

Historical and Psychological Retrospective of the Genesis of “Social Connection” Concept and its Research Prospect

Історико-психологічна ретроспектива ґенези концепту «соціальний зв'язок» та перспектива його дослідження

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ABSTRACT

The article aims to highlight the theoretical analysis of the “social connection” concept and its transformation throughout the 20th-century historical retrospective.

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Research methods. To achieve the study's objectives, a historical-psychological analysis was employed to identify, compare, and synthesize the relevant research material.

Research results. The study offers a theoretical analysis of the evolution of "social connection" at the intersection of sociological, socio-psychological, and general psychological discourses. The genesis of the term is traced from classical structural sociological concepts, where connection serves as an objective, static basis for solidarity, to functionalist and interactionist approaches that emphasize rational social action and procedural forms of sociation. Special attention is paid to non-classical interpretations, where social connection transforms from an "external given" into a subjective individual resource. Through the lens of contemporary theories, social connection is conceptualized as social capital – a resource for accumulation and investment that serves as the foundation of public trust. It is noted that in the context of Ukrainian scholarly thought, social connection is conceptualized primarily within a non-classical paradigm: as a tool of resilience and a key professional competence for specialists in territorial communities. Approaches to the term's parameterization are examined, revealing challenges in achieving its unambiguous understanding. In particular, the study reveals the functional differentiation between strong and weak ties as community resilience resources, as well as the distinction between social connections and contacts as interaction parameters.

Conclusions. The results of the analysis demonstrate the necessity of establishing "socio-psychological connection" as an independent object of psychological research. A definition of the connection is proposed as a form of organization of the whole that determines the mode of existence of its parts. The study substantiates that inclusion in such a connection radically transforms the architecture of the individual psyche, creating a space for supra-individual mental phenomena that are irreducible to individual ones.

Key words: carrier of the psychic, supra-individual mental phenomena, social connection, sociation, social capital, structural functionalism, socio-psychological resource.

Introduction

Today, in the discourse of social issues, the approach to defining social connection through the concept of relationships is deeply entrenched, where it is understood as a system of relationships between people. At the same time, interpretations of

social connection based on the interaction of individuals (subjects, agents, actors) are no less prevalent. These focus on the mode of social exchange, highlighting the mutual dependence or compatibility of people and groups. Social connection can also be viewed as a system of factors – such as relationships, interactions, and contacts – that unify individuals, groups, and society. These factors regulate collective activities and the formation of social institutions, ultimately defining an individual's position within them. It is also worth noting the interpretation of social connection through the lens of social influence, which serves as its dynamic dimension. While the connection itself represents a structure, influence acts as the kinetic energy that enables this structure to function (Durkheim, 2018; Homans, 1958; Parsons, 1970; Prislin, 2025; Turner et al., 2011; Соціологія, 2014).

Thus, a distinct trend can be observed within the discourse on social issues: a tendency toward the mutual definition of core analytical categories, where basic social phenomena are interpreted through one another. At the same time, this trend neither culminates in an attempt to synthesize these analytical tools into a more fundamental category, nor does it foster a clear consensus on the semantic substance of the concepts involved – particularly that of social connection.

On the other hand, another feature can be identified: the specification of the meaning of general scientific concepts as they are integrated into the disciplinary discourses of social studies (such as social and general psychology or sociology) as a methodological research tool. As can be observed, this procedure introduces concepts such as «influence», «interaction», «relationship», «connection», «cause», «system», and «whole and part» into the disciplinary fields of these sciences. Typically, this process involves appending the predicate «social», «socio-psychological», or «psychological» to these general categories, followed by a further clarification of their conceptual substance in light of such modification.

Methods and methodology

As can be observed, the issues described above tend toward a methodological focus of analysis. At the same time, within the scope of historical-psychological inquiry, scientific interest typically lies in revealing the transformation of perceptions regarding the subject of study. In this context, the traditional methodological approach for analyzing such changes involves both the direct disclosure of the grounds for declared shifts in subject interest (research programs, paradigms in general) and the tracing of undeclared changes in the interpretation of a given concept's meaning. After all, a shift in a term's conceptual substance without a change in the term itself reflects, in a specific way, the evolution of scientific understanding within a particular field of inquiry.

Thus, the application of historical-psychological reconstruction to the genesis and transformation of the concept of "social connection" should facilitate the clarification of its conceptual substance. This, in turn, will contribute to identifying the prospects for its investigation within the framework of contemporary psychological and socio-psychological discourse.

The purpose of this article is to present the results of a theoretical analysis of the conceptual substance of the term "social connection" within the historical retrospect of its transformations throughout the 20th century.

Results and discussion

The formation of the concept of "social connection" within the discourse of sociality is traditionally associated with the scientific work of É. Durkheim (Berkman et al., 2000; Holt-Lunstad, 2021; Turner et al., 2011). It is noted that through his study of the nature of solidarity, this classic of sociological thought distinguished between two types: mechanical solidarity, inherent in traditional societies and based on the homogeneity of their members, and organic solidarity, characteristic of complex social systems. In the latter case, integration is ensured

not by the similarity of individuals but by their functional interdependence through the division of labor. Thus, while mechanical solidarity relies on direct interaction, organic solidarity is sustained by systemic ties that serve as the objective foundation for social cohesion (Durkheim, 2018).

Within the framework of M. Weber's interpretive sociology (Weber, 1998), the term "social connection" can be interpreted through social action, which is viewed as an individual activity endowed with subjective meaning and oriented toward the behavior of others. Weber distinguishes four types of such action (instrumentally rational, value-rational, affective, and traditional), which serve as the fundamental basis for the emergence and maintenance of diverse social connections.

At the same time, in the works of G. Simmel, social connection is treated as the basis of "formal sociology". As is well known, this approach prioritizes "pure forms of sociation" which, despite varying content, possess a typical structure and emerge through the process of social interaction (Turner et al., 2011).

According to the postulates of T. Parsons' structural functionalism, social connections are the key instrument for ensuring the stability and integrity of the social system. They are based on a unified system of norms and values, which allows for the integration of individual elements – from small groups to large institutions – into a single whole. This stability is maintained through the processes of socialization and mechanisms of social control (Parsons, 1970; Сагалаков, 2019).

Thus, the evolution of the understanding of social connection in sociological thought is based on a synthesis of structural and functional approaches. This ultimately allows for social connection to be viewed not only as a stable entity that grounds social phenomena (as per Durkheim or Parsons) but also as a functional construct that ensures the continuous interaction and reproduction of social systems (as per Weber and Simmel).

Undoubtedly, such an understanding played a significant role in justifying and objectifying the «social» as a subject of scientific inquiry within the framework of classical rationality. For instance, M. Weber's concept is based on the premise that an action directed toward another necessarily implies reciprocity (Вебер, 1998; Горохова, 2023). This framing requires identifying the factors that determine social action even before it occurs. In other words, reconstructing the language of classical rationality – characteristic of the psychological discourse of that time – this is formulated as the task of identifying those variables that determine the will to act. In this context, the social emerges as an objective reality that determines individual behavior. This approach is reflected in several fundamental theories: collective beliefs in É. Durkheim's concept (Durkheim, 2018; Слюсаревський, 2018); and shared norms and rules in T. Parsons' model of social action (Parsons, 1970; Сагалаков, 2019).

Ultimately, the problematization of action leads to a logical shift in scientific focus: on the one hand, from the strictly social to the psychological, and on the other, from behavioral activity to interpretive activity. This tendency is clearly observed in numerous versions of the interactionist approach (Burns et al., 2025; Васютинський, 2005). Interactionist theories justify the need for an extensive interpretive toolkit which, by accompanying every act, grants the action its social status. This approach is also reflected in fundamental theories – for instance, in social exchange theories, where the calculation of rewards and costs serves as one of the variables determining social connections (Homans, 1958). In turn, this shift from a sociological to a socio-psychological focus brings to the fore the problem of the group mind and supra-individual mental phenomena, which require clarification of their ontological status and interpretation (Lewin, 1939; Слюсаревський, 2018).

In the discourse of the «social» through the lens of socio-psychological analysis, the research focus – and thus the conceptual

interpretation of social connection – shifts from the functional purpose of ties to the psychological determination of their emergence, revealing the internal mechanisms of their formation. In particular, the psychoanalytic approach proposes viewing an individual's social functioning through libidinal dynamics and mechanisms of identification with a leader, where a special place is held by the psychoanalytic interpretation of culture as a space of identifications (Trach, 2021). Developing this line of thought, E. Fromm interprets social connection as a fundamental response to existential challenges: connecting with others becomes a tool for the individual to overcome the existential vacuum. Healthy social connections, embodied in productive labor and love, emerge as an alternative to social alienation (Губа, 2012).

Modern Ukrainian scientific research offers a non-classical vision of «social connection», viewing it through the lens of an individual's lifeworld and resilience. In the works of T. Tytarenko, social connections are interpreted as a dynamic support resource that enables the constructive overcoming of crises and the projection of the future through dialogue with significant others. Within the dialogical paradigm, social connection is embedded in the context of an individual's life path, where dialogue serves as a criterion for successfully navigating crises and constructing one's own destiny (Титаренко, 2010; 2018).

In this context, a conceptual shift occurs: from perceiving connection as an objective structural given to understanding it as a toolkit for self-projection. The individual emerges as the creator of their own sociality, where connections are simultaneously the subject of individual creation and a form of social capital to be accumulated.

Such conceptualization reaches its completion in P. Bourdieu's theory of social capital, where connections are viewed through an economic metaphor. Social capital emerges as a specific form of ownership, while the development and maintenance of a network of relationships is seen as a conscious investment strategy. In this light, accumulated connections represent a capi-

talized personal resource that yields «dividends» in the form of access to opportunities, support, and social recognition (Tzankis, 2013; Бловза, 2016).

At the same time, this interpretation offers significant prospects for further conceptualization and problematization within the context of contemporary social trends. Specifically, in the light of technological innovations, classical ideas of the dialogical paradigm require re-evaluation – particularly regarding dialogues where one of the parties is a digital algorithm. In such a format, the act of communication is perceived as real, and the psyche generalizes the algorithm into the image of a holistic and full-fledged interlocutor (Meng, & Dai, 2021; Boyd, & Markowitz, 2026). This clearly prompts a revision of the issues surrounding social perception – a traditional domain of socio-psychological discourse – exploring how it might be supplemented by the concept of para-social perception. Consequently, this leads to the exploration of para-social connections as a potential resource for personal growth.

Another aspect of development within the non-classical interpretation of «social connection» involves its status as a critical factor in physical and mental health. A long-standing tradition of research demonstrates that the impact of social integration/isolation on mortality rates is as significant as that of risk factors such as smoking or obesity. Furthermore, this is expressed in the discovery of direct correlations between a deficit of social connections and an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, immune dysfunction, and cognitive disorders (Berkman et al., 2000; Hakulinen et al., 2018; Holt-Lunstad, 2021). In the context of mental health, the significant role of «weak ties» is noted. Empirical evidence suggests that even brief, superficial daily contacts with acquaintances significantly increase life satisfaction (Sandstrom, & Dunn, 2014; Spitsyna, 2025).

The integration of a non-classical understanding of «social connection» into the field of classical sociological analysis (notably in the works of J. Coleman and R. Putnam) allows these

connections to be interpreted as the foundation for social trust (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993). In this light, the network of interactions becomes a prerequisite for collective action and a community's capacity for self-organization in the face of contemporary challenges. This necessitates a re-evaluation of the professional profile of the social worker. As Yu. Shvalb (Швалб, 2022) points out, the competency in moderating and creating social connections becomes of paramount importance in the activity of a community specialist. The implementation of this competency, in turn, implies the realization of the social interests of the community as a collective subject of activity. Thus, social connection is transformed from an individual psychological asset into a powerful socio-psychological resource of the community, determining its vitality.

The parameterization of social connection is reflected in the distinction between «strong» and «weak» ties, which, within the non-classical paradigm, becomes a key criterion for the analysis of network structures. Drawing on M. Granovetter's concept of the «strength of weak ties» (Granovetter, 1983), the assertion gains weight that it is precisely weak interactions that are more effective in ensuring social mobility and information exchange beyond the boundaries of stable groups. Within social studies, this prompts a renewed discussion on the contrast between rigid hierarchical institutions and flexible networks with a dynamic temporal structure as distinct modes of social organization.

The concept of «weak ties» continues to hold a significant position in contemporary scientific discourse. The classic arguments of M. Granovetter's theory regarding the «strength of weak ties» are consistently reaffirmed today. However, the role of «strong ties» is being re-evaluated in the context of the digital transformation of society. While in the classical framework weak ties were primarily viewed as «informational bridges» between closed groups, current research highlights a growing debate over the resilience of strong ties. Crucially, research data confirms the predictive power of weak ties in labor mobility:

monitoring processes on LinkedIn proves that they provide access to non-trivial information that is difficult to obtain within homogeneous «strong» groups (Rajkumar et al., 2022).

However, contemporary research into online environments introduces significant adjustments to this model, pointing to a renaissance of strong ties. In a digital reality saturated with information noise and para-social acts, it is precisely strong ties (close friends, family) that become the primary source of emotional support and the filtration of verified data (Gee et al., 2017). In conditions of crisis or high uncertainty, users tend to trust «their own» small communities and messengers more than an extensive network of random contacts, which re-actualizes the concept of the «strength of strong ties» (Arnaboldi et al., 2013).

At the same time, para-social interaction with algorithms intensely mimics the structure of strong ties, creating a specific ecosystem of «digital sociality.» In this environment, digital communication tools reinforce and «cement» the core of such strong ties, restoring their role as a primary resource for social resilience. This is further illustrated by the algorithmization of personalized content, which creates the effect of «filter bubbles» and leads to a specific preservation of social perceptions (Berman, & Katona, 2020). In this context, we observe a paradoxical return to the principles of organic solidarity, where the basis of unity is no longer the commonality of labor conditions, but rather the homogeneity of perceptions and preferences that form new types of closed digital communities. Consequently, this serves as a distinctive foundation for contemporary digital conservatism.

Despite its deep rooting in empirical research practices, the problem of the parameterization of social connection remains acute today. To some extent, it finds its solution in multidimensional models that distinguish between the structure, function, and subjective quality of interaction. According to the four-dimensional concept of social connection, the research focus

should encompass not only objective characteristics of social interactions and specific acts of support but also processes of interpersonal synchrony and an individual's sense of belonging (Baek et al., 2025). Such an approach allows for identifying social connection as a complex dynamic system, yet it leaves room for debate regarding the transition from quantitative definitions to a qualitative grasp of the phenomenon's essence. Specifically, the contrast between «strong» and «weak» ties is reflected in the approach to parameterizing this very distinction, albeit in different terms. In the socio-psychological and psychological focus of analysis, this difference is illustrated by the distinction between the terms «social connection» and «social contact». Based on a quantitative criterion, an attempt is made to separate short-term interaction as a «contact» from time-extended, recurring interaction as a «connection».

However, the traditional differentiation of social connections and contacts based on quantitative criteria (duration and frequency) appears insufficiently productive – at least from a psychological perspective, especially within therapeutic discourse, where the task of establishing contact is a fundamental objective (Шевченко, 2021). In this approach, contact emerges as a parameter of interaction that characterizes a specific state of connection within which interaction occurs, regardless of the specific subject of exchange. In this sense, contact is a dynamic parameter characterizing the quality of presence of the parties in the interaction. Everyday rituals (greetings, handshakes) initiate this state, while farewells conclude it. This necessarily brings to the fore the problem of the adequacy of contact: its correspondence to the form of interaction, the content of exchange, and the type of social connection for which it serves as a functional parameter.

Conclusions

In summary, it must be stated that there is no unified interpretation of the term “social connection” in either the clas-

sical discourse of sociality or its contemporary interpretations. Despite the existence of fundamental approaches that view this phenomenon through the prism of solidarity, social action, interaction, social systems, or structures, a clear dichotomy remains: a contrast between sociological and socio-psychological approaches to analyzing social connection. Specifically, the sociological perspective defines connection through interaction and relationships, expanding its analysis into derivative phenomena such as social trust, cohesion, and health. Meanwhile, the socio-psychological perspective focuses on the specific mechanisms of forming and maintaining connection and its derivative supra-individual mental phenomena, such as trust, empathy, influence, and identity.

However, despite the recognized significance of "social connection", its actual conceptual substance often remains overlooked. Defining connection through other categories – such as interaction, relationships, systems, or resources – tends to legitimize its role in scientific discourse and underscores its importance for the discourse of sociality, rather than clarifying its inner essence and conceptual meaning. A prime example of this is the existing challenge of measuring and parameterizing the phenomenon in question.

In this context, it becomes crucial to specify exactly what kind of connection is being discussed within the scope of socio-psychological analysis. This is where the need for concretization arises: here, «social connection» emerges specifically as a connection between carriers of the psychic. This shifts the analytical focus toward two key vectors. First, toward justifying the conditions and possibilities for establishing such a connection between carriers of the psychic. Second, toward investigating the intrapsychic consequences: how the acquired connection modifies the individual's psychic structure and what new forms of its organization emerge as a result of this process.

The grounds for such an inquiry can be derived from the working definition of connection as a form of the whole. Within

this definition, the characteristic of connectedness describes a fundamental mode of the whole's existence as a set of parts – that is, as a unified system where connection acts as its integral component. In this sense, connection emerges as a mode of organizing the whole, or its form. Consequently, «social connection» is not an external addition to the individual, but the immediate form of organization of their psychic experience. Thus, a carrier of the psyche who is in connection with another carrier and one who lacks such a connection represent fundamentally different modes of existence for the psychic system as a whole – different forms of psychic organization (Koval, 2026). This constitutes the basis for the emergence and functioning of various mental phenomena, as well as for the irreducibility of supra-individual mental phenomena to those limited by an individual mode of psychic organization – namely, those existing outside of a connection with another carrier of the psychic.

From this, it is clear that in such an interpretation, the term «social connection» – understood as the link between an individual carrier of the psychic and another carrier or carriers – is more appropriately defined as a «socio-psychological connection.» In turn, socio-psychological connection should play a significant role in describing and, to some extent, explaining the diversity of those phenomena of reality to which the predicate of the psychic is typically applied. In this regard, it is necessary to clarify the possibility of treating connection in general, and socio-psychological connection in particular, as an independent object of psychological research and analysis. Accordingly, an urgent task for scientific inquiry becomes the identification of specific subject interests arising in the study of connection: from the mechanisms of its initiation to the investigation of its role as a determinant of existing and/or possible forms of psychic organization. The implementation of these directions represents the prospect for further advancement in the investigation of the issues raised.

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Коваль Геннадій. Історико-психологічна ретроспектива генези концепту «соціальний зв'язок» та перспектива його дослідження.

Метою статті є висвітлення результатів теоретичного аналізу змісту поняття «соціальний зв'язок» в історичній ретроспективі його змін упродовж 20-го століття.

Методи дослідження. Для розв'язання поставлених у роботі завдань використовувався метод історико-психологічного аналізу для виокремлення, порівняння та узагальнення матеріалу дослідження.

Результати дослідження. У статті представлено результати теоретичного аналізу генези змісту поняття «соціальний зв'язок», розглянутого у перетині соціологічного, соціально-психологічного та загальнопсихологічного дискурсів. Було простежено генезу терміна: від класичних структурних соціологічних концепцій, де зв'язок виступає об'єктивною статичною основою солідарності, до функціональних й інтеракційних підходів, які акцентують на раціональній соціальній дії та процесуальних формах соціації. Особливу увагу приділено неklasичним інтерпретаціям, у межах яких соціальний зв'язок трансформується із

«зовнішньої даності» на суб'єктивний ресурс особистості. Крізь призму поширених на сьогодні теорій розкрито зміст зв'язку як соціального капіталу, що підлягає накопиченню, інвестуванню та є фундаментом суспільної довіри. Зауважено, що у контексті вітчизняних розвідок соціальний зв'язок концептуалізується насамперед у межах неklasичної парадигми: як інструмент життєстійкості та ключова професійна компетенція фахівця територіальної громади. Розглянуто підходи до параметризації терміна, що виявляє труднощі у досягненні його однозначного розуміння. Зокрема, дослідження розкриває функціональну диференціацію між сильними та слабкими зв'язками як ресурсами стійкості спільноти, а також різницю між соціальними зв'язками та контактами як параметрами взаємодії.

Висновки. Результати аналізу демонструють необхідність розгляду «соціально-психологічного зв'язку» як самостійного об'єкта психологічного дослідження. Запропоновано визначення зв'язку як форми організації цілого, що визначає спосіб існування його частин. У дослідженні обґрунтовано, що включення в такий зв'язок радикально трансформує архітектуру індивідуальної психіки, створюючи простір для надіндивідуальних психічних явищ, які не зводяться до індивідуальних.

Ключові слова: носій психічного, надіндивідуальні психічні явища, соціальний зв'язок, соціація, соціальний капітал, структурний функціоналізм, соціально-психологічний ресурс.

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