Chapter 6
Supporting Participation in Online Social Networks

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ABSTRACT

Social networking systems can be considered one of the most important social phenomena because they succeeded in involving billions of people all around the world and in attracting users from several social groups, regardless of age, gender, education, or nationality. Social networking systems blur the distinction between the private and working spheres, and users are known to use such systems both at home and at the work place both professionally and with recreational goals. Social networking systems can be equally used to organize a work meeting, a dinner with the colleagues, or a birthday party with friends. In the vast majority of cases, social networking platforms are still used without corporate blessing. However, several traditional information systems, such as CRMs and ERPs, have also been modified in order to include social aspects. This chapter discusses the participation in online social networking activities and, in particular, the technologies that support and promote the participation in online social network.

INTRODUCTION

Social networking systems represent one of the most important social phenomena involving billions of people all around the world, attracting users from several social groups, regardless of age, gender, education, or nationality. In fact, some social networking systems are become the largest information systems accessible to the general public and, because of their neutrality regarding the public-private and the work-home axes, they often assume the role of feral systems.

Social networking systems blur the distinction between the private and working spheres, and users are known to use such systems both at home and on the work place both professionally and with recreational goals. Social networking systems can be equally used to organize a work meeting, a dinner with the colleagues or a birthday party with friends. For example, the chat systems that are embedded in social networking platforms are often the most practical way to contact a colleague to ask an urgent question, especially in technologically oriented companies.

Moreover, several traditional information systems have been modified in order to include social aspects and several organizations: (*i*) allow external social networking platforms to be used (e.g., Facebook was available for Microsoft and Apple employees before the general public launch), (*ii*) have created an internal social networking platform (DiMicco & Millen, 2007), or (*iii*) allow other social platforms for specific purposes (Millen et al., 2006). However, in the vast majority of cases, social networking platforms are used without corporate blessing, maintaining their status as feral systems.

According to DiMicco (2008), most users that use social networking platforms for work purposes are mostly interested in accumulating social capital, either for career advancement or to gather support for their own projects inside the company. Given the close relation between professional usage of social media and social capital.

This chapter has the goal of discussing about the participation in online social network, about the technologies that support and promote their use by individual and organization. The next section introduces online social networks; the third section discussed about the participation in this kind of networks; the fourth section introduces the technologies the support the activities in online social network; the fifth section discusses about the use of online social network and related social media in firms and organizations; and, finally, the last section concludes the summarizing its main contributions and presenting the directions for future work.

BACKGROUND

The result of the interactions among the users in a social networking system is an online social network, i.e., a special case of the more general concept of social network. A social network is defined as a set or sets of actors and the relations defined on them (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Social networks are typically studied using social network analysis, a discipline that focuses on the structural and topological features of the network. More recently, additional dimensions have been added to the traditional social network analytic approach (Monge and Contractor 2003; Borgatti and Foster 2003; Parkhe et al. 2006; Hoang and Antoncic 2003).

The study of structure of Online Social Networks, expressed as patterns of links among nodes, can exploit models and ideas from classical sociology and anthropology, with particular attention to contextual and relational approaches. In fact, all the results obtained in decades of studies of human networks

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