A Social Network refers to a group of individuals who voluntarily interact on the basis of a common interest the share. It may be an idea or a problem or a product or anything else. A social network is critical for communities to maintain their rituals and traditions, moral responsibilities of their individuals. In our country, the traditions and moral responsibilities have passed on from generations to generations because of these social networks only.

Social networks are very important to study various trends that are becoming popular among the people. These are useful to study relationships between individuals, groups, organizations or entire societies. Basically, social network is a theoretical concept that helps us to understand the social structure.

A social network is represented in the form of a network graph, in which the people are represented as vertices and the interactions among them are represented as edges. An edge is placed between two vertices, if the corresponding persons interact with each other.

Now-a-days, the meaning of social networks has changed slightly. It generally refers to the use of social media networking sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter etc.

Types of social networks

Social networks can be classified into two types based on the specificity of the audience. They are directed and undirected.

Directed Social Networks:

In these social networks, the communication between various players is directed. In other words there is a central figure or authority which passes on their messages to other people, mostly like an order or a propaganda. One can clearly identify a flow of communication among the entities in this network. For e.g., in a business organization, you can see that the bosses are the ones sending out orders to their subordinates and not the opposite way.

Undirected Social Networks:

In these social networks, all the players involved are communicating with each other and there is no top-bottom approach for the communication. A certain information is spread through the network by various players and it is difficult understand the origin of that information. An example of this is the fake news that is spread among people in WhatsApp. Nobody verifies it is true or not but people keep forwarding to each other and nobody know the origin of that news.

Current social networks

The evolution of computer science coupled with the concept of social networks has given rise to Social Media. In 1971, two computers communicated with each other through an email for the first time. But now, a person can communicate with millions of people at a time. They can share their ideas easily through various social media platforms. So, we can say that computer networks combined with social networking software provide a new medium for social interaction.

Importance of Social Networks in comprehending Social Development

Social development is about improving the well-being of every individual in society so they can reach their full potential. The success of society is linked to the well-being of each and every citizen. It requires the removal of barriers so that all citizens can journey toward their dreams with confidence and dignity. It is about refusing to accept that people who live in poverty will always be poor. It is about helping people so they can move forward on their path to self-sufficiency.

From the definition of social development, we can say social networks can help us in understanding social development. When there is good social development, it means people are working together for each others’ well-being. Consider the example of Arab Spring in Tunisia. This is a beautiful example of social development. The local governing body of the country had banned newspapers , news channels and other non-digital means of communication. They suppressed the people into following their own ideology. But people wanted to fight against the governing body. So, they used the social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook etc to spread the ideas among themselves to gather courage to fight the supressors and to spread their plight among international media. Finally, it helped their cause and they were liberated from their suppression.

I wonder, if these social networks were available during India’s fight for Independence may be we would have been celebrating our 95th Independence day instead of 75th. Our country was so large that the British used divide and rule policy to rule us for centuries. It we were able to sow the seeds of independence in the minds of people through these social networks, we could have fought the British in more united manner, than fighting them independently across various regions.

Another application of social networks is the use of LinkedIn. LinkedIn is also a social media platform that is used for professional purposes like job searching or showing job vacancies etc. It is a nice application of social networks and a good indicator of social development also because people are helping each other in finding jobs, which is nothing but caring about other people’s well-being.

In the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, the use of social networks has increased and is important more than ever because people have to refrain from in-person contact for the fear of contacting the disease. So, the use of LinkedIn has increased even more. People are losing jobs and searching for new ones through LinkedIn. Also, election propaganda is being spread through social network sites like Twitter. We are communicating with our families through Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram. In my opinion, this is a clear indicator of social development only. Becuase people are ready to communicate and help each other through any means possible despite the unfortunate circumstances.

References:

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Social networks and the analysis of them is an inherently [interdisciplinary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interdisciplinarity) academic field which emerged from [social psychology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_psychology), [sociology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociology), [statistics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statistics), and [graph theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graph_theory). [Georg Simmel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georg_Simmel) authored early structural theories in sociology emphasizing the dynamics of triads and "web of group affiliations".[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network#cite_note-2) [Jacob Moreno](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob_Moreno) is credited with developing the first [sociograms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociogram" \o "Sociogram) in the 1930s to study interpersonal relationships. These approaches were mathematically formalized in the 1950s and theories and methods of social networks became pervasive in the [social and behavioral sciences](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_science) by the 1980s.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network#cite_note-WF94CH1-1)[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network#cite_note-Freeman_History-3) [Social network analysis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network_analysis) is now one of the major paradigms in contemporary sociology, and is also employed in a number of other social and formal sciences. Together with other [complex networks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Complex_network), it forms part of the nascent field of [network science](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Network_science).[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network#cite_note-4)[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network#cite_note-EK-5)

The social network is a [theoretical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_theory) [construct](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Construct_(philosophy_of_science)) useful in the [social sciences](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_sciences) to study relationships between individuals, [groups](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_groups), [organizations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Formal_organizations), or even entire [societies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Society) ([social units](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_unit), see [differentiation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Differentiation_(sociology))). The term is used to describe a [social structure](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_structure) determined by such [interactions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_interactions). The ties through which any given social unit connects represent the convergence of the various social contacts of that unit. This theoretical approach is, necessarily, relational. An [axiom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Axiom) of the social network approach to understanding [social interaction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_interaction) is that social phenomena should be primarily conceived and investigated through the properties of relations between and within units, instead of the properties of these units themselves. Thus, one common criticism of social network theory is that [individual agency](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agency_(sociology)) is often ignored[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network#cite_note-jscott-6) although this may not be the case in practice (see [agent-based modeling](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agent-based_model)). Precisely because many different types of relations, singular or in combination, form these network configurations, [network analytics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Network_science) are useful to a broad range of research enterprises. In social science, these fields of study include, but are not limited to [anthropology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthropology), [biology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biology), [communication studies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communication_studies), [economics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economics), [geography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography), [information science](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_science), [organizational studies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organizational_studies), [social psychology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_psychology), [sociology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociology), and [sociolinguistics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociolinguistics).