



# CS 6474 Social Computing: Social Networking Sites

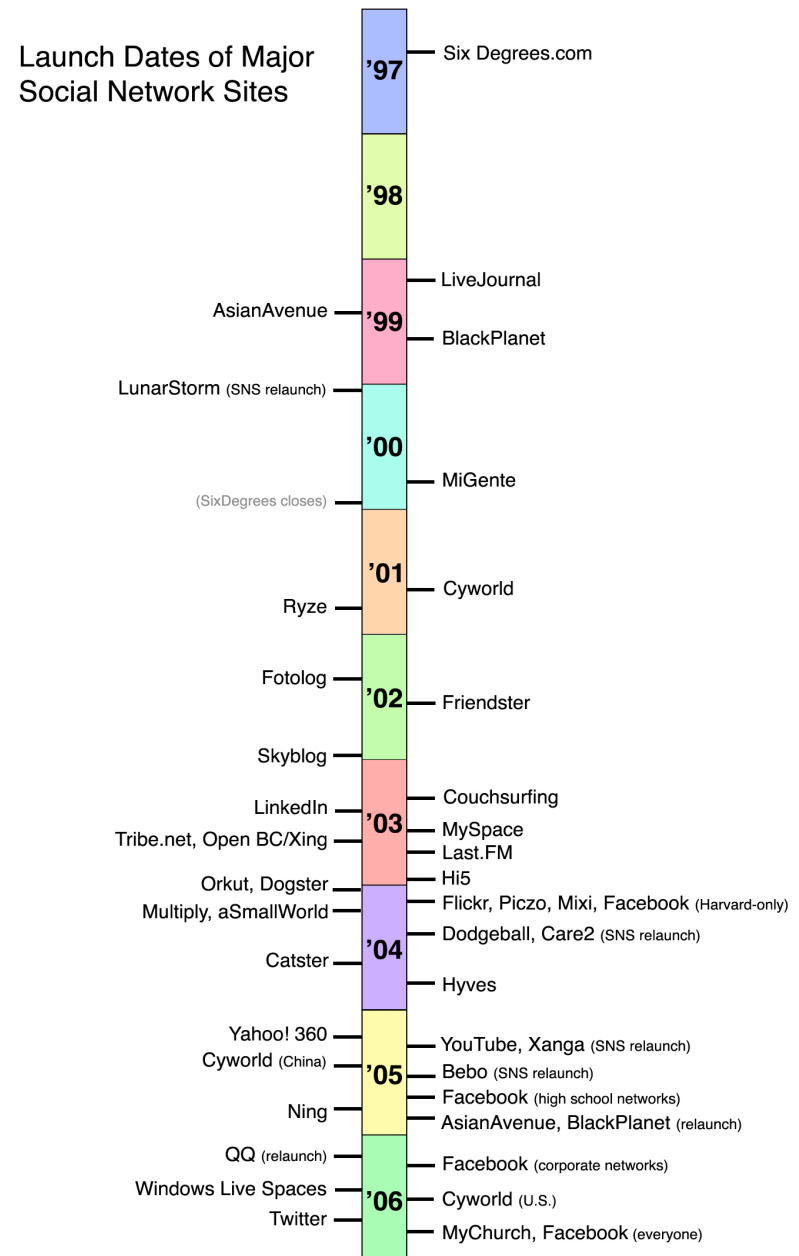
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Week 4 | September 12, 2016

# “Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship”

- One of the early seminal work in defining SNS, authors present their perspective on the history of these sites and discuss their key challenges and developments
- Discuss the various ways in which different social networks manage profile visibility
- Discuss about the multiplicity of ties, also structure of undirected and directed ties: “friends”, “followers”, “fans”
- The article points to the lack of (at that time) experimental and longitudinal studies



**Micro assignment:** What is a social networking site?

**Online and Offline:** boyd and Ellison pose that one way SNSes were distinct from earlier CMC groups was that they bridged people's offline and online worlds.

What does it mean to bridge someone's online and offline world? Do all SNSes today fill this characterization?

**Making Social Networks Visible:** boyd and Ellison point to an important observation: "*[SNSes] enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks.*" What are some of the potential issues, from a design perspective, in making one's social network visible?

The article talks of the “privacy paradox”.

Is there still a privacy paradox?

Today we see Facebook implements a variety of complex access controls as well as user defined lists to control who sees what. What are the benefits and challenges of this type of an approach where you can fine-tune your privacy settings?

“Friendster and Publicly  
Articulated Social Networks”



- Ethnographic study of Friendster (circa 2003)
  - *Friendster* was built on the assumption that friends-of-friends were more likely to be good dates than strangers
  - Allowed access to those only within four degrees
  - Encouraged people to join even if not interested in dating; potential bridges
- Focus on the following aspects:
  - understand how people negotiate context when presenting themselves – “context collapse”
  - determine the issues involved in articulating one’s social network as compared to a behavior-driven network
  - Maintenance and bridge of old and new social connections, beyond dating
- Overall highlighted the gap between understanding of the site use by the designers and the users

**Context Collapse:** boyd introduces the concept of “context collapse”.

Do you experience context collapse today?  
What design or behavioral elements of today’s SNSes minimize context collapse, if any?

**Nature of friendships:** boyd talks about the failure of Friendster designers in articulating nature of friendships: *friendships are binary, no consideration of the weightage of relationships*. We have come a long way, has this design feature really been incorporated in today's SNSes? If not, why not?

**Trust and four degrees of separation:** boyd mentions that initially Friendster restricted viewing profiles which were more than four hops away in their social networks, as a result people started adding interesting-looking strangers.

Designers wanted to ensure trust in the contacts created, however it backfired. How have SNSes today dealt with this situation?

**Presentation of self:** an important issue with a dating focused SNS as Friendster is that people are likely to portray only their positive attributes.

What could designers incorporate to deal with this challenge? Are there examples of SNSes today where these issues have been curbed to some extent?

**Fakesters:** boyd also talks about Fakesters despite some of its negative aspects: “by and large, most people love the fake characters. [...] the site became less interesting once the Fakesters were removed”  
What in your opinion could have been a better way to deal with Fakesters?

Are Fakesters necessarily a bad thing? What are some example Fakesters in today's platforms and how do they impact social dynamics on the platform?

**Micro assignment:** Comparing Friendster, one of the early SNS and today's Facebook, what do you think (in terms of design considerations) has worked for Facebook in its success that didn't for Friendster?