

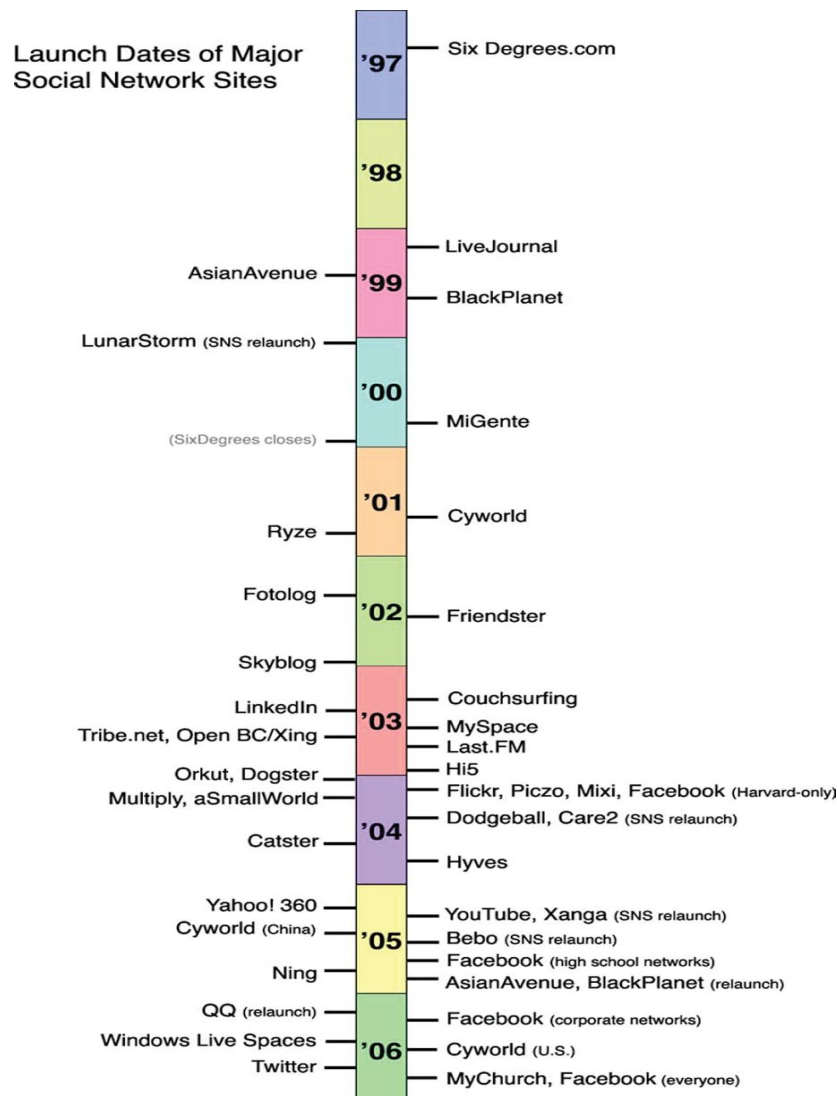
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Internet Technologies: Social Networking
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In this day and age, it's difficult to come by someone under the age of 65 who isn't a member of at least one Social Networking Site or SNS. It's nearly impossible to even remember a time before heavily curated social networking profiles and "likes." Many people, entire generations, in fact, (generation X and up) were born into or grew up in the age of social media. While millions of others followed the lead of family members and friends and joined to stay connected. Today, there are hundreds of different social networks. Meaning there is truly something for everyone. While popular SNSs like Instagram currently has over one hundred million users, Facebook boasts one billion active users from across the globe. Jose van Dijck author of *The Culture of Connectivity: a critical history of Social Media* writes, "in December 2011, 1.2 billion users worldwide - 82% of the world's internet population over age 15 logged onto a social media site, up from 6% in 2007. Within less than a decade, a new infrastructure for online sociality and creativity has emerged, penetrating every fiber of culture today." These SNSs are constantly progressing and evolving. Changing to fit the needs, preferences and trends of its users. The reach, power and potential of Social Networking sites are limitless, to say the least.

In '*Users of the World, unite. The challenges and opportunities of Social Media*' by Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, Social Networking is defined as "a group of internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 and user generated content." In other words, social networks are platforms that are constantly evolving and being modified by users in a collaboration with all of its necessary functions combined with all of the ways people can utilize social media. However, in *Social Network Sites: Definition, History & Scholarships* by Danah M. Boyd & Nicole B. Ellison defines Social Networks as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site." The majority of Social Network users joined one of the many SNSs to stay in touch and connected to people that are already a part of their network but also get the opportunity to connect with mutual friends and provides the chance to connect with people you probably wouldn't connect with otherwise. However, there are also a large population of SNS users who join a platform to connect with likeminded, interest-sharing communities of people. Whether it be a community of people who share your sexual orientation, religion or race, or an interest based community. For example, the ever growing body positivity, fitness, self-love communities on social media. Often, these communities provide more authentic connections and support than the networks you are a member of in real life.

In 1997, the first social network, sixdegrees.com launched. The basis around it and the inspiration for its name derived from the separation theory that states that every person in the

world could potentially be connected to another person by just six degrees of separation. This Social Networking site is considered to be a “forefather of Social Media.” This site allowed you to create a profile, add friends and message each other. At its peak, it had over a million users. However, SixDegrees failed at becoming a business that was sustainable and designed to last, leading to its imminent close in 2000. While SixDegrees is considered to be the first Social Networking Site, in the Kaplan and Haenlein article they state that there are some discrepancies over when social networking truly began. Almost 20 years before the launch of SixDegrees, Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis at Duke University had created the Usenet, a worldwide discussion system that allowed internet users to post public messages. While other platforms had open forums and messaging capabilities, SixDegrees was the first to combine a personal profile, messaging and making connections. Throughout the years many Social Networking Sites came and went. Some of the most famous being Friendster, MySpace and Flickr. Attached is a chart taken from the Boyd and Ellison Article giving a visual of the timeline of the some of the earliest social networking sites.



The evolution of Social Networking Sites is quite impressive. Like with most things, to be a successful and sustaining Social Networking site you need to be constantly evolving and adding new features in order to stay relevant. The very first Social Networking sites offered limited features. Today, Social Networking Sites encapsulate photography, videography, friends/followers, music, and personalized pages. For example, when Snapchat took off and gained success due to the many fun and different filters and story capabilities that only they offered. Instagram was immediately intimidated. So what does Instagram do? They go to the drawing boards and soon add their own Insta-story feature complete with filters, rivaling those of Snapchat. In short, you need to listen to your users, watch the trends and see exactly what makes a competing platform a threat...and then add that feature to yours.

When Facebook stepped out on the scene, MySpace slowly but surely became obsolete. Facebook made it almost effortless to connect with your peers and friends from other schools, while boasting a clean and sleek format. Within a short time you could create business profiles and personal profiles that weren't affiliated with a high school or college. From its creation you could friend people, upload photos and videos, message friends and post on friends walls and "like" content. In order to stay relevant and fresh to the users who have been there from its creation, naturally, they had to keep updating and adding features. Today, you can easily post videos and photos, create albums, "poke" friends. Today you can "like" "dislike" "love" and even "laugh" at a post in one quick click. Furthermore they offer a feature similar to snapchat where you can take photos with filters right off the app. Facebook is so easy to use its almost intuitive, making it a hit amongst baby boomers.

Instagram launched in 2011 and wasn't necessarily an instant hit. Many people used it as an app to add cool filters to their photos, not realizing that it offered much more than that. Within months Instagram took off and more and more people began creating profiles and gaining followers. At the time of its launch, Instagram allowed you to upload and edit photos with one of their several filters. You could follow friends and celebrities and gain followers. They made it so easy to link the app to your phone contacts and facebook pages, making it quick and trouble free to connect with friends and people already within your network. Right off the bat, Instagram utilized hashtags to market your photos and broaden the reach of your posts. By following trending hashtags and putting them in your posts you could potentially gain dozens of followers who were searching that hashtag. Over time, as the amount of Instagram users grew, they started making changes and advancements. They added several more filters by popular demand, a page that contains all of your tagged photos, a story feature, similar to snapchat, that only stays on

your page for 24hrs, complete with cat ear filters and cartoonish ones. In competition with Pinterest, they added a feature that allows you to save photos and neatly put them into albums for easy access. Instagram is truly the most popular and used app by millennials and it keeps getting better everyday.

Snapchat followed Instagram and launched in Fall of 2012. This app allowed you to send fleeting photos to friends lasting from 1 to 10 seconds and notified you if someone screenshotted your image. You could also post stories that lasted up to 24hrs. Like all successful apps, Snapchat has had to make updates and add features to stay fresh and entertaining. Recently, snapchat had an update so advanced and extreme people are complaining about how difficult the app is to navigate now. This is something you would want to avoid when evolving your app. While the younger generations typically pick up the updates with ease, when the layout and format is completely changed it makes it difficult for everyone. Snapchat offers a news feature that links you to current events and news websites, it has many filters and “geotags” that allow you to put your location on the photo, in an almost postcard fashion. Snapchat currently has 150 million active users.

Sources

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