

# Social Networks (methods, techniques, tools)

Sistemas de Informação

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# Chapter 1

## Social Networks

### 1.1 Introduction

Social networks sites allow users to register, create profiles and fill them with their personal information. Users can search for their friends and add them to their list. After being added, those users will have access to each other's profile and will be able to see their updates. Some websites like Facebook let you post photographs, append interests to your profile and even share everyday activities. Most part of the recent social networks revolve around the same concept. For example, Facebook, Twitter and others.

The real essence of a social network is connecting people. Some websites try to achieve that by providing interesting content to diverse

audiences, others just focus on drawing people by common language or nationality. All of them use different types of technology and algorithms, but they are all aiming to strive the same goal: creating an online community that allow users to share information with others.

## 1.2 History

The first appearance of a recognizable social network on the internet was of a site called SixDegrees.com, it was launched back in 1997 and granted users the power to create profiles, list their friends and surf that list. Other similar sites existed like AIM, ICQ, but they did not give access to profiles. By 2001 a multitude of other sites started popping up; offering more personal and professional profiles like MiGente.com. Others offered dating profiles that could be seen and receive messages from anyone without needing an approval like Match.com.

Friendster, another social network site, was launched in 2002. It offered a list of friends-of-friends, a new concept that was not in any other social network. It consisted of a list of friends of your friends. It had a goal of people being allowed to meet other people having an existin connection with them (a mutual friend), it helped meet people without them being total strangers like it happened in other sites. In 2004, teenagers, college students and the music industry

members started joining MySpace. That website allowed users to connect with their favourite bands and friends. The big change was that MySpace policy allowed minors to create accounts, different from other websites at the time.

In 2005, social network sites started getting more and more attention. MySpace gained popularity in the U.S. and abroad. Friendster became a hit in the Pacific Islands, while Orkut started gathering users in Brazil. In China QQ (an instant messaging service) became the largest social network worldwide when it added profiles and made friends visible. Unlike any other social network site before, Facebook surged in 2006 and made all users unable to make their full profile public to others. They also let outside developers build Applications, which allowed them to personalize their profile and create new tasks. For instance, comparing film preferences. It introduced a new organizational framework for online communities.

There is no trustworthy data that informs how many people are using social network sites nowadays. But it is known that the community is growing year after year, as more people are getting access to the internet and eventually access to those sites. Knowing that SNSs (social network sites) have a huge incoming daily traffic, corporations are investing their money, purchasing, promoting and advertising on them. And developers are making sure the site works and that they

also support different devices, such as tablets and mobile phones. In early 2009, Facebook became the most popular social network on the internet. And what started as just a college social network site, eventually became available to anyone.

### 1.3 Definition

The social network study is still in its early stages. There is not a way of saying who defined it since its a term that is still being researched. Boyd and Ellison define it as “(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.” (Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 13(1), 2007).

What they want to say is that a social network is any system with boundaries that allow users to communicate or connect with others. Social Networks are systems that would be useless without humans. They are not build to help them in any specific and elaborated task. A social network would not be anything without its users. It is different from other applications that could still be functional after just receiving some commands.

## 1.4 Article 1

The first article analysed was, 'Social Network Sites: Definition, History and Scholarship' by Dana M. Boyd and Nicole B. Ellison, it was published on the journal of Computer-Mediated Communication in 2007. In this article, the authors try to describe some features of Social Network Sites. They also introduce the history of social network sites and discuss what the future holds for this type of informational system.

First they present a brief history of the social network sites and explain how all of them became popular and which special audience they attracted. They mention that the SNS research has been focusing on impression management, friendship performance, network structure, online and offline connections and privacy issues. They comment about the authenticity of users, some authors believe that not a single profile will ever be "real". As for network and data structure they report that social network sites provide rich sources of naturalistic behavioral data. Which means that there is a lot of human patterns to be analysed in social networks. They state offline relationships can be solidified and online to offline connections can be created. Enabling complete strangers to be able to meet. Security issues are also brought into discussion, affirming that there are studies that show the risk of putting so much personal information

online. Teenagers can be an easy target for online threats, but they seem optimistic and inform that some survey results show that teens are well aware of the risks in online interaction.

The end of the article has an overview of what was presented and they seem optimistic about contributing to an on-going discussion about SNSs, but alert that social networks are always changing therefore there needs to be a more large-scale research, both quantitative and qualitative.

## 1.5 Article 2

The second article analysed was, 'Social network(ing) sites.revisiting the story so far: A response to danah boyd and Nicole Ellison' by David Beer, it was published on the journal of Computer-Mediated Communication in 2008. In this article, Beer starts the discussion about social networks, questioning the authors of the previous article's definitions.

Beer argues that the definition of a Social Network is too broad and it should not be used to refer to so many sites. He believes that are rapid cultural shifts and that there is a need to classify social network sites due to their dynamic and disjointed nature. He rejects the idea of not using the term "networking" and say that it would benefit



SNSs to differentiate themselves from other sites. He believes there should be a more precise analysis of how friendship works and their relation to offline connections. He suggests that the authors do not fall into 'sociological amnesia' and focus on issues like how capitalism affects SNSs.

The author's closing arguments mention that the only real way of researching and understanding Social Networks are through knowing the capitalism involved, the code, how the organisations really work. He also points out that all of the data kept by the SNSs are significant to studying how people live and their patterns of consumption. He suggests that we take a more particular, distinctive approach to analysing those systems.

## 1.6 Conclusion

As was previously stated, social network sites continue to grow every year. But those sites have to face some issues. For instance, the huge amounts of traffic data that they need to store. SNSs like Facebook require a large physical database that costs a lot of money every year. All the hardware has to be kept in a place with coolers and constant maintenance. Another problem is speed. The sites have to be fast while establishing a connection and when they retrieve requested information, if they don't follow this criteria it's most likely the user

will be discouraged to use their site. Therefore, they need a good algorithm and good hardware. And to keep the audience entertained they have to launch new and interesting features periodically. And most importantly, grant that every user information is secure.

At last, those sites are very useful for people who wish to connect with others. Over the years more sites and mobile applications keep appearing, most of them with different features for different types of audience. They allow users to be closer to someone even if they are far away. Some people see them as a way of people being apart from each other and only turning us into a lonely society. Others believe they are a great way of communication and stand by them. Either way, there is no denying that social networks are a practical way of communicating and connecting with people.

# Bibliography

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