Social Networks

The inclusion of social networks and network analysis can deepen our understanding of the world around us through information such as personal details, actions, and associations. Many people who use social media put much of their personal information and experiences on these websites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and so on. The information provided is intended to be observable to a select few but may become visible to everyone and can become a valuable source of information for employers, friends, and also enemies. Depending upon the extent of details someone includes on social media, others can know what a person is doing, where a person is doing it, and also when a person is going to do it.

Hypothetically, suppose that I am an authority in a certain campus organization. As an authority figure, I am expected to discourage people from making harmful or careless decisions. I tell my group not to drink or do drugs, but that night a member of my group sees that I post a picture of me intoxicated at a party with questionable characters. That person then tells the head of this organization and I am in turn reprimanded. Now I can not be trusted or taken seriously when I am instructing my group. I am discovered and reprimanded due to the social networking I have involved myself in.

The same idea can be applied to applying for a job. Suppose an individual has a great interview. The employers gets the impression of a respectable, trustworthy, and punctual worker. Per company policy, the firm does a routine background check on Facebook and other popular social media and discover the applicants habitually posted foul language, multitudes of party pics, and or overall lack of discretion with inappropriate pursuits. Due to this new found information, the promising addition suddenly just isn’t what the business is looking for.

A specific area in which network analysis could be helpful is in the use of our intelligence drone program. Using network analysis, a social network can be inspected for who is the most common link for the actions of that network. In the case of terrorism, the CIA can use these findings to surgically remove the most influential person of said network using drone technology. In the case of al-Awlaki, the CIA looked at the social network of al Qaeda and discovered that not only was al-Awlaki the primary recruiter for the organization, but also that the majority of the high-ranking officials in al Qaeda had direct ties to him. This verified their suspicions that al-Awlaki was likely responsible for many of the terrorist attacks executed by al Qaeda. Analysis of a human network directly led to the identification of the most efficient target for the combat drone.

This the Twenty-first Century. Social networking has evolved from fraternity handshakes and cocktail parties. Connections can now get someone in the door, escorted out of the building, or an explosive end to just an ordinary day.