

Social Evolution Through The Use of **Social Networks**

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Introduction

The word social networking is fairly new to the technology scene the world has become accustomed to. In this technology centered time, one cannot imagine what our daily lives would be like without the inclusion of visiting some popular website centered around social networking. Themes in new technological development are even centered around the ideas of social networking. Although there is popularity in using social networking, the adverse affects are argued to outweigh the short term benefits. Disregarding security concerns however, it is very clear that since the introduction of social networking, the world has changed in a way that has never occurred before.

Background

According to Ellison and Boyd (2007), the first start of social networking began with the website SixDegrees.com in 1997 which had a format to create a user profile and then create friend lists that could be viewed by others. This website was linked to popular instant messaging programs such as AOL Instant Messenger (AIM) in order to include other forms of contact to friends within the social network (p. 214). SixDegrees.com was the very first website that met the modern definition of a social website. There were other websites out there such as classmates.com and other dating websites that had social networking themes, but SixDegrees.com was the first to incorporate much more than a singular need such as dating or classmate finding. SixDegrees.com was shut down in 2000 due to lack of popularity. The main reason for the decline of SixDegrees.com was the fact internet access was still in its infancy in terms of the average number of users who had an internet connection at home (A. Weinreich, personal communication, July 11, 2007). The internet bubble was building however and as internet infrastructure grew so did the new technologies in social networking. In 2003 the first significant

mainstream success was the website Myspace.com (Ellison & Boyd 216). It was built in order to compete with existing social networking websites, incorporating many popular existing social networking features as well as many new aspects. From then on, the new social networking age had officially launched based on the popularity of myspace.com and the expansion of cheaper broadband internet into even more homes globally.

Potential Benefits

Social networking has revolutionized the way the world learns, thinks, socialized, and even make a living. The world found out how easy it was to meet new people and communicate with loved ones while within the comfort of their own houses. As social networks developed, more and more benefits came about. For instance Ecommerce has made its way to social networking. In 2008 through today's most popular social networking website Facebook.com, the company Wholesale-dress.net combined its marketing and sales with the popular social networking site in order to advertise and gain customers (Wholesales Inc 2011.). Now almost any company, be it small or large, has a profile on Facebook and has the ability to reach more customers due to the popularity of the social network as well as advertise for free via the company's profile page.

The other major benefit of social networking is the ability for people around the world to communicate with each other in real time for free. This outreaches the previous methods of communication and brought new trends such as mobile talk and mobile video onto the social networking framework. More and more parts of everyone's lives are filled with some sort of interaction on a social networking site. A student may contact a professor or other classmates via Facebook, or a customer may research a company to view company information and products. The possibilities of whom or what can communicate via social networking sites is endless. Information can be spread to different parts of the world allowing for real people's voices to be heard in an instant. This kind of benefit has redefined how our society communicates and uses the internet.

Legal and Ethical Issues

The main concern about the growing popular social networking sites is privacy. Now that a person's profile is a part of the public domain, the privacy of each individual is compromised. Pictures or words can be found and used to hurt someone or convey hate. There are legal and ethical complications with using social networking. A very interesting example would be within the medical profession.

There are serious legal violations that occur on social networking sites through the pictures medical staff post. They incorporate images of patients or would be patients who compromise patient privacy protection that is outlined in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act or HIPAA (Black,Black,Dawson,Duff,Saliba,&Thompson 2011).

This is just one serious legal and ethical problem that faces social networking. There have been many issues that have risen after the development of social networking that include privacy of user on the public internet and the legal right of ownership of user generated content. Many legal challenges have come about based on website practices which challenge the ethical issues the social networking faces. Over time the social networks adapt to the legal and ethical violations to retain the user base.

Security Concerns

As with the ethical and legal implications of social networking are clearly prevalent, so are the various security concerns with using the social networks. Privacy is yet again the main concern. Information is given to the supposedly trusted companies such as Facebook and MySpace, holding very sensitive data on their servers and databases. This information is not centralized nor is it guaranteed to be physically secured on the premises where the information is

kept. Such information can be used to harm the users via identity fraud, intimidation tactics, or even threats on one's life. The user generated content can inadvertently lead to security risks through giving too much public data. For example using the social networking site twitter, a user updates the status of their daily activities via mobile accounts or various locations. These locations are often broadcasted within the status update, giving a person with harmful intentions the information needed to figure out whether or not a target is at home or any other place of interest (Albrechtslund 2008).

Social Problems

According to Hennessey, "Facebook depression" can occur when people spend too much time on the social networking sites. The people who spend excessive periods of time on these sites compare their social value with others based on number of friends, relationships, or how close friends are to others. This kind of behavior is unhealthy to the individual and compromises a healthy social interaction.

Another major aspect of the social issues associated with social networking websites is the new form of harassment amongst the teen population in particular, cyber bullying. Cyber bullying is an ever growing concern within schools and at home. It is easy for other teens to contribute to cyber attacks based on the disassociation with the physical target. (Hennessey 2011). There have been several cases of teen suicide that have been linked to various forms of cyber bullying, creating a significant public demand for action against the harassment.

The third significant social problem that stems from social networking is the degradation of physical social skills. So many people sit behind their profiles and socialize behind a web

interface and when it comes to personal interactions in person, the person lacks the social skills to develop a relationship in person and feels uncomfortable (Hennessey 2011).

Conclusion

The social evolution that the world is still currently experiencing is due to the creation of social networking websites. Since 1997 the idea has stuck and grew right alongside upcoming information technology development. The social networks have become so popular that almost everyone has at least one personal profile they use daily. This social development is not without its faults though. Privacy is a great concern considering the amount of data that is stored and delivered over the public internet. Alongside privacy concerns are social concerns. Even though more and more people can share their personal content with friends around the world, it creates a real world struggle to make relationships.

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