

CS 6474/CS4803

Social Computing: Sociological Foundations I

Munmun De Choudhury

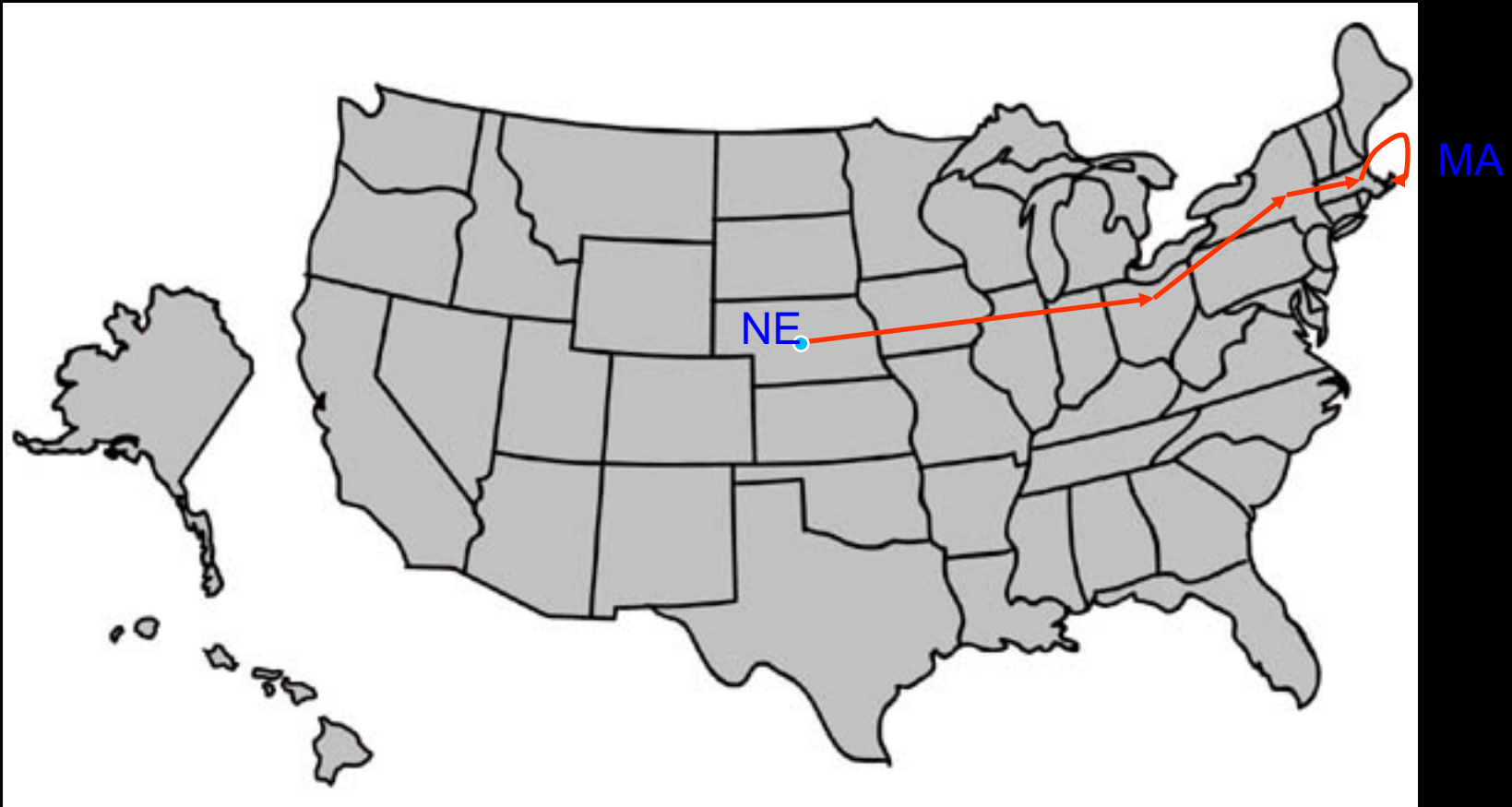
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Week 2 | August 28, 2017

- Frigyes Karinthy in 1929 published a volume of short stories called “Everything is Different”
- He was the first proponent of the six degrees of separation concept, in his 1929 short story, Chains (Láncszemek)
- In his book the characters created a game out of the notion that “the world is shrinking”:

A fascinating game grew out of this discussion. One of us suggested performing the following experiment to prove that the population of the Earth is closer together now than they have ever been before. We should select any person from the 1.5 billion inhabitants of the Earth – anyone, anywhere at all. He bet us that, using no more than *five* individuals, one of whom is a personal acquaintance, he could contact the selected individual using nothing except the network of personal acquaintances

An Experimental Study of the Small World Problem



Summary

- First sociological study of the “six degrees of separation”
- Empirically determine the maximum number of intermediaries it would require to reach anybody in the US
- Experiment conducted through forwarding of a set of snail mail letters, all targeted to a target in Massachusetts
- N=296 for two groups in Nebraska and Boston
- Main strategies involved in selecting the next point of forwarding: geographic and business

Summary

- How many of the starters would be able to establish contact with the target?
- Well, that depends: the overall mean 5.2 links
 - Through hometown: 6.1 links
 - Through business: 4.6 links
 - Boston group faster than Nebraska groups
 - Nebraska stakeholders not faster than Nebraska random
- Results:
 - 64 chains reached target
 - Funneling - Presence of a set of “hubs”/sociometric stars, through which most letters went through near the final target

Summary

- At least two facts about this study are somewhat remarkable:
 - First, that short paths appear to be abundant in the network
 - Second, that people are capable of discovering them in a “decentralized” fashion, i.e., they are somehow good at “guessing” which links will be closer to the target

Such small-world phenomena turn out to be abundant in a variety of network settings

The Erdős Number

Who was Erdős? <http://www.oakland.edu/enp/>

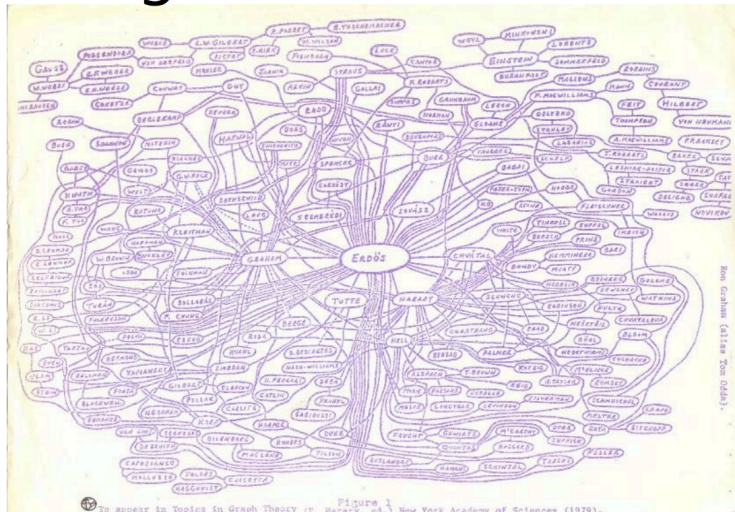
A famous Hungarian Mathematician, 1913-1996

Erdős posed and solved problems in number theory and other areas and founded the field of discrete mathematics.

- 511 co-authors (Erdős number 1)
- ~ 1500 Publications

Such small-world phenomena turn out to be abundant in a variety of network settings

e.g. Erdos numbers:



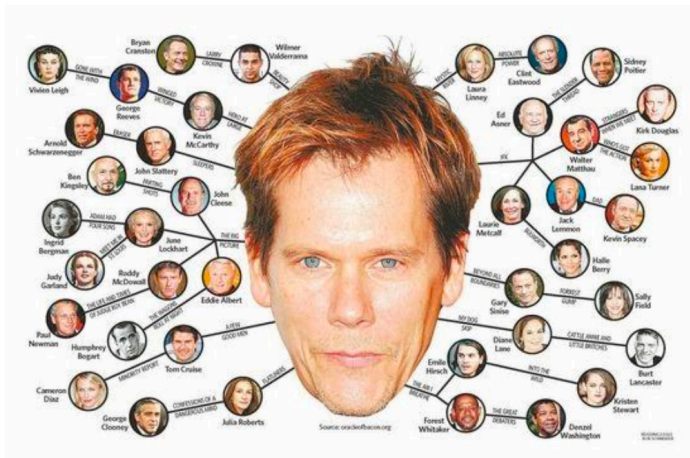
Erdős # 0	-	1 person
Erdős # 1	-	504 people
Erdős # 2	-	6593 people
Erdős # 3	-	33605 people
Erdős # 4	-	83642 people
Erdős # 5	-	87760 people
Erdős # 6	-	40014 people
Erdős # 7	-	11591 people
Erdős # 8	-	3146 people
Erdős # 9	-	819 people
Erdős #10	-	244 people
Erdős #11	-	68 people
Erdős #12	-	23 people
Erdős #13	-	5 people



<http://www.oakland.edu/enp/trivia/>

Such small-world phenomena turn out to be abundant in a variety of network settings

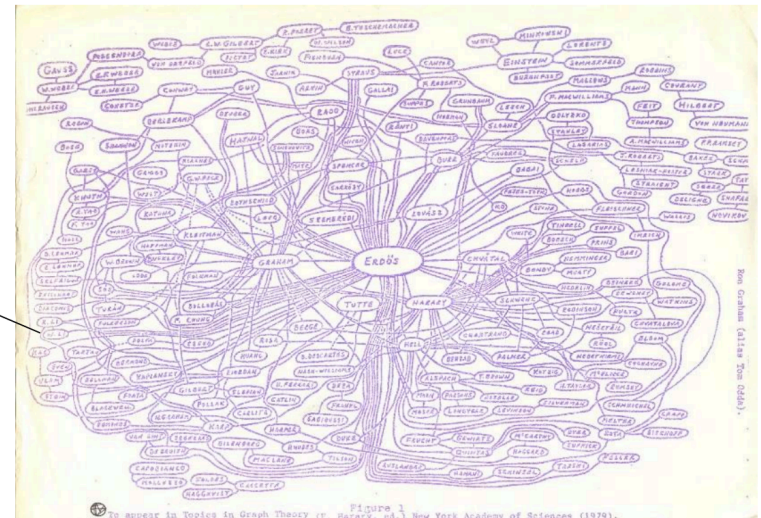
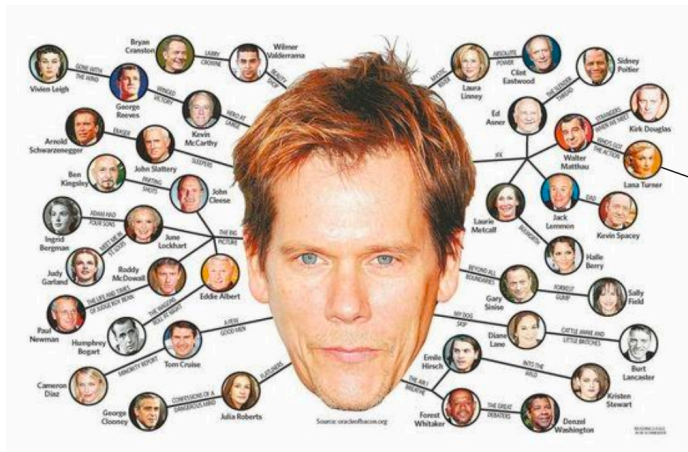
e.g. Bacon numbers:



linkedscience.org & readingeagle.com

Such small-world phenomena turn out to be abundant in a variety of network settings

Bacon/Erdos numbers:



Kevin Bacon→Sarah Michelle Gellar→**Natalie Portman**→Abigail Baird→Michael Gazzaniga→J. Victor→Joseph Gillis→Paul Erdos

What were some of the biggest assumptions/constraints in the study that may have affected the outcomes?

- Fixed target (Stock broker)
- Constrained on geography and profession
- Snail mail letters – limited by transportation

What were some of the biggest limitations of the study? What could have been alternatives to address them?

- Too few completed chains; sharp drop off
- Cross-sectional frame of social network
- Focused only in the US population
- Population bias: literate population; availability to send the mails
- Target had high social status

What were your biggest surprises from the study?

- Geography did not matter much (statistically), NE-stockbroker/ME-random/Boston-random
- Profession did not matter much (statistically)

A. There was a constant drop off rate as the letters traveled forward. What could be potential reasons behind this phenomenon?

B. Why do you think there were so few completed chains?

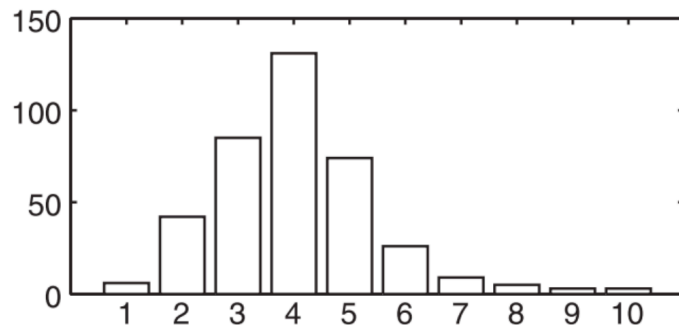
In Milgram's chain letter experiment, men were 10 times more likely to forward the letters than women. Why do you think it was the case?

Milgram did not after all investigate whether tie strength might play a role. How do you think tie strength would impact the so called “small world phenomenon”?

Class Exercise I: Validity + Parallels With OSNs

Dodds, Muhamed, & Watts repeated Milgram's experiments using e-mail

- 18 "targets" in 13 countries
- 60,000+ participants across 24,163 chains
- Only 384 (!) reached their targets



Histogram of (completed)
chain lengths – average is
just **4.01!**

L	N	Location	Travel	Family	Work	Education	Friends	Cooperative	Other
1	19,718	33	16	11	16	3	9	9	3
2	7,414	40	11	11	19	4	6	7	2
3	2,834	37	8	10	26	6	6	4	3
4	1,014	33	6	7	31	8	5	5	5
5	349	27	3	6	38	12	6	3	5
6	117	21	3	5	42	15	4	5	5
7	37	16	3	3	46	19	8	5	0

Reasons for choosing the next
recipient at each point in the chain

from <http://www.cis.upenn.edu/~mkearns/teaching/NetworkedLife/columbia.pdf>

In Milgram's chain letter experiment, letter forwarding may imply a different notion of a friend compared to what we imply today in online settings. Can these differences affect the number of hops (i.e., people are separated by about 6 acquaintances)?

The study showed the funneling effect - presence of a set of “hubs”/sociometric stars, through which most letters went through near the final target. How does this relate to OSNs of today?

Four Degrees of Separation

Lars Backstrom* Paolo Boldi† Marco Rosa† Johan Ugander* Sebastiano Vigna†

January 6, 2012

Abstract

Frigyes Karinthy, in his 1929 short story “Láncszemek” (“Chains”) suggested that any two persons are distanced by at most six friendship links.¹ Stanley Milgram in his famous experiment [20, 23] challenged people to route postcards to a fixed recipient by passing them only through direct acquaintances. The average number of intermediaries on the path of the postcards lay between 4.4 and 5.7, depending on the sample of people chosen.

We report the results of the first world-scale social-network graph-distance computations, using the entire Facebook network of active users (≈ 721 million users, ≈ 69 billion friendship links). The average distance we observe is 4.74, corresponding to 3.74 intermediaries or “degrees of separation”, showing that the world is even smaller than we expected, and prompting the title of this paper. More generally, we study the distance distribution of Facebook and of some interesting geographic subgraphs, looking also at their evolution over time.

The networks we are able to explore are almost two orders of magnitude larger than those analysed in the previous literature. We report detailed statistical metadata showing that our measurements (which rely on probabilistic algorithms) are very accurate.

1 Introduction

At the 20th World-Wide Web Conference, in Hyderabad, India, one of the authors (Sebastiano) presented a new tool for

studying the distance distribution of very large graphs: HyperANF [3]. Building on previous graph compression [4] work and on the idea of diffusive computation pioneered in [21], the new tool made it possible to accurately study the distance distribution of graphs orders of magnitude larger than it was previously possible.

One of the goals in studying the distance distribution is the identification of interesting statistical parameters that can be used to tell proper social networks from other complex networks, such as web graphs. More generally, the distance distribution is one interesting *global* feature that makes it possible to reject probabilistic models even when they match local features such as the in-degree distribution.

In particular, earlier work had shown that the *spid*², which measures the *dispersion* of the distance distribution, appeared to be smaller than 1 (underdispersion) for social networks, but larger than one (overdispersion) for web graphs [3]. Hence, during the talk, one of the main open questions was “What is the spid of Facebook?”.

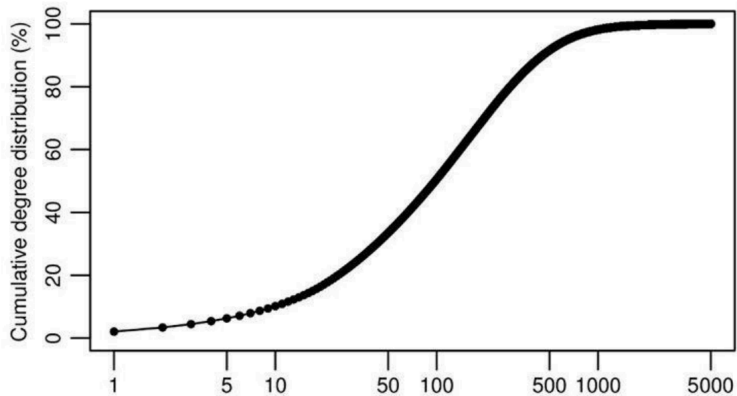
Lars Backstrom happened to listen to the talk, and suggested a collaboration studying the Facebook graph. This was of course an extremely intriguing possibility: beside testing the “spid hypothesis”, computing the distance distribution of the Facebook graph would have been the largest Milgram-like [20] experiment ever performed, orders of magnitudes larger than previous attempts (during our experiments Facebook has ≈ 721 million active users and ≈ 69 billion friendship links).

This paper reports our findings in studying the distance distribution of the largest electronic social network ever created. That world is smaller than we thought: the average distance of the current Facebook graph is 4.74. Moreover, the spid of the graph is just 0.09, corroborating the conjecture [3]

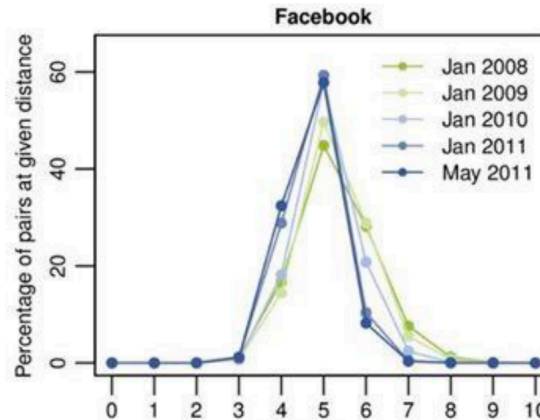
*Facebook.

†DSI, Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy. Paolo Boldi, Marco

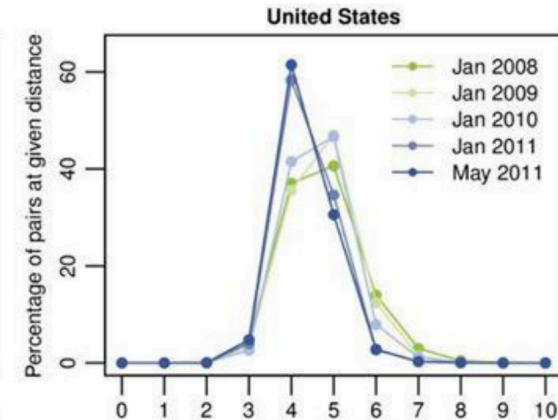
Actual shortest-path distances are similar to those in Dodds' experiment:



Cumulative degree distribution (# of friends) of Facebook users



Hop distance between Facebook users



Hop distance between users in the US

This suggests that people choose a reasonably good heuristic when choosing shortest paths in a decentralized fashion (assuming that FB is a good proxy for "real" social networks)

from "the anatomy of facebook": <http://goo.gl/H0bkWY>

Class Exercise II: Is the world really shrinking?

- Impact of globalization, transportation, and technological innovation.