

GE 204 - SOCIAL NETWORKS

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Description

Social networks are structures of interaction between social actors. While the term became synonymous with recently popular web sites such as Facebook, scientific theory and methods developed in this field applies to various types of actors and relations such as collaboration between companies, friendship and learning among children, or knowledge networks among scientists or professionals. The social network analysis focus on features of the network structure, rather than the features of actors, and as a result highlights the truly relational aspects of social phenomena. As a consequence it leads to reconsideration of certain social processes in relation to qualities of network structure within which they take place. These processes (e.g. spread of information, communication and collective problem solving, and innovation) are of interest in various disciplines such as sociology, social psychology, human relations, management, and information technology.

This course aims to introduce students to (1) a variety of approaches in the social networks research in relation to their strengths and applicability for different problem domains, and (2) a basic set of quantitative methods to collect, represent, analyze, and visualize social network data.

Learning Objectives

- To learn essential principles of relational approach to understanding social systems.
- To develop an understanding of the effects of social relations on individual behavior, and in turn functioning of social systems.
- To learn basic techniques for representation of relational aspects of social systems.
- To understand representation of social network data in practice, essential network measures and their interpretation, and to learn using tools to generate such measures
- To learn essential criteria for collecting social network data and choosing proper measures for investigating desired aspects of social processes.

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of the course students should be able to:

- Assess the consequences of certain network structural features in relation to communication and information dissemination.
- Make informed use of ego-centric or socio-centric concepts for different types of problems posed on social networks.
- Decide what data to collect about a social network of interest, and how to represent it.
- Use social network analysis metrics and software to quantify features of networks, or to visualize them.

Classwork and Assessment

Exams %70, coursework/assignments %30.

The course has a hands-on orientation. Thus it involves projects in which students will collect social network data or given a dataset and apply analysis techniques using ready software tools.

Resources

- Introducing social networks BY Alain Degenne, Michel Forsé, 1999, is available as an electronic resource at our library: <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/bilgi/docDetail.action?docID=10256916>
- Relevant chapters will be assigned from the book: John Scott, 2004, “Social Network Analysis”. SAGE Publications.
- My brief lecture notes (in Turkish), are available on the web <http://mgencer.com>
- Additional digital resources and journal papers will be handed out during the course.

Tentative weekly outline

- General introduction to relational (versus substantial) social study
- Representation of relational data
- First steps in investigating and visualizing social networks
- Managing different types of social relational data
- What to ask to social network data, and types of measures to answer those questions
- Meaning of structural properties: what happens in the social network?
- Flow of information, resources, and opportunities in social networks

- Structural and processual similarities and differences among small and large scale networks
- Social networks in the business world
- Globalization, virtual networks, and new opportunities and challenges for collaboration
- New business practices of innovation, advertising, and collaboration through networks
- Evolution of social networks through time