Benefits and Implications of Today's Online Social Networks

Student's name

Course name

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According to Krebs (n.d.), "a social network is a system of relationships and flows between people, groups, organizations, computers, URLs, and other connected information/ knowledge entities". This definition outlines the main feature of a social network – the fact that all people within it find themselves in a certain relationship and communicate according to it.

Social networks like any other means of communication have their advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, many people claim that social networks, such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter, do more good than harm. First of all, it goes without saying, that they enhance communication between people in a friendly relationship. It is sometimes difficult to meet or call relatives and friends to share the latest news and hear from them. Social networks provide an excellent solution to this problem - the network users can share news, photographs, videos and all types of media content, thus keeping in touch with all the people they know.

Second, social networks allow their users to strike up acquaintances with other people, as they may search for new friends with similar interests, living in the same region or complying with any other search criteria. This feature is especially useful for lonely people, looking for new friends. Furthermore, as the communication takes place on the web, it is easier to put an end to some undesirable relationships in case such need arises.

Third, social networks may present a valuable tool for all kinds of group interactions, including study or work groups, due to the fact that practically all people are registered there and can easily access information concerning schedules, learning programs, meetings etc. In most

cases such interaction is rather informal; however, it does not prevent co-workers or students from using this means of communication. Moreover, social networks are often used by the public as a kind of an unofficial business card, since employers or colleagues may take a look at their co-worker's profile at any time. For this reason, most people contribute much effort to creating a glossy image of themselves online.

On the other hand, however, social networks obviously have drawbacks, which should be taken into account. First, the main and widely discussed shortcoming is the fact that social networks threaten live communication between the users. Most people, sometimes without even realizing it, spend all or almost all their free time in front of their computers, surfing through various pages of their friends, relatives or even people they do not know in real life. As it is much easier to click on somebody's profile on Facebook than to meet them in person, some people allocate significantly less time for live communication and some even start communicating by emoticons and "thumbs up" signs. This fact is considered to have a detrimental effect on most people's psychological health and emotionality.

Second, the information transfer within social networks is not always safe. According to Fowler and Christakis (2008), "the basic idea in social network analysis is that individuals are influenced by their location in a social network and by the happenings among people who are "nearby" them in the social network". This fact is often used by criminals, searching for new victims, or bad debt collectors, who connect with people via social networks using fake accounts.

Third, according to Kleinfeld (2002), "the notion that we live in a "small world" where people are connected by only "six degrees of separation" has become part of the intellectual

furniture of educated people". This outlines the idea that any person in the world nowadays may

be reached by another person with only six mouse clicks through mutual acquaintances. This

supposition is regarded as a grievous trend, which depicts today's world shallowness.

  All in all, it should be outlined, that although most social networks impose barriers to live

communication, they still are a valuable tool in terms of modern lifestyle.

References

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