people do you get in touch with? Entrepreneurs? Projects? Education and career? How many?
- What use is the LinkedIn network to you? Examples?
- OR/AND does it help to maintain existing relationships? Who? How? Examples?
  - Have you found any old acquaintances through LinkedIn? Gotten back in touch? Examples?
    - Have you consciously searched for old acquaintances? Example?
    - Have any old acquaintances found you? Example?
- Have any of the relationships evolved with the help of LinkedIn? How? Who?
  - Is there anyone you are in contact with out of the work-context? Have you made any new friends? Examples?
- Have you deleted any contacts? Who? Why?

### **Does LinkedIn organize your network?**

- Do you manage to keep in control of all of your contacts?
  - How many contacts do you have? Do you know who all of them are?
    - How many of your contacts do you know?
    - EVT. How did the ones you don't know wind up in your contact list?  
Why do you keep them in your contact list?
  - Has anything become easier since you've started using the LinkedIn network?  
What?
  - Is there anything you would like to change about the LinkedIn network? What?

### **How do you use your contacts?**

- How often do you log on to LinkedIn? Time? What do you think about spending time on networks like LinkedIn?

- Do you use your existing contacts on LinkedIn? How? Examples?
  - o What is your approach?
  - o When do you use your contacts? To what?
  - o Have you ever gotten rejected/not gotten an answer? Example?
  - o Have you ever sent an InMail? Used an introduction? Example/Wanted to? What do you think about these functions?
- What kind of relationship do you have with your contacts?
  - o Strong/weak ties? Example?
  - o Professionals/friends? What do you have more of? Who do you contact the most?
- Have any of the relationships evolved? Has LinkedIn played a part in this? Example?

**All human beings have a social network. What does this social network mean to you?**

- Professional network vs. personal-networks? Are they separated? What is the difference? Different in use? Exceptions? Do they blend?
  - o Do you use your personal-network in job-contexts? Example?
- How do you keep in touch with people in your personal network? Tools?
- Who do you have contact with? Anyone you don't have contact with that you wish you had?
- How do you regard network-building? Positive/negative? Why? Examples?
- What is it about network-building that is important to you?
- What part of your personal network does LinkedIn represent? Example?
- Do you feel it is important to have an online network like LinkedIn? What is it that makes it/doesn't make it important? In what situations has it been important to you? Examples?
- What does this kind of network mean to you? Do you think anything would be different without it? Examples?

**How do you experience LinkedIn with regard to establishing, maintaining and developing relations?**

- Does it work?
- Just an address book or is it more than that? What do you think makes it/doesn't make it something else?

**Is there anything you would like to add?**

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

**Say thanks for the interview.**

**Ask if it is OK that I get in touch if anything is unclear.**

## 9.2 Approval

An English translation of the approval will be presented on the next page.

### Beskrivelse av studien

Studien vil fungere som materiale for en masteroppgave i Medievitenskap, som tar for seg hvordan relasjoner etableres, opprettholdes og videreutvikles i et online nettverk som LinkedIn. Intervjuet tar med dette sikte på å undersøke hvordan og hvorfor man bruker LinkedIn, og hvordan man finner frem til hverandre.

Alle data om enkeltpersoner vil behandles fortrolig og anonymiseres. Materialet vil kun brukes til forskningsformål.

Intervjuet vil bli tatt opp på tape for senere transkribering. Denne tapen vil bli slettet når prosjektet er ferdig.

Det er din rett til å nekte å delta i studien eller til å nekte å svare på enkelte av spørsmålene i intervjuet.

Sett kryss.

Jeg ønsker å være anonym

Jeg ønsker ikke å være anonym

Jeg bekrefter med dette at jeg har lest og forstått studiens hensikt, og at jeg samtykker til å delta i intervjuet.

---

Underskrift

### Kontaktinformasjon

---

Linda Elen Olsen

Mobil:

Hustelefon:

E-post:

MSN:



Linda.E.Olsen@student.uib.no

lindaeo@hotmail.com

English translation of the approval:

### **Description of the study**

The study will function as the data for a Master in Media Science. It will focus on how relations are established, maintained and developed through an online network such as LinkedIn. The interview's goal is to find out how and why people use LinkedIn, and how they find each other.

All data on individuals will be treated confidentially and anonymously. The data will only be used for research purposes.

The interview will be recorded so that it may be transcribed later on. This tape will be deleted upon the completion of the project.

It is your right to refuse to participate in the study and to refuse to answer certain questions in the interview.

Make a mark.

I wish to be anonymous

I do not wish to be anonymous

I confirm that I have read and understood the intention of the study and consent to participating in the interview.

---


Signature

### **Contact information**

---

Linda Elen Olsen

Mobile phone: 

House phone: 

E-mail: Linda.E.Olsen@student.uib.no

MSN: lindaeo@hotmail.com

## 9.3 Translation of quotations

### Chapter 5.2

Extract 1:

*“You sign up to maybe 20 places and end up using two of them”* (Interview 6)

“Du melder deg på kanskje 20 steder også ender du opp med å bruke to av de”

Extract 2:

*“From the age of 16 I knew that having a network was the most important thing you had to have”* (Interview 1)

Original language (English)

Extract 3:

*“It has become natural to have it in the back of my mind”* (Interview 9)

“Det har blitt naturlig å ha det i bakhodet hele tiden”

Extract 4:

*“You’re always looking for new ways to improve your work, get better connections, a better circle of acquaintances, (...) new friends or better ideas”* (Interview 9)

”Du ser alltid etter bedre måter å gjøre jobben din bedre på, eller bedre forbindelser, eller bedre omgangskrets eller (...) nye venner eller mer passende ideer”

Extract 5:

*“LinkedIn isn’t anything special, it’s just a place where we stay in touch”*(Interview 11)

”LinkedIn er liksom ikke noe. Vi bare har kontakt med hverandre der sånn”

Extract 6:

*“It’s not something that’s urgent right now”* (Interview 7)

“Akkurat nå så er det ikke noe som haster”

Extract 7:

*“It hasn’t been decisive in any context what so ever”* (Interview 5)

”Det har ikke vært avgjørende i noen som helst sammenheng”



Extract 8:

*“I quickly noticed that it was a useful tool for establishing new contacts, but I also had a place where there is updated information about existing contacts, so that I have an overview of my relations”* (Interview 8)

“Jeg så ganske fort at det var veldig nyttig som et verktøy for å både knytte nye kontakter, men også ha en plass hvor det er oppdatert informasjon om eksisterende kontakter igjen, sånn at jeg da har en oversikt over de relasjonene jeg har”

Extract 9:

*“LinkedIn has made this more explicit and I have a more reflected relationship to it now because I use LinkedIn”* (Interview 7)

“LinkedIn har på en måte gjort det her mye mer håndfast og jeg har et mer reflektert forhold til det nå fordi jeg bruker LinkedIn”

Extract 10:

*“The winner takes it all. Once you start to get active (...) it’s just like fishing in stirred water – you get in touch with other people that are active”* (Interview 4)

”The winner takes it all. Når du første begynner å bli aktiv (...) det er nærmest bare å fiske i rørt vann, så kommer du borti andre som er aktive”

### **Chapter 5.1.3**

Extract 11:

*“To me LinkedIn is just a tool for connecting to more distant contacts so that I can gain access to their network as well”* (Interview 3)

”For meg så er LinkedIn bare et verktøy til å knytte, kall det mer perifere kontakter da, og på den måten også få tilgang til deres nettverk”

Extract 12:

*“I have no criteria for who I connect with on LinkedIn, but I wouldn’t say that they’re automatically a part of my network”* (Interview 9)

”Jeg har ingen kriterier for hvem jeg connecter meg med på LinkedIn, jeg vil ikke si at de automatisk er en del av mitt nettverk”

Extract 13:

*“I think that, because my network is as big as it is, I get more enquiries now. Because I put myself at disposal, I am on stage”* (Interview 4)

“Så jeg tror at, gjennom at det nettverket mitt er så stort som det er, så får jeg flere henvendelser nå, fordi at jeg stiller meg til disposisjon, jeg står på scenen”

Extract 14:

*“Who people know also says a lot about what type of person they are. I see that personally, when I look at people in my network and who they know, it definitely matters”* (Interview 2)

“Hvem folk kjenner sier også en del om hvilke personer det er. Det ser jeg jo selv når jeg ser på folk i nettverket mitt og hvem de kjenner, og det er helt klart at det har betydning”

Extract 15:

*“I have to know who they are and that they stand for something I think is alright both professionally, and to the extent I know, on the human level”* (Interview 7)

“Jeg må vite hvem de er altså, at de står for noe som jeg synes er alright både profesjonelt, og i den grad jeg vet det, på et menneskelig nivå liksom”

Extract 16:

*“I kind of went through and I wanted to make sure that I had a connection to everyone that’s on my list. Even if it’s weak, but I wanted to make sure that there were no strangers”*

(Interview 1)

Original language (English)

Extract 17:

*“LinkedIn is mainly professionally oriented. That doesn’t mean that I’m not connected to close friends, because I am, but they’re there in a professional capacity”* (Interview 7)

“LinkedIn er i stor utstrekning profesjonelt orientert. Ikke dermed sagt at man ikke har kontakt med nære venner altså, det står nære venner av meg i kontaktlista mi. For det gjør det. Men de står der i en profesjonell kapasitet”

### Chapter 5.3.1

Extract 18:

*“I’ve gotten in contact with one of those headhunters, who contacted me because I had a profile on LinkedIn (...). That was actually about a job-offer”* (Interview 2)

”Det er i hvert fall en sånn hodejeger som jeg har fått kontakt med her, som tok kontakt med meg på grunn av at jeg hadde en profil på LinkedIn da (...). Det var faktisk et konkret jobbtilbud det”

Extract 19:

*“More people know who I am because I’m a member there”* (Interview 11)

”Det er flere som vet hvem jeg er fordi at jeg er med der”

Extract 20:

*“I’ve helped others to facilitate transfer of competence. I’ve gotten enquiries from people asking if I can forward their contact to other people, so I feel that I’ve helped others in getting things done”* (Interview 8)

”Jeg har hjulpet andre til fasilitere kompetanseoverføring, det at jeg har fått henvendelser fra folk som bruker om jeg kan videreformidle kontakten deres til andre. Så da føler jeg det at jeg har hjulpet andre da, til å ha fått ting til”

Extract 21:

*“I try to keep it updated all the time, even though I’m not really searching for jobs. Frankly so that others may know who I am”* (Interview 2)

”Jeg forsøker å holde den oppdatert hele tiden, selv om jeg ikke er på jobb jakt egentlig da. Rett og slett for at andre skal vite hvem jeg er”

Extract 22:

*“It’s about getting known in an industry. Making my name known and tying myself to the content of my profile”* (Interview 11)

”For min del så er det å bli kjent i et miljø. Gjøre navnet mitt kjent liksom. Og knyttes opp mot det som står i min profil”

Extract 23:

*“It’s that seriousness – the feeling that you’ve been raised a few notches”* (Interview 6)

“Den seriøsiteten – altså at du føler at du blir hevet et par hakk”

### Chapter 5.3.2.1

Extract 24:

*“You have a place that gives an overview of information about what they do, what they know, what functions they have – so that you can use them if you need to”* (Interview 8)

“Du har en plass, med oversikt over informasjon om hva de holder på med, hva kan de, hvilke funksjoner har de - så du kan bruke dem visst du har behov for det”

Extract 25:

*“LinkedIn sorts it for you, well not sorts, but makes it searchable for you, systemize it, see who is whose contact so that you get a nice map”* (Interview 9)

“LinkedIn sorterer det for deg, eller ikke sorterer, gjør det søkbart for deg, systemiserer det for deg, se hvem som er hvem sine kontakter slik at du får et fint kart”

Extract 26:

*“LinkedIn is more like a CV-database, you have a better overview of what people actually do”* (Interview 11)

”På LinkedIn så er det mer sånn CV-database, du har mer oversikt over hva folk faktisk driver med”

Extract 27:

*“LinkedIn is (...) a very advanced address book”* (Interview 10)

”LinkedIn sånn sett er jo (...) en veldig avansert visittkortbok”

Extract 28:

*“It has the overview that I need in a network. And I don’t have that in any other way, really”* (Interview 2)

”Det har den oversikten som jeg trenger for et nettverk. Og det har jeg ikke på noen annen måte egentlig”

Extract 29:

*“If I lack competence in an area and I, for example, know that people in Oslo that I’ve had contact with through my company, and through LinkedIn, have experience from the things we*

*are going to do – then I contact them and ask if they can come and help us (...) I recently did and it's very alright that way*” (Interview 11)

”Visst jeg mangler kompetanse på et område ikke sant, så vet jeg at folk i Oslo for eksempel, som jeg har hatt kontakt med gjennom firmaet mitt og gjennom LinkedIn, som jeg vet har drevet med de tingene vi skal til å begynne med nå. Da tar jeg kontakt med de og hører om de kan eventuelt komme opp (...) det gjorde jeg nettopp. Sånn sett er det veldig alright da”

### **Chapter 5.3.2.2**

Extract 30:

*“They do all the typing and I get all the reading”* (Interview 1)

Original language (English)

Extract 31:

*“I found a place where I didn't have to manage my contact list all the time. All of the people in my network updated their own contact-information (...) and I saw it as very time-saving to have such a central place where you updated your contact information”* (Interview 8)

”Det at jeg fant et sted hvor man slapp at jeg måtte vedlikeholde min egen kontaktliste hele tiden. Hver av de personene jeg hadde i nettverket oppdaterte sin egen kontaktliste (...) det så jeg som veldig besparende, det å kunne ha et sånt sentralt sted hvor man oppdaterte kontaktinformasjonen”

Extract 32:

*“Before you used to send an e-mail and say that I've gotten a new job (...) but now you can stay updated through this”* (Interview 8)

“Før i tida så sendte man ofte en e-post og fortalte at jeg har fått meg en ny jobb (...) men nå kan man holde seg oppdatert via det her”

Extract 33:

*“You have a very nice way of staying updated, at least on people's e-mail address”*  
(Interview 5)

”Du har på en måte en veldig grei måte å holde oppdatert, i alle fall e-post adressen til folk da”

Extract 34:

*“The great thing now is that I get daily updates on what happens in my network, who that changes jobs and so on. So that’s genius!”* (Interview 9)

“Det fine nå er, at nå får jo jeg daglige oppdateringer på hva som skjer i nettverket mitt, hvem som skifter jobb og så videre, så det er jo genialt!”

Extract 35:

*“Now at least I know where in the world he is, that person. I know where he works and if I need to talk about something with that person I can contact him because I have his contact information”* (Interview 8)

“Nå vet jeg i alle fall hvor han er hen i verden, den personen. Jeg vet hvor han jobber hen og visst jeg har behov for å snakke om et eller annet med den personen så kan jeg ta kontakt med ham fordi at jeg har kontaktinformasjonen”

Extract 36:

*“It’s been brilliant! I mean, people that I maybe heard from once every two years - now, through LinkedIn, as they update their profiles, I get to know (...) this is what’s happening in their life now”* (Interview 1)

Original language (English)

### **Chapter 5.3.2.3**

Extract 37:

*“In every meeting I’ve attended, also if it’s outside of IT, I’ve searched for them in the network. I check out people on LinkedIn before I meet them, and that’s like all the time”*

(Interview 9)

”I alle møter som jeg går i, også visst det er møter som går utenfor IT, har jeg funnet de fram via LinkedIn nettverket. Sjekke opp folk på LinkedIn før jeg møter de, og det er liksom hele tiden”

Extract 38:

*“When I started to wonder about changing jobs I used it quite actively to find out who worked where and stuff like that, without it being anything crucial or that I used it for applying for jobs”* (Interview 5)

“Når jeg begynte å lure på å skifte jobb, så brukte jeg det ganske aktivt for å finne ut hvem som jobbet hvor og litt sånn, uten at det var noe avgjørende eller at jeg brukte det til å søke jobb gjennom”

Extract 39:

*“With what other tool can you manage to search for something or a particular company and find nearly everyone that, for example, works in Telenor in Norway? (...) I get to know who works there, who they are and what they are. I can make a map of the organization before I’ve even talked to any of them!”* (Interview 9)

“Hvilket annet verktøy klarer du å søke etter noe og i en spesiell bedrift og få vite at de faktisk jobber der, og få frem så å si alle som for eksempel jobber i Telenor i Norge? (...) Jeg får jo alle sammen. Hvem som jobber der, hvem de er, hva de er. Jeg kan lage et organisasjonskart av bedriften før jeg i det hele tatt har snakket med noen av de!”

#### **Chapter 5.3.2.4**

Extract 40:

*“It is interesting to see who others are tied to – because it helps me to find out if there’s anyone I also know about or have a relation to”* (Interview 8)

”Det er litt mer interessant å se hvem andre har knyttet til seg, for det hjelper å finne ut om det her er noen jeg også har, vet om eller har en relasjon til”

Extract 41:

*“I’ve noticed that I know people who know people who know a person that might be interesting in the long run”* (Interview 7)

“Jeg har også notert meg at jeg kjenner mennesker som kjenner mennesker som kjenner et menneske som kan være interessant på sikt”

Extract 42:

*“In January I start working in a firm called FIRM<sup>44</sup>. I’ve had a connection that has worked in FIRM for a long time and who is also a good friend. So I looked at his contact list to see who he knew in FIRM. So when I searched for the job and got called in for an interview, I immediately checked if he knew that person and I asked the person I knew how he got on with*

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<sup>44</sup> Due to issues of privacy the firm that the informant talks about will only be referred to as FIRM.

*FIRM (...) When I went to the interview and talked to the people I met in FIRM I also got their e-mail addresses and connected with them straight away on LinkedIn. I didn't need to do it through this friend, so it sort of becomes part of a bigger thing” (Interview 8)*

”I januar, da begynner jeg i et nytt firma. Da begynner jeg i et firma som heter FIRMA. Jeg har hatt en kontakt lenge som har jobbet i FIRMA og som også er en god venn. Så da så jeg på hans venneliste for å se på hvem han kjente i FIRMA, så da jeg søkte på jobben og ble kalt inn på intervju, så sjekka jeg med en gang i forhold til hva, kjenner han den personen, og jeg spurte den personen jeg kjente i forhold til hvordan han omgikk FIRMA (...). Når jeg da var på intervjuet og de personene jeg da traff, jeg snakka med i FIRMA, så fikk jeg jo deres e-post adresse og kobla meg direkte til dem, til LinkedIn. Jeg trengte ikke å gjøre det via den vennen, så du bruker det litt som en del av en større ting”

### **Chapter 5.4.1**

Extract 43:

*“The professional network – there are two reasons why you build it. One is to make the job you do easier and the other is to get the job of your dreams” (Interview 9)*

”Det profesjonelle nettverket - det er to grunner til hvorfor du bygger opp. Den ene for å gjøre jobben du gjør bedre, og den andre er for å få drømmejobben”

Extract 44:

*“There are a lot of people I wouldn't have gotten to know without LinkedIn” (Interview 3)*

”Det er mange jeg ikke hadde blitt kjent med uten LinkedIn”

Extract 45:

*“Sometimes at night when I just sit around and play and have nothing else to do, I find people who for example are listed with the same interests or background as me. And then I just send them an e-mail, because their e-mail address is right there. And people like that answer in about 10 minutes, and then you're connected” (Interview 4)*

”Når jeg av og til sitter om kvelden og leker meg og ikke har noe annet å gjøre, så finner jeg noen sånne som for eksempel er lista med samme interesse som meg, eller samme bakgrunn som meg. Og så sender jeg de bare en mail, for da ligger mailadressen her, sant. Og sånne svarer gjerne i løpet av 10 minutter så har du de inne”



Extract 46:

*“I go through the profile and see what types of people that send me an invitation. If it’s a recruiter I take more depth-contact. If it’s a person that’s interesting in some context, and I see that there is something to that profile, I send the person a mail and ask what’s up and stuff like that. If it’s just a connection in order to get a connection I accept them as well, even if I don’t have anything in common with them at all, just to get the biggest possible volume”*

(Interview 9)

“Jeg går gjennom profilen og ser hva slags folk det er som sender meg invitasjon. Og er det da en rekrutterer så tar jeg mer dybdekontakt. Er det en person som er interessant for en eller annen sammenheng og jeg ser at den profilen kan være noe, så sender jeg en mail og liksom spør hva det går i og litt sånt som det der. Og visst det er bare en kontakt for å ta kontakt så aksepterer jeg de, og visst jeg ikke har noe til felles med de i det hele tatt, bare for å nå størst mulig volum i bunnen”

Extract 47:

*“There are some that I’ve had a special interest of getting in touch with, and after they’ve accepted, I’ve gotten in contact with them and sent them a mail back and said thank you for accepting my invitation (...) and what I want from them”* (Interview 4)

“Så er det noen som jeg har hatt en spesifikk interesse over å få kontakt med, så har jeg nok fått kontakt med de ved at jeg, etter at de har akseptert, sendt de en mail tilbake og sagt tusen takk for at du aksepterte min invitasjon (...) det jeg vil ha av deg er”

Extract 48:

*“A buddy of mine that lives in Bergen is now moving to Miami. He has quit his job and everything in Bergen and I gave him some pointers on how to use LinkedIn, and he started to search for recruiters in Miami. He’s leaving now on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December and already he has four or five interviews down there completely created through contact via LinkedIn”*

(Interview 9)

”En kompis som bor i Bergen, som flytter nå til Miami. Han har sagt opp jobb og alt i Bergen, og jeg ga han en del pekepinner på hvordan han skulle bruke LinkedIn, og begynte da å søke etter rekrutterere i Miami. Skal reise ned nå 21. Desember og har allerede 4-5 intervjuer der nede i sin helhet skapt av kontakt via LinkedIn”

Extract 49:

*“If you want to reach people in Europe, and furthermore USA, you don’t start in the phonebook. Then you have your work cut out for you. If you instead can get in through people you know who know someone (...) the LinkedIn channel is superior to all other ways of getting through”* (Interview 4)

”Visst du på en måte skal ha tak i folk i Europa, enda mer i USA, begynner du ikke i telefonkatalogen. Da har du en jobb foran deg altså. Visst du da kan komme inn gjennom at du kjenner en som kjenner en (...) så er LinkedIn-kanalen overtruffen all annen måte å komme seg gjennom på”

Extract 50:

*“I like to have the possibility to think that wow, the world is so small that there’s suddenly only two links between me and Steve Jobs and, by extension, Bill Gates”* (Interview 9)

“Jeg liker muligheten til å tenke meg at jøss, verden er såpass liten at jeg har plutselig bare to ledd imellom meg og Steve Job, og så Bill Gates”

Extract 51:

*“I use LinkedIn in order to get hold of contacts that I am not connected to (...) and I experience that if I approach someone, through LinkedIn, and they have a look before they eventually choose to contact me or respond, and see that I am there and who I am and that this looks serious, I find that it opens doors”* (Interview 4)

”Jeg bruker LinkedIn for å få tak i kontakter som jeg ikke har kontakt i (...) så opplever jeg at henvender jeg meg til noen, fra LinkedIn, hvor de kan gå tilbake før de velger eventuelt å kontakte meg eller respondere, og se at jeg ligger der og hvem jeg er og at det ser seriøst ut, så oppfatter jeg at det åpner dører”

Extract 52:

*“Especially in relation to the people I don’t know that well (...). I have established a relation to them because they’re in my network (...) I have less trouble contacting them, when they’re in my network, than if they hadn’t been there. I feel that I am very free to contact everyone in my network”* (Interview 2)

Særlig på de folka som jeg ikke kjenner så godt da. Jeg har jo oppnådd en relasjon til de ved at de er i nettverket mitt (...). Jeg kvier meg mindre for å ta kontakt med de, når de er i

nettverket mitt, enn om de ikke hadde vært det. Jeg føler at jeg står veldig fritt til å kontakte alle de i nettverket mitt (...)"

Extract 53:

*"An acquaintance of mine was thinking of moving to Australia and wondered if I had any connections in Sydney. So I sent him a mail and said that an acquaintance of mine is actually thinking about moving to Sydney. Can you help him with some local knowledge, schools, jobs and how you search for jobs, in what order do you go about things? And he replied immediately and said that you can just forward all of my contacts and we'll get in touch and I'll be there. And this is a guy that I've never met at all. We only have contact through the net"* (Interview 10)

"En bekjent av meg vurderte å flytte til Australia, og om jeg da hadde nettverkskontakter i Sydney. Også maila jeg ham og sa det var en bekjent av meg som vurderer å flytte til Sydney faktisk, kan du hjelpe ham, altså med litt lokalkunnskap og hva med skoler, og hva med jobb og hvor søker man, og hvilken rekkefølge gjør man hva. Og da kom han tilbake sporensiks og sa at jøss, ja du kan bare gi mine kontakter til alle videre, og så tar vi to direkte kontakt da og jeg stiller opp. Og det er en mann jeg aldri har truffet i det hele tatt. Vi bare hatt kontakt over nettet"

Extract 54:

*"I've felt a tighter connection even though (...) it hasn't necessarily made us tighter than what we would have been without LinkedIn per se, I don't suddenly know that much more about the person as a person. But I feel better connected!"* (Interview 1)

Original language (English)

## **Chapter 5.4.2**

Extract 55:

*"You can establish a network that is relatively efficient and easy to maintain through LinkedIn, than you will be able to do through phone and e-mail and stuff like that"* (Interview 7)

"Du kan etablere et relativt effektivt nettverk som er enkelt å vedlikeholde via LinkedIn, enn det du klarer å gjøre bare via telefon og e-post og sånt"

Extract 56:

*“I wanna keep in touch with friends and colleagues. For me this is a great way of knowing what’s going on in their lives without having to pry or ask a lot of personal questions, or send out 155 individual e-mails. And when I want them to know something about me all I have to do is update my profile”* (Interview 1)

Original language (English)

Extract 57:

*“I thought I’d never hear from them again, and like, here they are on LinkedIn and it’s just wonderful!”* (Interview 1)

Original language (English)

Extract 58:

*“You sort of establish contact with former students and so on that you can stay in touch with, and you don’t have to go around having a constant bad conscience”* (Interview 7)

”Du på en måte etablerer kontakt med tidligere studenter og så videre som du da på en måte kan ha kontakt med, uten at du trenger å gå rundt og ha konstant dårlig samvittighet”

### **Chapter 5.4.3**

Extract 59:

*“I see that when I refresh contact with people I already know it results in another type of contact as well. Either they send me a mail because they know me privately, and wonder how’s it going, or it’s about something concrete”* (Interview 6)

“Jeg ser jo at når jeg frisker opp kontakten med folk jeg kjenner fra før så resulterer det i en annen type kontakt også. Enten at de sender en mail til meg fordi at de kjenner meg privat, og lurer på hvordan det går, eller så det noe konkret”

Extract 60:

*“You re-establish a connection that used to be there, and as a student the connection might not have been on a personal level, but it could become so”* (Interview 7)

“Man gjenetablerer en kontakt som har vært der og som student kanskje ikke har vært veldig på det personlige plan, men det kan bli til at det blir det”

Extract 61:

*“There are some of the other semi-active people that I’ve met that way and that I’ve gotten to know better as well, but that’s because of the combination of both networking online, and participating in networking forums and meeting each other. It takes a lot to keep a good contact over the net otherwise”* (Interview 10)

”Har forstådd litt av de andre litt sånn semiaktive medlemmene der. Det er folk som jeg har truffet den veien, og som jeg etter hvert har blitt bedre kjent med og. Men det skyldes den kombinasjonen av både nettverking på nettet, altså deltaking i diskusjonsforum, og så treffes man igjen. Så det er kombinasjonen som gjør noe til slutt. Det skal veldig mye til å holde en god kontakt over nettet ellers”