Social Networks – The Change of Communication Paradigm

The reason most people join social networks is because their friends are already there, all that other stuff just enhances their experience once they're in. Users are what make social networks go. (1)

Virtual community, e-community or online community is a group of people that primarily interact via communication media such as letters, telephone, email or Usenet rather than face to face. If the mechanism is a computer network, it is called an online community. Virtual and online communities have also become a supplemental form of communication between people who know each other primarily in real life. Many means are used in social software separately or in combination, including text-based chat rooms and forums that use voice, video text or avatars. Significant socio-technical change may have resulted from the proliferation of such Internet-based social networks. (2)

A social network service focuses on the building and verifying of online social networks for communities of people who share interests and activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others, and which necessitates the use of software. (3)

Actor – network theory

Actor-network theory originated in studies of scientific practices, but it has become a generic framework for understanding social phenomena. A scientific laboratory may be viewed as a network of test tubes, diaries, scientific publications, budgets, and researchers, each with their own "competences" and "resistances." (4)

A key concept in actor-network theory is "translation." Translation means that complex sub-networks become "punctualized," and start acting like a unified entity, from the point of view of those actors who interact with the sub-network. At the same time such translated sub-networks become resources. For example, an existing scientific instrument can be used without considering all those processes, knowledge, and other resources that are required to manufacture it. Translation therefore means that complex networks can be taken for granted. But at the same time it means that the point of translation also becomes a locus of power and control. The effects produced by the translated sub-network become resources that can be located and controlled. Through this process of translation the punctualized network can be represented as if it were owned by the actor who manages the translation. (4)

Social network aggregation

Social network aggregation refers to collecting a person's scattered assets such as messages, bookmarks and profiles on multiple social networks. As the use of social network software rises, some people are ending up using multiple social network services. Social network aggregators are software that provides tools or widgets to help collect a person's assets. (5) (6)

Virtual worlds

Such services generally allow people to provide personal information, then search for other individuals using criteria such as age range, gender and location. Most sites allow members to upload photos of them and browse the photos of others. Sites may offer additional services, such as webcasts, online chat, and message boards. (7)

Facebook and MySpace are already the closest things we have to "virtual worlds." Even before Facebook allowed outside applications, it had millions of users who basically lived inside their profile pages. The typical Facebooker spends hours each day sending messages, posting "notes" or blog entries, and uploading photos, along with trolling.

Facebook Platform simply expands this world. Now you can check the local weather, feed and nurture a virtual pet rabbit, and see what music your friends are listening to. With just a few more additions—e-mail, an instant-messaging program, RSS feeds—Facebook obsessives will become total shut-ins. Users wouldn't have to venture out into the Internet; the Internet would come to them. (8)

Advertising on social network

The secret sauce for success of advertising on social network site lies in adhering to general good community building techniques. (9)

- Know your member (consumer)
- Offer them something of value
- Craft the offer in a human voice
- Be transparent about your intentions
- Be respectful of the member (privacy, needs, wishes, intelligence)
- Accept feedback
- Have thick skin
- Continue to innovate (i.e. try, try again)

Potential problems

With addictive, time-consuming nature of the site, gives many people access to a member's life, without giving the time needed to maintain such relationships. Such relationships do not possess the depth of in-person relationships. There is a place for the disturbing and fraudulent behavior of people who can contact a member, unsolicited, as when he was contacted by someone expressing a desire to socialize and date. (10)

The goal of attempting to bring together people who might not otherwise associate with one another in real life may seem honorable, inherently violates a social contract only present when people interact face-to-face, rendering the website nothing more than a passing fad. (11)

One of the major problems behind the flood of invites is that many of the services seem to mine users' contacts lists for names to send invites, either for joining a new service or for, say, using a Facebook application. Similarly, some systems force users to opt-out of adding their contacts to new invite lists rather than opt-in. (12)

Some users have discovered that it is nearly impossible to remove them entirely from Facebook, setting off a fresh round of concern over the popular social network's use of personal data.

While the Web site offers users the option to deactivate their accounts, Facebook servers keep copies of the information in those accounts indefinitely. Indeed, many users who have contacted Facebook to request that their accounts be deleted have not succeeded in erasing their records from the network. (13)

Students' main concern should be the persona they project to potential employers. For potential jobs on and off campus, people go on your Facebook and look at your pictures. Interviewers use it to their advantage to find out what kind of person you are." (14)

Social network services are increasingly being used in legal and criminal investigations. Information posted on sites such as MySpace and Facebook, has been used by police and university officials to prosecute users of said sites. In some situations, content posted on MySpace has been used in court to determine an appropriate sentence based on a defendant's attitude. (15)

Sexual predators on large social networking services

On large social networking services, there have been growing concerns about users giving out too much personal information and the threat of sexual predators. Users of these services need to be aware of data theft or viruses. (3) (16)

Online predators find online dating sites especially attractive, because such sites give them an unending supply of new targets of opportunity for Internet fraud. A recent study, led by Dr. Paige Padgett from the University of Texas Health Science Center, found that there was a false degree of safety assumed by women looking for love on the internet, exposing them to stalking, fraud, and sexual violence. (17)

A Net dating service, also known as online dating or Internet dating, is an example of a dating system and allows individuals, couples and groups to meet online and possibly develop a romantic or sexual relationship. Net dating services provide un-moderated matchmaking through the use of personal computers, the Internet, or even cell phones. (7)

MySpace and Sentinel Tech Holding Corp. created Sentinel Safe, touted as the nation's "first proprietary software dedicated to identifying and removing sexual predators from online communities." (16)

How to maintain safaty

It is possible to choose to keep your details private on MySpace or Facebook. However, some experts believe this should happen automatically - otherwise you're dangerously unprotected. (18)

So how does one go about navigating the Internet's treacherous waters while maintaining safety? Here are some helpful tips to keep your next online connection, romantic or not, in the right hands. (17)

1. Avoid posting your last name, email address, phone number, or where you work.

2. Don't post your whereabouts or anything that might suggest where you are. For example, if you're leaving the office, don't customize your IM message to say "Out on break, back in an hour."

3. Make use of privacy settings on web forums like Friendster, MySpace or Facebook.

Never do anything you wouldn't want to see printed in a newspaper. There's nothing wrong with MySpace, but when you put all these crazy pictures on it's going to come back to bite you. It certainly can be used against you when you least expect it. (14)

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