MSc Information Systems Management
Department of Information & Communication Systems Engineering

Thesis

Social Networking & Risk Awareness: Legal & Sociological Aspects

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Humans constitute social (or political) beings, as expressed by Plato’s student, Aristotle, in ancient Greece:

‘Φύσει μέν ἔστιν ἄνθρωπος ζῷον πολιτικόν.’

Man’s natural tendency towards creating groups with common characteristics and collaborative relationships between their members is a reasonable aftereffect of ‘consciousness’, an attribution applied to only nine different species on earth.\(^2\) History has proven that family is a key determinant in the formation of societies, as apart from being the most ancient form of social structures, it has maintained its significance throughout politics and sociological shifts without losing its identity. Again, Aristotle provides an undeniable connection between family and the state, the latter mentioned as a natural outcome of human psychology and consciousness:

‘Seeing then that the state is made up of households, before speaking of the state, we must speak of the management of the household’.\(^3\)

While the history of homo sapiens is fairly young (a few hundred thousand years), his evolution in both the intellectual and technological fields has always had an overall ideal of spreading information and producing new knowledge through the exploitation of it, this of communication. With family being the fundamental organizational scheme, the first issue to be acquainted with is communicating each of the individual’s wishes to another, so that both

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\(^1\) Aristotle, \textit{Politics}, Publishing in Motion, 2011, p.3

\(^2\) The ‘mirror test’, meaning the ability to recognize one as himself when looking into a mirror is a common, however disputable, way of arguing whether consciousness can be attributed to a given species. Consciousness is here used as the realization of self-existence, not as John Locke would approach the term thus including moral and religious attributions (Locke, Chapter XXVII).

\(^3\) Aristotle, \textit{Politics}, p.4
personal and collective satisfaction can be achieved. As in a larger societal scale, each family is run by a number of leaders (usually the parents), who provide the internal rules and behavioral patterns that members have to adopt, so that cohabitation happens in harmony and with as little conflicts as possible.\textsuperscript{4} Extending this to a larger scale, the combination of groups/families along with the development of emotional, financial and commercial relationships between them is the fundamental platform on which tribes were originally based and evolved.

Within this more complicated system, together with its unavoidable rising complexity, in order to make groups of interest function in relative harmony and generate efficiency, communication has always been a matter of utter importance. Therefore, societies strive for creating faster, more reliable and adequately efficient communicative channels.

The term ‘tribalism’ can acquire two distinctive meanings:

a) this of sharing common anthropological and social attributes (language, nationality, religion) in its traditional meaning and,

b) this of sharing common interests and pursuits regardless of one’s nationality or societal characteristics (economic organizations, politics), in the way it develops through networks.

Although the first meaning is that which tribalism as a term originally refers to, over the recent centuries we are witnessing a strong tendency towards the second, especially with the globalization of the industry and the rapid development of powerful social affairs. Tribalism has insofar been applied to the urge among men to constitute small or large groups with common aims and wishes and to encourage strategic planning for the benefits of those. Those would occur through the spread of common beliefs among the members, as they emerge from common social, educational, political or

\textsuperscript{4} We cannot speak of an absolute match between family and society. The former is a pre-decided group formation while the latter can elect its leaders through democratic procedures. The argument, of course, does not remove the undeniable logical bondage between the two.
geographical characteristics; attributes that have been predominant throughout human history regardless of social or political system changes and differences between nations and continents.

To be more precise though, in the first case (a) we should regard the members of a family and, in extent, a certain nation as the paradigm, while in the second case (b) we should see entire organizations, political groups and worldwide social movements as different segments of the same tendency. In our research, we will be focusing on (b).

What we will be attempting to explore in this study is the formation of digital societies in a broader sense, strictly within the cyber world and especially in Social Networking Services (SNSs). For reasons of avoiding references to specific writers and intellectuals that have systematically used the term to support positions of an either opposite or irrelevant scope to our study, from this point we shall be referring to organized internet groups as digital societies and the tendency to form those as digital tribalism. Our aim is to present the potential force of cyber groups and the possibilities, threats and opportunities that adhere to various related fields of interest such as lifestyle, electronic political participation and the impact of social networking on societal structure. We will be presenting legislations and technological measures of protecting users against cyberbullying, identity theft, anti-social behavior and others, while we will examine several legal disputes in regards to major SNS networks in both ethical and legal grounds. Moreover, we will argue how new business models emerge and what new types of work or educational opportunities can be materialized. Furthermore, we will present an insight into SNS-related issues such as corporate espionage, social network aggregation and data privacy.

Our study will also be one of questioning whether the undeniable penetration of social networks into everyday life can potentially lead to more awareness around political, social, ecological and human rights-oriented issues and, specifically, as to how possible would it be for any global cyber movements to succeed in their purposes. The main question is: do Social Networking Services provide a good means for expressing ideas and a trustworthy platform for liberal ideas to evolve and pave the way to a more
fair sociopolitical system? Or are they yet another evasive tool under the authority of corporate management and international organizations to promote lifestyle patterns and attract people into a state of being less aware around important issues of their everyday lives? While there is evidence towards proving both these inquiries rightful, it is hard to predict with certainty, given that the more interest there is for social networking, the more complicated, extrovert and open to more different social groups those services become. As complexity within social networking rises, it will become harder to control and prevent liberal movements to develop and that could even lead to a new state of decision-making and spreading information as well as ideological brainstorming across the globe.
Chapter 2 The Background of Social Networking

2.1. Definition of a social network

A Social Network\(^5\) is a social formation that consists of interconnected entities, which are either individuals or systems/organizations. These are brought into contact through a structure of relationships and communication channels and share several characteristics such as financial status, sex, religion, aesthetic preferences, economic relationships, scientific research, educational systems etc.

In terms of information technology, we can imagine a social network as equivalent to a peer-to-peer data distribution system, where every entity appears as a node with its own characteristics, however it shares the same input and output configuration through which it can receive and distribute information. Although this is a simplistic approach as to how 'real' human societies connect to each other, it nevertheless suggests a general framework around the concept of a non-fictional, artificial social network.

2.2. Social Networking

Similar to the idea of the social network, the need for bringing users, organizations and other entities closer through the internet led to the foundation of Social Networking Services (abbr. SNSs). An SNS is an electronic platform, accessible by users of the world wide web

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\(^5\) Although J. Barnes was probably the first to use the term to denote patterns of connections between traditional societal structures (family, tribe), the German, neo-Kantian sociologist Georg Simmel (1908-1971) was the first to provide academic research around social networking in the beginning of the 20th century. Simmel shares a common thinking with Max Weber, mainly in the latter's definition of the 'ideal type' and the theory of non-positivism.
internationally\textsuperscript{6}. Its purpose is to bring people who share similar interests, beliefs and ideology into a common ground and to provide the means to enable their online communication as well as the capability to attract other users of the same service to their circle of online 'friends' or to smaller groups within the service itself.

The first steps into social networking date almost two decades back\textsuperscript{7}, when websites like AOL and Usenet provided a fundamental and quite simplistic platform of social networking to their users. The posterior changes in home internet connection speeds alongside the ability of internet browsers to support websites with heavier graphic content (flash, javascript etc.) opened up the opportunities for creating more complicated, user-driven websites and internet services. It took more than ten years for social networking to become the norm for spending most of the user's time on the internet, however through websites such as Friendster in the beginning, and MySpace or LinkedIn afterwards, social networking communities were widely adopted and used for the purposes of online social interaction.

The wide infiltration of SNSs into everyday life should be acknowledged as a social phenomenon. Heavy work schedules, information overload and the complexity of modern life are depriving working people from free time and leisure. The absence of free time usually reflects upon one's social behaviour and, especially in their opportunity to socialize with other people who share common characteristics and preferences. This is what SNSs came to fulfill and, to a large extent, they have been very successful in this direction. Whether social networking helps regaining one's socializing activity or, on the contrary, adds up to isolation, loneliness and frustration comes to a strong debate and in the next paragraphs, we will attempt a more insightful look upon those issues.

The general concept of a modern SNS is the creation of a personal profile for each user, automatically following an easy and (usually) free of

\textsuperscript{6} Except from certain countries in which SNS websites are banned by governmental law. Vietnam, Iran, Pakistan and Bangladesh are only some of the nations that have blocked user access to Facebook in their territories.

charge signup procedure. As soon as the user's profile is set up, he can invite other users to his electronic circle of 'friends', post a note about his current status (accompanied by a relevant url when desired), comment on other users' statuses, exchange messages on a private or public basis and receive instant notifications for any updates in regards to his posts (replies, comments etc.) through e-mail and/or the service itself.

Although popular websites such as Facebook, MySpace or Twitter are usually the referential point to online social networking, a vast array of online communities could as well be classified as e-social services. Some of them are online blogs that attract large numbers of visitors and provide ways of interaction through comments, remarks, polls and voting procedures, while also international communities (e.g. Indymedia) that serve as powerful web-based links between persons or groups who follow a certain political, social or religious ideology.

2.3. Web 2.0, Facebook & Twitter

For the most part of online network history, the internet's functionality has been associated with static pages being linked together with hyperlinks, HTML code language, as well as website design and implementation based on tables and frames. Web 2.0\(^8\) constitutes the shift from Web 1.0 to interactive internet and, as T. Flew suggests, 'the move from personal websites to blogs and blog site aggregation, from publishing to participation, from web content as the outcome of large up-front investment to an ongoing and interactive process, and from content management systems to links based on tagging'.\(^9\)

The wide capabilities of Web 2.0 are realized through applications that facilitate interactive systemic biases, interoperability, user-centered design and World Wide Web development. This interaction, online collaboration and

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\(^8\) Although the term was originally introduced by Darcy Dinucci in 1999 in an article called 'Fragmented Future', it was popularized by Tim O'Reilly because of the O'Reilly Media Web 2.0 conference in late 2003. See: O'Reilly, Tim, What Is Web 2.0, O'Reilly Network, 30.09.2005. Source: http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html (retrieved 13.02.2011).

user engagement to social media dialogue in the role of both the creator and consumer of web content is taking place most successfully within SNSs.

Facebook has to be accredited as the currently most popular SNS (and a successful Web 2.0 socializing tool), as it offers great eligibility to its users and through its friendly interface and easy-to-use graphic environment, it allows its members to perform a large number of tasks in terms of communication, self-promotion and self-expression. Facebook's wide structure in combination with third-parties that service members can use in the form of applications within their account (games, puzzles, real life simulators etc.) as well as Facebook's relatively loose censorship policy, offer a significant number of choices and capabilities.

Users can upload pictures or videos, associate those with other users (tags), receive real-time notifications whenever there is an update related to one of their posts, write notes, use e-mail and chat services and stay informed about the activity of their online friends through a news stream displayed on their homepage after a successful login. These capabilities in combination with groups, pages of interest, advanced search options and the proven high levels of success in finding the person a user may be looking for (classmate from high school, former work collaborator etc.) have turned Facebook into a highly attractive service for both regular users as well as businesses that apply marketing, data mining, market segmentation and customer targeting methods or organizations destined to raise global awareness and affect political opinion, through an up-to-date and coherent online system.

Facebook is different to other SNSs (e.g. MySpace) for one more reason: it does not exclusively seek to establish virtual bonds between strangers. On the contrary, it is designed to both (re)establish communication between old friends, classmates etc. as well as to create new friends. Hence, anonymity and the use of nicknames is not very popular among Facebook users and as a result, the majority of service members provide real information (name and surname, date of birth etc.) about themselves.

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10 In regards to expressing one’s opinion publicly, not in the case of offensive and/or illegal material and graphic content (animal abuse, pornographic material etc.).

The fact that more than 600,000,000 users are currently members of the service has brought up issues and worries in regards to safety, privacy, lifestyle, culture and opinion-making to the foreground of sociological, financial and legal interest among the world's specialists. Taking various Facebook-associated cases into consideration, from identity theft to criminal acts such as murder or rape, there has been a strong debate as to how the service itself abides with national as well as international law and whether it encourages its members to reveal personal data, which should better be kept private.

Twitter, on the other hand, is the most popular microblogging online network and is focused extensively on mobile networks and the exchange of up-to-date information on a real-time basis. The service provides dynamic linkage between users and information through embedded media and groups. Twitter enables users to send and read messages called tweets, which are plain text posts of up to 140 character length displayed on the user's profile page and publicly visible by default; however, senders can restrict message delivery to just their followers. Users may subscribe to other users' tweets, a feature known as 'following' with subscribers being known as 'followers'. This feature is different than the one provided by Facebook, where once a 'friendship' is established, both users are engaged into bidirectional communication, and which practically means 'following' each other, in Twitter terms.

The major advantage of Twitter is the fact that data privacy can be more effectively preserved than in other SNS networks, mainly for two reasons: the content is strictly text-based, therefore no media files such as photographs or videos can be posted and related to specific users (at least not in the service itself) and, secondly, Twitter enables users to add limited lines of information about themselves without providing the opportunity to add extensive personal data. Regardless of the amount of information per user however, Twitter collects personally identifiable information about its users and shares it with third parties, which has the right to sell as an asset in the
case that the company is sold\textsuperscript{12}. While Twitter does not display advertisements, advertisers can target users based on their history of tweets and may quote tweets in ads directed specifically to the user. This has led to the service being heavily criticized as well as for its ability to notify users for the location and activity of other users due to its strong mobile network infiltration. At the same time, several data privacy violations have been recognized in Twitter due to security failures having occasionally occurred since its original launch in 2006.

In the next paragraphs, we will be discussing the advantages, risks, opportunities and dangers that internet users face while being involved with social networking. Our research will focus on the interactive abilities of Web 2.0 and especially to the risks it brings to users, organizations and others who use SNSs extensively. We will be mostly studying Facebook-related issues, given its tremendous infiltration in almost every household's personal computer.

Chapter 3 Social networking & its sociological impact

3.1. Introduction

Back in 1985, William Gibson13 was picturing a world where multinational corporations would govern the earth and machines would have their own consciousness; a global network, a hard-to-escape virtual reality, software viruses and applications acting as real persons within the network, state-of-the-art technology, hackers, ultra-intelligent robots, dark skies, black skyscrapers and neon. In this cyber world, men with advanced skills in computer systems infiltration and database penetration known as 'space cowboys', were able to connect to the master network and appear as unique electronic characters with different characteristics and behaviour than how their physical self would react in the 'real' world. Gibson alongside his predecessors George Orwell and Michel Foucault gave an almost prophetic description of an extreme version of 21st century's modern network and the ways in which users become absorbed in it, occasionally without noticing time flow or even the necessity of satisfying physical needs (food, drink etc.). Internet gamers especially, often find themselves lost inside the digital world of a computer game, performing actions which they would normally avoid, due to law, moral codes and social standards. The need to become someone else, to escape the character by which other people know and recognize them is a particularly interesting phenomenon and has already found extensive application in online gaming for some and in the face of social networking for the wider mass.

An increasing number of social networking users is often met as highly

13 William Gibson (born March 17, 1948) is an American-Canadian writer who has been called the 'noir prophet' of the cyberpunk subgenre of science fiction. Gibson coined the term 'cyberspace' in his short story 'Burning Chrome' and later popularized the concept in his debut novel, Neuromancer (1984). In envisaging cyberspace, Gibson created an iconography for the information age before the ubiquity of the Internet in the 1990s. He is also credited with predicting the rise of reality television (Big Brother, X-Factor and the likes) and with establishing the conceptual foundations for the rapid growth of virtual environments such as video games and the internet.
addicted, manic and obsessed with online socializing activities. 'Victims' of this addictive trend are at most teenagers and at next, young people between twenty and thirty. Facebook has a worldwide penetration, which differs significantly between countries. What needs to be highlighted at this point is the fact that countries with a relatively low percentage of internet penetration often show a higher user involvement with social networking. For example, Facebook penetration in Greece is 25.11% with a 46.1% internet usage of the overall population, as of June 2010: practically, this implies that more than half of the internet users in Greece are social media users as well. On the contrary, several countries such as Austria show significantly less interest in social networking: in this case, a 24.9% Facebook penetration accounts for only one third of the overall amount of internet users in Austria (74.8%). The following figure presents the service's percentage penetration by country, as this occurs from the ratio between the overall population to the users of the service, as of July 2010.

<table>
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<th>Country</th>
<th>Facebook users (July 2010)</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percentage penetration</th>
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<td>3408240</td>
<td>7026400</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>15497900</td>
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<td>Population</td>
<td>Facebook Users</td>
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**Source:** http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/blog/2010/jul/22/facebook-countries-population-use#data

### 3.2. Life & Lifestyle

The United States, with a population of over 300 million people and a 40% being Facebook users, constitute a reliable sample for deducting conclusions in regards to Facebook's infiltration and user engagement, as those emerge from the following figures. As suggested by the pie chart below, almost one third of the total Facebook users are in the 18-25 age interval, while closely being followed by the 26-34 age interval (23%). Therefore, users between 18 and 34 account for more than half the members of the service. Global scales are quite similar to US statistics.
Women and especially those of young age, continue to comprise the single largest demographic group within the US. In total, women constitute over 56% of the overall Facebook population: a continuation of a long-time trend.

Younger users saw the biggest numerical increases in December and the 26-34 range saw the largest overall increase, adding 839,000 new members, most of whom were female. Earlier last year, we were seeing stronger relative growth in older demographics.
Even though the majority of users are young, there is a significant share for older age segments as well, with nearly 20% being in their mid-forties or older. What once started as a web service for students, the American use of this social networking platform nowadays shows that it is very intergenerational. Note that the total number of users in a given age group is higher than the combined number of males and females within it, and for a couple reasons: one is that not every user designates their gender on Facebook, either by choice or because they forgot to; the other is that overall demographic numbers are estimates.

Studying those estimates, we can safely speak of SNSs being part of a daily routine, a social norm. By this is implied that involvement with the service, interaction with other users and participation in several groups is, generally speaking, performed excessively. Already the argument lies in how exactly does social networking affect lifestyle and which are the activities that users are engaged to through the extensive use of Twitter and the rest. We will focus on some of these aspects in the next paragraphs.

14 Mark Zuckerberg started Facebook as part of one of his school assessments, when he was still in university. There is an ongoing battle between him and some of his schoolmates, relative to whose original idea the service was and to the amount of elements that Zuckerberg might have used, taken by somebody else's work and embodied to Facebook.
3.2.1. Human relationships

It is a common fact that, as life becomes gradually more complex, so do relationships between individuals. While communication means are significantly more diverse, easy to use and offer more in both quantity and quality of provided services than in past decades, communication between people remains problematic and, in fact, appears to be less natural than before. The turn from 'traditional' means of meeting other persons, exchanging ideas and constituting real-life social circles has started to evaporate and instead limit its function to the relationships created within close and well-defined borders, work environment being the predominant.

A recent example comes from the United Kingdom: an online service named 'Citysocialising' with currently more than 50,000 users\textsuperscript{15}\textsuperscript{15} brings together young professionals, business travelers and others in areas such as London, Brighton, Edinburgh etc. It is basically an online subscription-based social networking portal that focuses on members meeting up offline to share interests and socialise together with like-minded people in the real world. It is most graphically represented through the picture of a usual office employee, formally dressed and waving his hands in sort of a widely known as a hip-hop music gesture and language code\textsuperscript{16}\textsuperscript{16}, in order to show how much he needs a different social circle than the one his work environment can offer. This is already a first notion towards taking social networking to a next level, this of geographical and even regional interest. Its undoubted success has enabled Citysocialising representatives to speak about expanding their territories to several countries in Europe and overseas.

The apparent question on this issue is this: are we to invest further into facilitating better, more convenient and enveloping online communities aiming to resurrect the social relationships among the lonely people in the world? Or, on the contrary, should we reject the potential of social networking in this field and attempt to re-establish social relations as we have

\textsuperscript{15} Responsesource, UK network welcomes 50,000th member after launch of new platform. Source: http://www.responsesource.com/releases/rel_display.php?relid=48884 (retrieved 06.06.2009).

\textsuperscript{16} The actual slogan used in the Citysocializing advertisement is 'You can’t choose who you work with - but you can choose who you socialize with' (as seen on London trains).
always known them (through physical and actual contact)? It is rather
doubtful whether a traditional and standardized contact model such as this of
creating bonds, should be enforced to evolve through online communities, as
this might suggest an overall societal decline instead of evolution and
development.

At the same time, aside from those willing to expand their social circle,
a large amount of users is actually using SNSs to find a love partner.
According to recent research\textsuperscript{17}, users who openly indicate that they are
currently not in a relationship, have the highest number of stigmatizing items
about them. Indeed, information disclosure meets its highest levels mainly
among those who are a looking for a relationship. Therefore a user who looks
for a partner, has access to detailed and highly informative profiles about
other users’ interests, educational background, how they look like, what are
their particular preferences, their religious views, political ideology etc.

As a result, especially in the younger ages, social networking appears
to be very successful in this regard, since it can be effectively used as a
browsing catalogue. Just as somebody could visit a dating agency and request
pictures, information and interests of other subscribers in order to aid the
selection process, the same result can be achieved without even leaving the
house. In fact, this source of information appears to be more accurate and
considerably more-revealing, since:

a) All the above informational criteria are satisfied (images,
interests, age, sex, preferences etc.), which altogether suggest a
complete user profile.

b) Through asynchronous means of communication (comments,
replies to other users’ posts), users can deduct useful information
in regards to how another user communicates with others.
Therefore information such as the use of language, (online) social
behavior, sense of humor, sexual preferences and other data can
be easily discovered through one’s online activity.

\textsuperscript{17} Wood, Eileen; Nosko, Amanda; Molema,Seija, \textit{Computers in human behaviour /All
about me: disclosure in online social networking profiles: The case of Facebook}, Department
of Pyschology, Wilfried Laurier University, 2009.
(c) Real-time communication. On Facebook, once a user becomes member of the service he can enter into immediate chat with his 'friends' through the service's chatroom box. Especially those seeking a relationship are usually the ones most likely to be logged in to the chat service, when they’re using the platform.

In addition to the above, there have been numerous examples of marriages resulting from an original contact through social networking services, while also a notable multitude of divorces having been conducted mainly due to SNSs. Particularly, one in five divorces in the US now involve the popular social networking sites. According to a survey\textsuperscript{18} by the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (AAML), a staggering 80\% of divorce lawyers have also reported a spike in the number of cases that use social media for evidence of infidelity. Flirty messages and photographs found on Facebook are increasingly being cited as proof of unreasonable behavior or irreconcilable differences while the service, being the biggest offender, was characterized as the primary source of evidence in a divorce case by 66\% of the lawyers involved with the survey.

3.2.2. Addiction & Isolation

Many users are experiencing SNSs in the form of addiction rather than a networking tool, and psychologists are starting to agree. Although there are no statistics on SNS addiction - it isn’t an actual medical diagnosis - therapists say they’re seeing gradually more people crossing the line from social networking to social dysfunction. Social networking is a growing global phenomenon and it seems, a new field of study for sociologists and scholars to examine the effect that social media and other communication technologies are having on human motivation, attention and social interaction.

The decisive test for SNS addiction is whether usage disrupts day to day life in actions as trivial as waking up, getting dressed, using the telephone etc. It appears that several SNS users ignore family, school or work obligations, in a way that their online, non-real world becomes more enjoyable than their real life; in this case, it is conceded that their behaviour has crossed over into an addiction.

According to a survey\(^{19}\) by Oxygen Media Insights Group, today's tech savvy woman at the age of 18-34 has a fixed dependence to social media networks. An overwhelming majority of 57% admits talking to people online more than face-to-face, while 34% say checking Facebook is the first thing they do when waking up in the morning – that includes brushing one's teeth or using the bathroom. More than one third (39%) are self proclaimed Facebook addicts; 37% have fallen asleep with their PDA in their hands; 84% believe it's okay to update your status more than once a day; and 78% think it's okay to check someone else's Facebook profile more than once a day. Finally, 19% say they have gotten into fights with loved ones about how much time they spend with their smartphones or cell phones and 31% feel more confident about their online persona than in their real lives.

With motivation being given by the recent examples of irregular behaviour due to incautious Facebook use, according to a 2010 article on the Independent, MEP\(^{20}\) Nessa Childers has called for the popular social networking site to come under increased regulation by the EU and for an expansion to the current legislation on SNS to be accomplished. In a 430-page statement, she mentions 'visiting your Facebook page frequently causes what psychologists refer to as 'intermittent reinforcement', and continues 'that anticipation can get dangerously addictive. Visiting Facebook rewards you with virtual connections. These connections then expand to fill an increasingly empty internal world, creating a vicious circle'. She concludes that the EU should provide better legislation in concern with SNSs, aiming at protecting users from addictive behaviour: ‘Action is needed at international level from the EU to


\(^{20}\) Member of the European Parliament.
properly take on the disturbing trend of addiction to sites such as Facebook, which are responsible for all sorts of problematic behaviour."²¹

Detachment from real social interaction leads also to isolation. According to leading American sociologist, Sherry Turkle, 'a behaviour that has become typical may still express the problems that once caused us to see it as pathological'.²² Her statement is that technology threatens to dominate our lives and make users less human. Under the illusion of allowing users to communicate better, it is actually isolating them from real human interactions in a digital reality that is a poor imitation of the real world. Various streams of thought, mainly in the US, underline the importance of this matter and explore solutions towards bridging online with in-person communication, without excluding or constraining any of the two.

3.2.3. Ambient awareness & information sharing

The technological innovations of the last decade made it possible for people worldwide to reach each other not only at their home or work landlines but almost at any place, any time of the day, signal coverage allowed. That was the time when companies started producing mobile phones massively for the global market, rendering them an essential everyday device, while the later inclusion of messaging (texting) capabilities paved the way for what today is called 'status update' in social networking terms. Both mobile phone texting as well as status updates have a character length limit and their similarity is rather high, given that both are used for updating others about a user’s current activity or asking others about their current actions. The main difference between mobile texting and social networking is the fact that the latter is public, except from the cases when it is sent as a private message through an SNS. While mobile texting remains a frequent activity mostly in ages between 15 - 25, its extension and growth in social media is rapidly increasing with services such as Twitter and their extensive


use through mobile devices\textsuperscript{23} with internet connection (usually smartphones). According to Comscore’s survey, more than 25 million Facebook users accessed the site via a mobile browser during 2009, which was more than double the number of MySpace mobile users. It appears as an ever-growing trend, especially in the large US and UK markets, where smartphone usage raises in popularity at a steady and fast rate.

This state of awareness where two SNS friends who regularly follow one another in the digital environment can be aware of each other's lives\textsuperscript{24}, without actually being physically present to discuss, is called 'ambient awareness'. The term is used in social science and is set to describe a new form of peripheral social awareness. This awareness is propagated from relatively constant contact with one's friends and colleagues via social networking platforms on the internet. With Facebook, Twitter, Blogger and others currently being the largest bearers of this tendency, the term essentially defines the sort of omnipresent knowledge of another user's experiences by being a regular user of these media outlets that allow a constant connection with one's social circle. It suggests both a one-to-many and many-to-one relationship in terms of data circulation, as it occurs from news streams, tweets, bulletins or whichever name each service uses to describe the continuous information flow between friends.

Some wonder how it is possible to follow such a large number of users through SNSs, a thousand for example, without being over-satiated with information. The answer to that is simple: while an e-mail is a binding procedure between two ends which requires the 100\% attention of the recipient, a user's post on a social networking does not necessarily demand a reply, neither does it call for different opinions. Users are not engaged into


\textsuperscript{24} According to C. Thompson of the New York Times, ambient awareness is ‘very much like being physically near someone and picking up on their mood through the little things they do, such as body language, sighs, and stray comments.’ Thompson Clive, \emph{Brave New World of Digital Intimacy}, The New York Times, 05.10.2008. Source: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/07/magazine/07awareness-t.html (retrieved 12.12.2010).
any kind of necessity to respond or to provide their own thoughts on a
subject. Facebook already functions upon a selective algorithm through which
several posts are shown on users’ pages, although there are examples of
services (Twitter) showing every new post having been made by the members
whom the user is following. The concept of this microblogging service is
therefore simple: if users do not visit Twitter often, their friends’ posts will be
conglomerated, so that the user can scroll back and search for posts he might
have missed. In this way, the use of the service is either enchaining, which
means that users have to frequently log in to their account and keep track of
the activity stream or rejecting, suggesting that infrequent users will
eventually drop out of the service. The second is particularly rare since users
will sooner or later take a more active stance in order to effectively follow the
stream in consistency. To address this issue, Twitter just recently launched a
new feature which appears as a '@mentions' tab and lets users perform
searches within the entire network in order to discover direct mentions to
their profile made by other members.

Ambient awareness is expected to become an integral part of civilized
modern societies, as the newer generations grow up in a world where
computers, networks, social media and information overload dominate the
virtual world of communications and electronic entertainment. The children
of our days develop their characters and personalities having access to any
sort of information, everywhere anytime. As mobility becomes a social
establishment and portable devices are considered necessary means of
contacting others and being up-to-date, the tendency to provide information
about both personal data as well as location, emotional status etc. on a real-
time communication environment, might gradually seem less paradoxical
than some currently consider. The ways in which young people use their
portable devices for entertainment reasons certifies the evolution of
ubiquitous computing to a deep societal pattern in the near future.

25 Ubiquitous computing (ubicomp) refers to the use of devices as means of
interaction between humans and computers, integrated into everyday objects and
activities. In the course of ordinary activities, someone using ubiquitous computing
engages many computational devices and systems simultaneously, and may not
necessarily even be aware that they are doing so. Young generations use their
smartphones for both blending different activities together and performing them
through these devices exclusively. For instance, a user downloads an mp3 track from
The concern lies in whether this will lead future governments, legislators and other entities of both institutional and executive power to exercise less strict rules in terms of information disclosure, privacy and data protection. Assuming that these authorities will be exercised by the young generations of today (both generation M as well as younger users), it is imperative that current education needs to promote awareness about the potential dangers of unjustified and faulty use of SNSs, and educate children in regards to when and how personal information should be used or made public.

3.2.4. Entertainment and interconnectivity

SNSs allow third-party applications\textsuperscript{26} to operate through their services. An SNS user can sign up for an application and then use it while being logged in. In most cases, the results of his application usage will be posted to his profile or somehow become publicly available to other users. Then, they can comment, join the application or share those results with others. Although this is not harmful in the majority of occasions, it is an indication as to how everything is connected and performs under a chain reaction pattern.

Services with a so far different aim such as YouTube and Blogger have already started being more 'social', while Google\textsuperscript{27} is rumored to have been secretly building their own social networking service. Today’s technologies make a user’s social context portable to all sites, through linkages and the capabilities of synchronizing accounts between the services that users are

\textsuperscript{26} One of the most popular third-party applications in Facebook is FarmVille, a real-time farm simulation game developed by Zynga, available also as an App on the Apple iPhone. The game allows members of Facebook to manage a virtual farm by plowing land, planting, growing and harvesting virtual crops, harvesting trees and bushes, and by raising livestock.

\textsuperscript{27} Google owns Youtube and Orkut, Brazil’s number one social network. In recent months and years they have released products and services that are, at their core, social in nature, such as Buzz and Wave. At the same time, products such as Gmail and the cloud-computing service Google Docs, are inherently about sharing and being social, laying the brand rather socially-focused.
members of. It appears as if every social network, no matter its size, is only part of a larger social networking universe which promises to transform the Web experience. Every click or action performed, depending on the users' synchronization choices within the services he uses, produce a certain interest around a topic. For instance, when a video link to YouTube is posted on a user's Facebook profile, several of his friends will follow the url and watch the video (which can often be exclusively music). In this example, an action leads Facebook users to a media source hosted by a different social networking and media service (YouTube) and can potentially lead to several transaction procedures or linking to other sources of information.

3.2.5. Multiple personalities

Being an active member of any SNS does not necessarily suggest that a user will interact with others in the same way he would during a face-to-face conversation or that the information he provides about himself are accurate and correspond to what he really is about. Oppositely, what seems to be an emerging trend in social networking is the ability to disguise, to present a profile completely irrelevant to one's actual social behavior in order to achieve a more satisfying level of social appreciation and status than what users actually enjoy in their everyday lives and through their family's, friends' or work's social circle. This phenomenon conceals two major risks:

a) Users with problematic social relations and reduced real-life socializing, will instantly turn to social networking, through which they will most likely attempt to present themselves closer to what other people of their age and usually of different gender perceive as attractive and 'cool'. Apparently, the fact that these people prefer to lean on SNSs in order to acquire social acceptance, will eventually deprive them of discovering ways through which their real personality can become more social and attractive. In terms of social evolution, enforcing distance from one's actual personal issues and, instead,

28 Usually, a video clip or audio material on YouTube is accompanied by several links where users can purchase the presented piece of music through iTunes, Beatport or other related webshops.
creating a digital shelter through which he feels safe and important is both worrisome and fraudulent. It becomes an obstacle towards resolving personal matters and it places individuals within an iconic world of a misleading and illusory digital euphoria. Obviously, when a relationship that was created online, results in a real meeting, the true aspects of one's personality will seize to be hidden and might lead to disappointment and frustration.

b) Other users rely heavily on what is presented as actual information about a user on his profile, most of the time without questioning his intentions, accuracy of information etc. It is argued that society can only evolve through fact and honesty. In this case, what others perceive as truthful can be extremely distant from reality and will either lead the individual to disappointment, not to mention incidents of life threatening (murder, rape, violent behavior etc.). Although none of the presented information should be taken for granted and while attempts to inform young people about the risks involved when interacting with strangers are slowly taking place, there is still not an adequate level of awareness about the issue: teenagers often underestimate the possibility of communicating with users that are different than how they appear on their social media profiles.

What can be pointed out as worrisome and likely to cause generalized confusion is how friendship adopts a less serious and also lightweight meaning, through the use of social media. Using the term 'friendship' to describe human connections in a digital environment which involves high possibilities of deception, is both an over-statement and a troublesome application of the meaning itself. Establishing a doubtfully beneficial mean as an acceptable form of interaction and communication between humans could be proven wrong and already makes social analysts rather worried. Deception, as it occurs due to incorrect evaluation of a user's motives and intentions, could potentially lead to a devaluated perspective on human relationships and an overall rejection of fundamental human emotions and values such as love, trust and honesty. It is argued whether there should be stricter and well-defined regulations as to how users should act and interact with others during SNS usage, in order to avoid fraud. Those would require users to provide more personal information, so that they can be traced and
led to justice, in case of showing criminal behavior. On the other hand, specialists argue that social networking is utterly devastating for both the young generations and the social system in its entirety, therefore authorities should find ways to limit or even forbid its use in schools, universities etc. The first case would open an endless conversation on data privacy and the protection of individuals from third parties and the social media themselves, while the second could be an obstacle to the evolution of information technology and, progress in general.

Whichever the outcome however, it appears hard to control a tendency which has already managed to become a way of entertaining, socializing and even living. Social networking is a widely adopted chapter of modern lifestyle, which is not likely to be abandoned, given that its evolution is not only a lifestyle-oriented matter, but is also being exercised by enterprises, organizations and even governmental associations, in order to aid business or civil growth. Nonetheless, social networking is a multi-billion social trend, which affects and influences an unusually large number of people and groups across the world.

3.2.6. The meaning of friendship

According to sociologist Theodore Zeldin, ‘...friendship is an exchanging of self-revelation; when one explains to others what one feels very deeply. With time and trust and talk, you make yourself vulnerable to another.’ By that, he refers to the original meaning attributed to the term, this which is based on emotions such as sympathy, compassion and love and premises such as honesty, truth, mutual understanding, trust and positive reciprocity. He suggests that friendship is a long-time journey that needs to go through various levels of trust and, during the procedure, there has to be an amount of exposure of one's intentions and real feelings. Accordingly, the Roman philosopher Cicero believed that in order to acquire true friendship with another person, one must have complete honesty, truth, and trust. He also believed that any

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expectation of payment for one's noble actions, should be completely indifferent between friends. If a friend is about to perform the wrong action, one should not compromise his morals and permit the friend to commit the action; one should explain what is wrong about the action, and help his friend understand what should be the best option.

Contradicting Cicero’s belief that ‘ignorance is the cause of evil in human relationships’\(^{30}\), the new meaning friendship seems to be receiving through its use in social networking is one of dereliction against important matters of a friend’s health, psychological condition or state of mind.

3.3. Work opportunities & new business models

As an individual, keeping up with friends’ Facebook status changes and Twitter updates can be time consuming although manageable for most users. However, social media activity for the average company is an important medium considering product launches, employees and investors. Companies and NGOs are in demand for personnel to fill new roles in developing and overseeing social media actions. A field that would not have existed a few years ago becomes gradually more popular with companies nationwide, as the social networking trend continues, expands and requires developers, IT engineers, marketers and managers to take up new positions.

At the same time, social networks in combination with the issues that have been brought about due to their eruptive evolution, have led to the creation of numerous organizations set to protect information privacy and to ensure users are safe from digital fraud and criminal behaviour. This results into a large number of new work positions circulating around SNSs. Business-oriented websites such as LinkedIn offer opportunities to users in order to actively search and apply for jobs online through third-party applications, which are often used by recruitment services. Apparently, the social media phenomenon can create new tendencies in employment needs and already attracts engineers, legalists and other professionals.

Finally, either new online business models are introduced or current business structures are enriched and given new directions. Twitter, for example, has deployed two main methods for generating income: the first comes from advertisers promoting their products in the service, which in return provides product and company links to users who perform a search with relevant keywords. With 'Twitter 101' or 'Twitter for Businesses', the service made another profitable opening to business owners, providing the necessary tools for promoting their products or services through Twitter, which according to The Economist, is used by 17% of businesses based in Britain\textsuperscript{31}.

Other uses of SNSs include campaigning or emergency reporting, which involve other organizations and social services such as the police, NGOs or political parties. All these relationships increase the complexity of social media business models and lead the way for new financial connections and commercial exploitation of the arising opportunities.

3.4. Transforming society into digital (digital tribalism)

So far, we have witnessed social networking as a method of entertainment and online communication, which however has caused much discomfort due to either criminal or divergent behaviour by a large number of users. Modern-day life conditions, stretched out working hours and the overall debilitating lack of creating lasting and meaningful relationships, form a new reality, one where individuals externalize their primary needs for socialization in the online world rather than the physical. Although there are multiple risks that can be caused through careless usage of social media, we must realize there are substantial benefits that come with this technology - as with every innovative technology - , if and when their operation obeys specific rules concerning the efficient protection of personal data.

Already, tribal-like behaviour in fashion and the music industry is a critical model for how organisations may see their future in the brave new world of 'digital tribes'. Both fashion and music focus on capturing the hearts, minds and souls of their customers, who willingly become members of a particular trend while spotting other members with similar characteristics through mutual identification of themes, styles, movements, items and abstract constructs with high uniqueness and specificity. In that context, social networking is worth watching as a powerful mechanism to build 21st century tribes. The evolution of modern civilisation with both its isolationism and self-centrism has done much to break down the traditional tribal bonds. Social observers underscore our weakening traditional influences, noting that young people's lack of enthusiasm to join community groups today can be translated as a lack of social responsibility. However, the conclusion that young people don't want to participate does not hold true, as the problem lies in the format and structure of our century's local community participation.

It is suggested that the force of social networking, combined with mobile telephony and handheld access to the Internet, can literally change political, business or social structures rapidly. Moreover, social networking seems to be virtually poised not just to dominate digital networks, but also to redefine and refine them. In essence, what social networking can do is to mobilise a shared interest very quickly. It can consist of a vital mechanism for the communication of new ideas to the world. It already feels as an extension if not a transformation of society and in effect, every digital community becomes a self-constructed transient media channel with unbelievable power. Very different from traditional fixed media channels with massive set up, advertising and maintenance costs as well as regulatory frameworks and strict codes of conduct that limit their appeal, reach and richness, the small communities are already smaller parts of a larger online society.

The perhaps most interesting aspect about digital tribalism is the fact that electronic tribes are not based on religious views, local traditions or common knowledge that has derived from a nation's or closed community's central beliefs. It is actually a much more open and essentially democratized structure that brings together people of largely different morals, beliefs, wants and societal statuses, mainly through their common interests and genuine
passions. Social networking seems as it can be the revolutionary medium for breaking conventional, thought-provoking boundaries between nations, individuals and organizations. Without disregarding the dangers or the fact that SNSs are controlled mediums, social media bring different voices and opinions together and both their union and diversity create an entire new, worldwide society, which is stimulated by rapid opinion-sharing and extrovert expression.

The recent examples of Tunis and Egypt have indisputably divided analysts into two streams of thought. Some believe social media to have significantly aided in spreading the protesters' message to people around the world, in order to seek more supporters and enhance each movement's momentum. They argue that SNSs are just another tool that provides help and spreads information and should not be seen as anything else. Others, however, give as much credit to SNSs as to assume those movements 'digitally-driven', relaying on the acts of communicating and organizing next moves and re-arranging current positions within the revolts. Soon after Wikileaks exposed the amounts of corruption in Tunisia and digital communities in Egypt defined a kick-start date, the public acquired a unique chance to express distrust to their local government. Mobility, blogging and social networking aided the protesters by providing a 24/7 source of information and an asynchronous, yet consistent and frequently updated coordinating medium. It is argued that SNSs have indeed been a method of transferring a real-life social problem to the digital sphere, were mobile telephones communicate global news, immediate local news, peer-to-peer text messages, multimedia video, voice and image, while protesters use blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Wikileaks documents, YouTube and other digital tools to organise, mobilise and report; In these cases, it seems as if an act which would be hard to coordinate, promote and put into effect through traditional social relationships, happens successfully through social networking communication tools. It appears as if an actual societal matter was able to be addressed more

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32 Any reference to the potential of creating a network of unstoppable, pure and consistent data stream, should be researched without underestimating the strong connection between advertisers, corporations, for-profit businesses and SNSs. While those networks provide an alternative way of interaction between users, in cases where powerful entities desire so, SNSs have interfered with user rights, in order to satisfy the former's wishes, completely disregarding the latter's expectations.
efficiently through its digital trigger than its condition in the 'real' world, hence it is not absurd to speak of societal transformation into digital structures.

3.4.1. Social Capital

Generally, the term 'social capital' refers to the resources accumulated through the relationships among people. Social capital is a particularly elastic term with a variety of definitions in multiple fields conceived of as both a cause and an effect. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant, social capital is 'the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition'. The resources from these relationships can differ in form and function based on the relationships themselves.

The internet and social media have brought back the issue into the interest of researchers, since SNSs are already in direct connection with society itself and seem to be affecting the way social capital is increasing or diminishing. With the wide infiltration of social networks, it seems that online interaction may supplement or occasionally replace in-person interaction, mitigating any loss from time spent online, indicating that computer-mediated interactions have a significant effect on community interaction, involvement and enhancement of physical bonds. Eventually, satisfying collective needs and leading both communities and individuals to succeeding in several of their purposes due to online relationships, is already happening with the aid of SNSs. It is argued that SNSs can greatly increase the weak ties one could form and maintain, because the technology is fit to maintaining such ties with minimum costs and maximum ease of use, a proposition

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strongly proposed by Ellison, Steinfeld and Lampe\textsuperscript{35}. Their research suggests that SNSs do not necessarily remove people from their offline world but may be practically used to support relationships and keep people in contact, even when life changes move them away from each other (change of location, work position etc.); in addition to helping student populations, the use of this technology supports a variety of populations, including professional researchers, neighborhood and community members, employees of companies, or others who benefit from maintained ties.

\textbf{Chapter 4} Social threats & protection measures

4.1 Introduction

Regardless of the unquestionable mass effect that social networking has upon society in regards to lifestyle, communication, marketing and social affairs, there have been several issues that raise significant concerns. Starting off from cyberbullying and threatening, to suspicious behaviour and criminal activity, there is a vast number of different occasions, all of which meet SNSs as a starting point. Concurrently with SNS-oriented crimes, social networking can also be used as yet another investigation mechanism to locate suspects and retrieve important clues. The activities of users and the information being posted on these sites have wide-ranging effects on the administration of justice, law enforcement investigation, prosecution and defense. In several examples, investigations initiated by the police, detectives or other bodies is enriched with the addition of research on certain user activities, as those can be traced by their social media webpages. These methods are rather questionable and frequently opposing to worldwide litigation on data privacy and legal rights. In the next paragraphs, we will be mentioning examples of both crime regions in which SNSs have a particular role, as well as of transgression of authority during investigation, monitoring and tracing suspects.

4.2. Social Threats

4.2.1 Murder

In March 2010, student Sofyen Belamouadden was stabbed nine times, punched and kicked after being hunted down by an armed group of no less than twenty teenagers. The motive behind the murderous action was a fight that was caused between students of two different schools. According to
prosecutor Mark Heywood\textsuperscript{36}, the attack on the schoolboy took place in broad daylight in front of hundreds of commuters in Victoria station, right at the heart of London. They were in fact so heavily armed that not even police force would be sufficient to stop them, while the entire operation is said to have been completely organized through Facebook. Jurors heard the night before the death one of the 17-year-olds, who was just 16 at the time, took to Facebook to ‘recruit troops and weapons’, while One boy who was seen on the murder tape wielding a Japanese-style sword with a blade up to 30cm long, had bragged on Facebook the previous night: ‘I will bring my samurai’\textsuperscript{37}.

Another upsetting murder case is this of Nona Belomesoff’s, an Australian 18-year university student. Nona was offered what she thought was a dream job working with the NSW Wildlife Information Rescue and Education Service by a complete stranger, who approached her through Facebook. Inspired by her wish to work with and help animals, she was fascinated by Christopher James Dannevig’s allegations, who faked to be a WIRES boss. Using this fake identity, Dannevig invited her to a supposedly animal protection mission in Campbelltown. Eventually, her body was found in a creek bed near Waminda Reserve about 9.40pm on Friday the 14th of May 2010\textsuperscript{38}.

These two incidents, besides being abominable and hideous, indicate two discrete concerns in regards to what could have been done in order to prevent the unwanted result. In the first case, it is originally questioned why other users took no action to report the threats proclaimed publicly on the Facebook pages that belonged to the teenagers who carried out the murder. The excuse for them being only children is certainly not reasonable enough, as they were mentioning the potential use of weapons in their plan. Even if a


\textsuperscript{37} This is Local London, \textit{Sofyen Belamouadden stabbing at Victoria station planned on Facebook}, 26.01.2011. Source:http://www.thisislocallondon.co.uk/yoursay/readersnews/8812779.NEW_CROSS__Sofyen_Belamouadden_stabbing_at_Victoria_station_planned_on_Facebook/ (retrieved 26.01.2011).

report had been made to the service, it is questioned whether Facebook would have taken action against this incident, or at least try to inform or prevent any action by raising publicity around the matter.

The second case, although having occurred through a well set-up plan and mainly by the use of private messages on Facebook, raises a different worry. Had the student been more aware about the danger and possible risks undertaken when meeting with strangers in desolate places, wouldn’t she have rejected any contact with this person, no matter what he was supposed to be offering? Without suggesting that her action was justified, it is strongly argued that the state, the education system and the SNS itself can be held responsible for not providing adequate informational background to young people in relation to the possibility of life-threatening risks induced by the use of social networking.

### 4.2.2 Suicide

On the 25th of December 2010, Brighton-based Simone Back publicly announced on Facebook that she had taken a lethal overdose after being told that her partner had cheated on her. Her last status update on the service read ‘Took all my pills be dead soon so bye bye every one.’ One of her online friends responded: ‘She ODs\(^\text{39}\) all the time and she lies’ while others contributed to the conversation by criticizing her with comments such as ‘She has a choice and taking pills over a relationship is not a good enough reason’.\(^\text{40}\) Sadly, even though Simone had a total of 1,048 friends on the service, none of them checked up on her and nobody cared to call an ambulance, although it’s a fact that several of her online friends knew exactly where she lived. Tragically, during the whole time she was lying helpless in

\(^{39}\) Abbr.: overdoses.

her room, malicious comments kept being posted on her profile as it took more than seventeen hours for an ambulance to be called.

It is unsettling to think that some effort could have been made to prevent the girl's death, given that her intention was made publicly known, it was not a secretly performed act of self-destruction. Friendship seems to be receiving another meaning than what it should, according to its moral and sentimental attributes, a notion of interest around the daily activities that 'friends' exercise without paying any attention to depressing and bleak affinities, such as this of suicidal tendency or death. In press interviews, Marck Zuckerberg's behaviour almost proves this assumption. He conversates in a way of exchanging data as rapidly and efficiently as possible, rather than as a recreational activity, a position which is well passed on to Facebook's function as well. For the most pessimistic ones, social networking can be seen as a certification of proving relationships to be vague and fading with time as normal and generally acceptable social model.

Nevertheless, since the topic goes beyond friendship and the impact of its obvious shakeout that often results is risking one's life, it is argued that society and its official institutions should focus on increasing awareness in regards to raising concern about such matters. Being apathetic towards death and any implication of fatal action, is an unacceptable behaviour model, which needs to be revisited and put into a regulatory framework.

4.2.3. Sex crimes

There have been various incidents of deception, most of which include sexually - driven acts and some have resulted to murder. Commonly, persons performing imposition are aiming for victims of younger ages and especially children, who are more vulnerable to fraud. The following examples highlight the issue, in their cruelty.

On the 25th of October, 33-year old Peter Chapman kidnapped, raped and strangled Ashleigh Hall, a 17-year old student. Ashleigh's body was found dumped in a field near Sedgefield, County Durham, in October. For the record, according to The Guardian's article, Chapman was already a convicted sexual offender, having been imprisoned from 1996 to 2001 for the
rape of two prostitutes. In order to convince the girl into meeting with him, he created a Facebook profile in which he used photos of a bare-chested, good-looking boy\textsuperscript{41} who apparently looked to be in his late teens. While engaging the girl into conversation and private message exchanging, he came to the conclusion that Hall was generally unwanted by boys of her class and used this assumption as a safe method to invite her to his territories.

The case of David Bradt\textsuperscript{42} is equally horrifying, although none of his victims died. 24-year old New Yorker Bradt, used Facebook over a whole year in order to meet and cyber-flirt with girls under the age of 17. According to the investigation's findings, his approach was simple: he would make 'friends' with his prospective victim and he would then do the same with all her underage female friends. He would then establish communication with them over texts, messages and comments, in order to gain trust and enable them to meet him in person. When he eventually met them, Bradt supplied the victims with alcohol and marijuana before he sexually took advantage of them. Although he was convicted to twelve years of imprisonment after admitting being guilty for at least four of the rape incidents, there is no certainty why there will be no more 'predators' looking for sexual partners of any age through social networking websites. Already, numerous lawsuits which are not receiving wider publicity are being filed against various SNSs, through which similar abuses of the service are reported in each of those cases.

Similar incidents have been reported in the past, coming from both the world of social networking as well as from other online communities (chat services, cyber groups etc.) that enable people who don't know each other to establish communication and eventually meet in real life. However, SNSs bring this matter in the spotlight, given the increasing frequency of incidents as well as the ease with which users can seduce their victims. What we are


witnessing here is also a double-sided issue. Firstly, social rejection or other factors lead users to entrust a stranger with their own lives and to falsely believe that social networking can be a potential solution to their problems of real-life socializing or simply an attractive way to meet others. Secondly, while families are usually aware of their children's socializing problems while also realizing that they are spending hundreds of hours on SNSs, they do nothing to explain the potential dangers to them, in order to prevent a tragic result. Is it lack of knowledge around the matter or simply negligence? Whichever the case, society should not exclusively lean on parents to warn children about the threats. Authorities should take strict measures and adjust enactment accordingly, in order to notify, warn and help users of younger age to realize how risky or life-threatening can the use of SNSs be. It is highly recommended that a worldwide social phenomenon which has already shown its sinister side, should be recognized as potentially harmful and dealt with in seriousness and responsibility.

4.2.4. Cyberstalking

The action of stalking is one of being obsessed with a specific person and is characterized by continuous and persistent attempts to engage this person in communication, regardless of her/his will. There have been countless examples of stalking via telephone, mail or other messaging means throughout the past decades, however cyberstalking is a relatively new term, which basically suggests stalking through electronic means (SNSs, e-mail, sms etc.) and finds wide application in social networking and other online communicative tools. Depending on the stalker’s intentions, the term can extend to other illegal actions such as cyberbullying, cybercrime and fraud. According to Paul Bocij43, ‘cyberstalking’ should be associated with the following factors, as defined by CyberAngels, a highly regarded internet safety organization:

'When identifying cyberstalking “in the field,” and particularly when considering whether to report it to any kind of legal authority, the following features or combination of features can be considered to characterize a true stalking situation: malice, premeditation, repetition, distress, obsession, vendetta, no legitimate purpose, personally directed, disregarded warnings to stop, harassment, and threats.'

4.2.4.1 Cyberbullying

Generally, 'bullying' is an act of repeated aggressive behaviour in order to intentionally hurt a person, physically or mentally. Bullying is characterized by one or more individual(s) behaving in a certain way to gain power over another person.

Cyberbullying derives from the exact same set of actions, although carried out with the use of technology and communication means such as the internet and mobile phones. The term belongs in the field of 'Cyberstalking'. Although research in the field of cyberbullying is still in embryonic levels, what can be held as fact is that it is increasing, especially through SNSs. As we are informed by a 2006 survey:

'About one out of ten youngsters has been involved in frequent cyberbullying: 3.3% exclusively as a victim, 5.0% exclusively as a perpetrator, and 2.6% as both a victim and a perpetrator.'

'The majority of youngsters (63.8%) believe cyberbullying is a ‘big problem’. This figure may reflect either a general assessment of the

44 http://www.cyberangels.org/


issue in the eyes of the youngsters, or it may indicate that they find it a serious problem for those being bullied.

In addition, according to a survey carried out by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL),\textsuperscript{47} one in seven teachers say they have been bullied by pupils and colleagues, indicating that cyberbullying does not only happen to young users and students but can also be initiated by them. In fact, the survey of 539 school and college staff found that of those who had suffered cyberbullying personally, 63\% had received unwelcome emails, 26\% had offensive messages posted about them on social networking sites, and 28\% were sent unwelcome text messages. Most of the reported cyberbullying - 44\% - was done by pupils, but 28\% of staff said a manager or colleague was behind it. The survey also highlighted the effect cyberbullying has on its victims, with 39\% saying their confidence fell, 25\% saying it made them a less effective teacher and 6\% saying they were forced to take sick leave because of resulting illness or stress. Nearly two thirds (62\%) were not aware of any policy against cyberbullying at their school.

SNSs are, as expected, the predominant web areas in which the most offensive, frightening and frequent bullying incidents take place online. The case of Megan Meier is one of the most important events in this field, which happens to be a starting point for new legislation and action towards societal awareness. Soon after 14-year old Megan Taylor Meier from Missouri started a MySpace account, she began receiving messages from Josh Evans, a supposedly 16-year old boy. Although the two never met, they kept exchanging messages through MySpace on a daily basis, while so-called Josh claimed to have just moved from a nearby city, was home schooled and did not use a mobile phone. Behind Josh Evans’ account was no other than 49-year old Lori Drew, mother to one of Megan’s classmates, who was pretending to be someone else and carefully used words in order to make the girl fall in love with her fake online personality. All of a sudden, on October 15, 2006, the tone of the messages changed, with Drew directing threatening

\textsuperscript{47} ATL, Fifteen per cent of teachers have experienced cyberbullying, ATL 2009. Source: http://www.atl.org.uk/media-office/media-archive/cyberbullying-survey.asp (retrieved 06.01.2010).
messages to the girl via the account, in which she accused Meier of being mean to her friends, while also swearing and telling her that she doesn’t want to talk to her anymore. Her last message read ‘Everybody in O’Fallon knows who you are. You are a bad person and everybody hates you. Have a bad rest of your life. The world would be a better place without you.’ Meier’s response, only 20 minutes before hanging herself in her bedroom closet was ‘You’re the kind of boy a girl would kill herself over.’

The follow-up to this tragic story was a sequence of trials and rulings, which caused serious confusion to the involved parts. On May 15, 2008, Lori Drew was indicted by the Grand Jury of the United States District Court for the Central District of California on four separate counts. Thomas O’Brien, U.S. Attorney for the Central District of California, personally oversaw the prosecution of the case. It was alleged that between September 2006 and October 16, 2006, Drew and the rest of the conspirators violated the US Computer Fraud & Abuse Act (CFAA) by intentionally accessing a computer used in interstate commerce "without authorization," in "excess of authorized use," and by using interstate communication to obtain information from the computer in order to inflict emotional distress in violation of 18 U.S.C. §§1030(a)(2)(c)

(a) Whoever—
(2) intentionally accesses a computer without authorization or exceeds authorized access, and thereby obtains—
(C) information from any protected computer;
shall be punished as provided in subsection (c) of this section’

As a result, Counts (2) through (4) allege Drew violated the CFAA by accessing MySpace servers to obtain information regarding Meier and, in order to do so, she violated MySpace’s Terms of Service. Aparrently, the

50 The service’s terms at the time.
legislation on which US justice based their allegations in order to prosecute and punish Drew was inadequate, since it appeared impossible to apply other criminal charges, for instance homicide. As an answer to this and only a month later, the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF)\textsuperscript{51} filed a brief to support Drew’s legal position, according to which the CFAA was not sufficient enough to hold her liable for violating MySpace’s terms of use, as it would violate Due Process\textsuperscript{52}. Mostly being dependant on EFF’s placement, the jury unanimously found Drew not guilty of Counts (2) through (4), although she was found guilty of a misdemeanor violation of the CFAA.

The concerns here are the following:

1) If Drew had been found guilty, would a felony conviction mean that millions of people who violate the terms of an SNS should become criminally liable? This, of course, refers to a large amount of user activity that does not necessarily involve risking one’s life in the way cyberbullying does. In this case, it is also argued that if violating such terms is a crime, then any SNS’s terms of agreement can essentially function as a lawmaker or prosecutor.

2) The above case is argued to have been brought to justice under irrelevant acts of law (CFAA), due to the absence of an existing, directly relevant legislation in regards to electronic bullying. To correct this, Missouri lawmakers finally approved a bill, which made cyber-harassment illegal by removing the Act’s requirement that the communication should be written or over the telephone, in order to cover electronic bullying as well\textsuperscript{53}. In order to limit the broadness of this addition and to provide concrete legislation in regards to cyber-bullying, Representative Linda Sanchez introduced ‘The

\textsuperscript{51} The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) is an international non-profit digital rights advocacy and legal organization based in the United States.

\textsuperscript{52} Due process is the principle by which the government must respect all of the legal rights that are owed to a person according to law. Due process holds the government subservient to the law of the land, protecting individual persons from the state.

Megan Meier Cyberbullying Prevention Act\textsuperscript{54} to Congress on April 2, 2009. If passed, it would hold as criminals those who intend to ‘coerce, intimidate, harass, or cause substantial emotional distress to a person’. It is however worrying whether such legislation can be used by anyone and for almost any reason. It would be able to criminalize any user who expresses himself in an edgier or rude manner, which could indirectly affect other users’ emotions. Whether this is a reasonable step towards confronting SNS bullying effectively or yet another backlash needs to be further explored.

3) According to their statements, Meier's parents described her daughter as a depressive person of low self-esteem, who rarely looked happy. As soon as she established communication with the user impersonated by Drew, she felt attractive and confident and therefore, her family was pleased to recognize that, knowing that this is a result of her daughter’s online relationship with a boy. Especially in occasions where a child suffers from certain psychological issues, it is highly recommended - and keenly highlighted by this specific incident - that parents should be more focused onto the actual problem and educate their children in regards to the dangers that can be caused by online interaction with unknown people.

4.3. Social Risks

4.3.1. Data Privacy

Data privacy refers to the legal and political framework concerning the protection of important, private or sensitive information from unauthorized collection and dissemination. The challenge in data privacy is to be able to perform information sharing, while at the same time protect this information, an issue for which data security and information security design and utilize

software, hardware and human resources. Privacy concerns exist wherever personally identifiable information is collected and stored - in digital form or otherwise. Improper or non-existent disclosure control can be the root cause for privacy issues. The privacy of information is an important matter: the results of violating sensitive data range from being exposed to unwanted advertising and electronic harassment to money theft, stalking, blackmailing and identity theft.

At this point, we should identify three main trigger events of data privacy violations:

1) *Excessive information disclosure by SNS users*, in the sense that users often provide personal information at a larger degree than what they should in order to be protected from malicious behaviour. This behaviour can be identified in either the user’s own level of awareness concerning data privacy, in the level to which SNSs themselves occasionally encourage users to reveal sensitive information or finally, in both.

2) *Precarious SNS terms of use and agreements*, meaning that certain parts of the agreement between SNS users and the services are shadowy and, therefore, in the event of a violation, it is doubted whether users can be truly safe.

3) *Third-party information collection and aggregation*, referring to external organizations whose applications run on SNS and can potentially violate the privacy of information by collecting and sharing personal user data.

A significant problem of modern SNSs is the amount to which they encourage users to spread personal information to others through their profiles. Facebook as well as Myspace have received severe criticism on this issue, with several data protection organizations noticing that those services highlight sensitive information such as full name and birthday, the two being
still quite regular to be asked during signup. Although users are able to change the parameters they desire to expose publicly or maintain private afterwards, only a few of them will actually alter their initial settings once they have completed registration. Therefore, with the SNSs not pinpointing that users shouldn't be disclosing personally identifiable information, the signup procedure can easily invoke a potential violation. While there have been numerous recommendations, there doesn't seem to be a step-by-step information projected to new users during registration, in order to explain which fields should be necessarily completed and which could be left hidden, according to potential risks and threats of information disclosure.

On the 15th of February 2009, a user noticed that Facebook's recent changes in its terms of use could be harmful to the safety of personal information. The clause which would allow the service to use content in any way and for as much as time as Facebook would desire, read:

'You may remove your User Content from the Site at any time. If you choose to remove your User Content, the license granted above will automatically expire, however you acknowledge that the Company may retain archived copies of your User Content.'

Followed by numerous users voicing opinions against the new changes to the terms of use, led to an Internet-wide debate over the ownership of content. The Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) prepared a formal complaint with the Federal Trade Commission. In order to calm criticism, Facebook returned to its original terms of use, with the service mentioning that despite this retreat, the service would be developing new terms in order to address the paradox. Facebook's CEO, Mark Zuckerberg soon invited users to join a group entitled 'Facebook Bill of Rights and Responsibilities', in order to gather insightful opinions and recommendations, hence introducing a more democratic SNS system. Despite this move, Facebook was severely


56 Source: http://epic.org/
criticized in a report by a group of Cambridge University scientists, who underlined that problems remain in the new terms while the 'democratic' process around them is disingenuous:

'Facebook's new terms represent a genuine step forward with improved clarity in certain areas, but an even larger step backward in using democracy theatre to cover the fact that Facebook is a business and its ultimate accountability is to its shareholders. The outrage over the previous terms was real and it was justified, social networks mean a great deal to their users, and they want to have a real say. Since Facebook appears unwilling to actually do so, though, we would be remiss to allow them to deflect user's anger with flowery language and a sham democratic process. For this reason we cannot support the new terms.'

Again in 2009, Facebook announced that some personal information, including names, profile pictures, city, networks, and friend lists, would be made publicly available. Users who did not wish this information to be shared with the wider web would have to 'opt out' of the new system by adjusting their privacy settings to make this information private again. But what would happen if a user did not log in to his account in time to read Facebook's notification or if it was not made absolutely clear what he would have to do in order to decline his information going public? In simple terms, the user would unwillingly agree with Facebook's initiative to publicize his personal information, therefore allowing a violation to befall through the service itself.

Soon afterwards, the SNS confirmed that it would no longer bind third-party partner websites to delete Facebook user data within 24 hours, and announced closer links with some companies, such as Yelp and Microsoft, which would allow Facebook users to sign in to Microsoft's new collaborative cloud-based editing software, Docs.com, through the SNS. In

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response, The Article 29 Working Party\textsuperscript{58}, wrote a letter to Facebook, saying recent changes that made previously private information publicly viewable by default were ‘unacceptable’.

According to the letter,

‘any further access, such as by search engines, should be an explicit choice of the user,” continuing ‘It is unacceptable that [Facebook] fundamentally changed the default settings on its social-networking platform to the detriment of users.’

‘Providers of social networking sites should be aware that it would be a breach of data protection law if they use personal data of other individuals contained in a user profile for commercial purposes if these other individuals have not given their free and unambiguous consent.’\textsuperscript{59}

More criticism against the service arose when a large violation was inferred: in July of 2010, personal information of 100 million Facebook users had been collected and published online by Ron Bowes, a security consultant who tried to prove the service's privacy technology to be easily violated. Despite Facebook’s response that the information in the list was already freely available online, the reaction was big. Users, data privacy defending organizations and legal entities convicted the incident with the example of the NGO 'Privacy International' mentioning that 'This highlights the argument for a higher level of privacy and proves the case for default nondisclosure. There are going to be a lot of angry and concerned people right now who will be wondering who has their data and what they should do.'\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{58} The Article 29 Working Party consists of a representative from the data protection authority of each EU Member State (HDPA in Greece), the European Data Protection Supervisor and the European Commission. Its name results from the European Directive 95/46/EC and was originally launched in 1996.


100 million user profiles were made publicly available through torrent websites such as 'The PirateBay'.

While there have already been privacy issues occurring from the relationship between SNSs and users, additional worries emerge in the case of third-party applications. An interesting study\textsuperscript{61} reveals that Facebook is particularly vulnerable to privacy attacks through the advertising possibilities that the service provides to users and organizations: Aleksandra Korolova, a researcher in Stanford University, gave proof that an attacker can identify the age and sexual orientation of specific Facebook users by tailoring certain advertisements to their profiles. By using public sources to collect information such as age, gender, location and interests of a user and, consequently, placing an ad targeted to people of those characteristics, the attacked would be able to use the technique to obtain other non-public information. According to her assumption, if the service indicated to the advertiser that the ad had been displayed to someone, he would know his sexual orientation, simply because nobody else would have a match for those attributes. While Facebook made efforts to apply fixes to the matters highlighted by Ms. Korolova's paper, she mentioned that there is still a way of circumventing the protective mechanisms.

In a similar survey\textsuperscript{62}, Microsoft researchers in India and the Max Planck Institute for Software Systems in Germany found that it was possible for an advertiser to obtain the stated sexual preference of Facebook users. They created six identical profiles, with only one supposedly belonging to a homosexual man. As expected, this profile received gay-targeted advertisements for places such as gay bars and other events corresponding to the disclosed sexual orientation, while none of the other users received any homosexual-oriented ad. Interestingly, there appeared ads which were only shown to the homosexual user but had nothing to do with gay content (e.g. a nursing degree in Florida). As soon as this user would click on the ad and would be taken to the advertiser’s website, the latter would be provided with his sexual preferences and a unique identifier for him. This indicates another important flaw in Facebook’s privacy protection measures.

Finally, while legislation, IT engineers, social networks and users struggle for a less fraudulent user experience on social media, there are non-third-party aggregators who offer services to SNS users and can infringe privacy. Recently, a Brazilian company by the name ‘Power.com’, which allows its users to connect to a number of social networking sites at the same time, was sued by Facebook, claiming that the service violates laws on copyright and trademarks while also exercising computer misuse.\textsuperscript{63} Their accusations were based on the fact that the external service asks users to give away their SNS username and password login credentials for a series of social media such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn; according to Facebook’s terms of use, users should not give away their passwords to other services or in any other case except when log in to their account on the service. Facebook own a platform, through which third parties can connect with users and which, after being evaluated, can be integrated without suggesting them having any access to user login credentials. In trial, it was alleged that Power.com accessed Facebook’s website and made unauthorized copies of it or created


\textsuperscript{63} *Facebook, Inc. v. Power Ventures, Inc.*, Case Number C 08-5780 JF (RS). Source: ipspotlight.files.wordpress.com/2009/05/facebook-v-power-ventures.pdf (retrieved 02.03.2010).
derivative works derived from the SNS, hence violating §106 of the DMCA. The service is still operating as before with Twitter, LinkedIn, Orkut and Hi5 users.

4.3.2. Electronic corporate spying

Cyber spying typically involves the use of illegally gained access to secret and classified information or illegally gained control of individual computers or whole networks for an unethical and illegal strategic advantage as well as for psychological, political and physical subversion activities or sabotage. In the case of corporations employing engineers to perform attacks, the targets are users (e.g. employees of large multinationals) from whom sensitive data is illegally extracted in order to harm the entire organization or to acquire information of corporate interest.

SNSs can be a sufficient medium through which espionage can take place, in the form of acquiring access to insiders through their social networking profiles. Once access has been established, methods such as blackmailing employees or collecting information from a vast array of individuals that work for a specific organization can later be used for obtaining sensitive customer information and even to access physical assets. The most recent example comes from Germany, where most of the thirty blue chip firms on the DAX financial index like VolksWagen and Porsche have blocked SNS access for fear of espionage. The main concern, apart from employee productivity and efficiency, is a potential giveaway of corporate secrets. The construction materials firm Heidelberg Cement has also stopped employees using the social networking site Facebook and micro-blogging site Twitter, while carmaker Volkswagen said 'various social networks' had been banned. Computer experts identify social SNSs as posing the main threat to company IT systems. 'Before it was email that was the favourite gateway for

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64 Violation under '1. the right to reproduce (copy), 2. the right to create derivative works of the original work', as described in Section 106 of the Digital Millenium Copyright Act (DMCA).
Today it is social networks, said representative of anti-virus provider Kaspersky Christian Fuchs.

In the UK, measurements against the use of SNSs in work, increase. With London being the largest network on Facebook with more than 882,000 of the UK's 3.2 million users, already in 2007 Transport for London (TFL) became the largest employer to ban Facebook access after concerns that its staff was spending too much time on the social networking website. LloydsTSB, Credit Suisse, the Metropolitan Police and Camden council are among the employers that have blocked the site in the UK.

The complete banning of social communication tool raises questions in regards to its democratic use (or abuse). Several people use Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn as ways of communication, which in many ways can be associated to their job or to promote the business for which they're working. If banning social media is widely adopted, then human rights concerns are expected to become of more significance. At the same time, organizations are worried that social media at work will reduce their employees' productivity, leading to reduced rate of growth and reflex.

### 4.3.3. Surveillance through SNSs

The surveillance methods introduced with the increasing use of social media come under 'sousveillance', a term coined by Steve Mann. The term

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66 Approximate estimation by: http://www.checkfacebook.com/


refers to the recording of an activity from the participant's perspective, typically by way of small portable or wearable recording devices that often stream continuous live video to the Internet. It denotes bringing the means of observation down to human level, either physically (mounting cameras on people rather than on buildings), or hierarchically (ordinary people doing the watching, rather than higher authorities or architectures doing the watching) and finds significant exercise in SNSs. It suggests recording of events in such a way that surveillance is democratized and transferred from the government to the community.69

Increasingly more investigations are taking place through SNSs alongside 'traditional' legal research. Police, private detectives, university and legal officials often explore information available on these websites in order to prosecute specific users, while in some cases, the available content has been used in court to determine significant decisions. In most cases, legal experts agree that using public content that users have uploaded on their social media webpage is a legit and fair way to perform investigations. Although SNS investigation has occasionally produced practical results in prosecuting and leading criminals to justice, the fact that both authorities and non-officials can perform such search on social media is worrying.

There are also two additional critical categories in which surveillance through social media receives an immediate effect on society and communication between different user categories, as these occur by the power granted to each of those: teachers and students, employers and employees.

In the first case, there are examples of school or university students having been punished because of 'inappropriate' behaviour, a conclusion to which their teachers came to after seeing photographs of certain events on their Facebook pages. At the same time, course leaders and university rectors often search for additional information about the applicants through their SNS pages. Students often feel comfortable posting questionable photographs or including candid information on their Facebook profiles because a user's

69 Μήτρου, Λίλιαν, Το διαδίκτυο ως χώρος δημοσιογραφίας, ελευθερίας και ασυδοσίας - προοπτικά και προσβολή του ιδιωτικού βίου, Ιδιωτικότητα στο Web 2.0. (εισήγηση που παρουσιάστηκε στο e-THEMIS συμπληρωμένη με βιβλιογραφικές αναφορές).
page can usually only be accessed by a 'friend' or schoolmate, as they falsely believe.

In the second case, many employers examine their employees' social media pages aiming to learn more about their personal life and enhance their positive or negative opinion about them. Therefore, job relationships exceed their regular environment and blend with personal liking as well as impression, as those in power draw conclusions by viewing user pages. Employers will also attempt to learn more about job applicants, hoping to aid their decision whether to accept or reject a person, basing their belief on both credentials as well as subjective opinion.

Most users will argue that it should be forbidden for their employers, teachers or others who have an influence on their job, to be able to search elements of their personal life and use those against them. Privacy law is where users rely on when referencing surveillance, however many argue that they shouldn't recognize these acts as unfair, since every user can select to either make his profile and personal information publicly available or private. However, there can be held no guarantee that an employer will not create a 'fake' profile pretending to be somebody else, which he will then use to make 'friends' with his employees in order to circumvent their online privacy and learn about their social and personal activities.

Moreover, several social media either do not provide users with the option to own a private profile, or make it a non-default option to sign up for a private page. Even if users are careful and selective in regards to who can browse their profile, what kind of information are they disclosing as well as who they choose to add as an online 'friend', it is still impossible to control every content that is referential to them, not being posted by themselves necessarily. In Facebook, users can approve or reject being 'tagged' in photographs, video or other audiovisual material, however any reference made to them that does not establish a direct connection between them and their online profile is extremely hard to trace, unless they spend most of their social media time in what is called 'vanity search'.

70 Μήτσου, Λίλιαν, Το διαδίκτυο ως χώρος δημιουργίας, ελευθερίας και ασυδοσίας - προστασία και προσβολή του ιδιωτικού βίου, Ιδιωτικότητα στο Web 2.0. (εισήγηση που παρουσιάστηκε στο e-THEMIS συμπληρωμένη με βιβλιογραφικές αναφορές).
Indeed, when the purpose of social networking is distorted in favour of satisfying control over others and reinforcement of authority, it is argued that injustice is most likely to occur. In short, these actions suggest serious, personality and privacy violations and can eventually introduce discriminations between working individuals, candidates and other co-workers or collaborators. We realize that a large amount of users such as university administrators, professors, police officers, coaches and alumni are now using social networking as a surveillance tool across the world.

The concerns here are many: should employers investigate the personal life of their employees or interviewees? Apparently not, if this action contradicts liberty of expression and the right to live one's life differently than what is perceived as 'socially acceptable' within work. The same applies to university students. Users can operate private profiles, of course, in which they choose which information goes public. Despite any arguments however, users ought to be careful with both the opinions expressed as well as their public content, since sousveillance through SNSs is an increasingly widespread phenomenon and a potential threat to democracy and to fundamental human rights.

4.4. Current legislation, legal risks and controversy

At this point, we have to define the following terms, in order to understand the principles surrounding the regulatory framework in regards to social media.

**Personal data** or **Personally identifiable information (PII):** information that can be used to uniquely identify, contact, or locate a single person or that can be used with other sources to uniquely identify a single individual. The abbreviation PII is widely accepted, but the phrase it abbreviates has four common variants based on *personal, personally, identifiable, and identifying.* Not all are equivalent, and for legal purposes the effective definitions vary depending on the jurisdiction and the purposes for which the term is being used. According to Article 2 (a) of the EU Directive 95/46/EC, which uses the
term ‘personal data’ to describe PII:

‘personal data’ shall mean any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person (‘data subject’); an identifiable person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identification number or to one or more factors specific to his physical, physiological, mental, economic, cultural or social identity;\(^{71}\)

**Processor and third party service:** As defined in the EU Directive in paragraphs (e) and (f) of Article 2, respectively:

‘processor’ shall mean a natural or legal person, public authority, agency or any other body which processes personal data on behalf of the controller;

‘third party’ shall mean any natural or legal person, public authority, agency or any other body other than the data subject, the controller, the processor and the persons who, under the direct authority of the controller or the processor, are authorized to process the data;

To understand how the above relate to social networking, SNSs are the main processors of user data (user being referred to as ‘controller’ here). Third parties are services which can also process user information but only under the authority of either SNS users or SNSs themselves. Of course, this condition is not always satisfied, therefore the definition of third parties should be extended to services that operate without authorization of the social media services or user permission, although they collect, process and store user information for various reasons.

The EU Directive provides legislation which is applied by all member states and implemented by the respective data privacy authority of each of

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the EU member states\textsuperscript{72}. It contains a number of key principles with which member states must comply. Anyone processing personal data must comply with the eight enforceable principles of good practice, which state that the data must be:

1. Fairly and lawfully processed.
2. Processed for limited purposes.
3. Adequate, relevant and not excessive.
4. Accurate.
5. Kept no longer than necessary.
6. Processed in accordance with the data subject’s rights.
7. Secure.
8. Transferred only to countries with adequate protection.

The above apply exclusively with the consent\textsuperscript{73} of the user (controller), whether written or agreed during SNS signup. User permission should be a result of knowledge and choice. This statement contradicts the current function of SNSs, where: a) users seldom read and fully understand the terms of use, b) it is impossible for users to know how personal information is used, given that the services themselves often have limited or zero knowledge regarding how third parties use data. (8) refers to the usage of personal information in countries where different regulations apply. The fact that services such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, LinkedIn etc. require information distribution throughout different countries, in combination with the major differences between EU and U.S. law has been a matter of debate between legal analysts. To address this issue, the U.S. Department of Commerce in consultation with the EU, developed the 'Safe Harbor', a streamlined process for US companies to comply with the EU Directive 95/46/EC on the protection of personal data. Intended for organizations within the EU or the US that store customer data, the Safe Harbor Principles

\textsuperscript{72}Hellenic Data Protection Authority (DPA) in Greece. Source: http://www.dpa.gr

\textsuperscript{73}Article 8 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2007 / C 303/01) recognizes the human right to protection of personal data, while also, the U.S. Supreme Court has recognized that privacy refers to the human right to control the information that are associated with a person.
are designed to prevent accidental information disclosure or loss. US companies can opt into the program as long as they adhere to the 7 principles outlined in the Directive. While several SNSs comply, The EU-US Safe Harbor has been the subject of significant criticism regarding compliance and enforcement, by the European Commission and the 29 Working Party. In various cases, U.S. companies misinterpret several definitions of the EU Directive and perform tasks, which are justified by US law, however proven illegal by the European legislation.

In every case of law infringement, whether this refers to cyberbullying, identity theft, face matching, cyberprofiling etc. it appears that the origin is data privacy violation.

The European Directive 95/46, a legal act which aims both to describe the flow of information and to control the collection and processing of personal data, proves now difficult to implement in Web 2.0 social networking environments. The Directive's broad definition of personal data was given before the internet moved on to adopting Web 2.0 applications and, hence, does not cover the quality and type of information that is made available through social networking, nor does it provide sufficient protection to users whose personal data is being processed in a third country.

On the other hand, the US Parliament avoids to provide specific legislation in regards to limiting the collection, processing and distribution of personal information, as such an action would contradict the powerful economic interests of US companies that offer free online services and collect personal data for profit. It is made clear that, more than ever, it is necessary to facilitate a universal legal approach to data and user protection.

4.5. Protective Measures

In October 2007, ENISA (European Network and Information Security

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24 Only recently did the U.S. suggest a relevant legislation: U.S. Senate had proposed the Privacy Act of 2005, which attempted to strictly limit the display, purchase, or sale of PII without the person's consent. It never came into effect. There are however several legal acts in some U.S. States such as California (California Online Privacy Protection Act [OPPA] of 2003).
Agency) presented a report on accessing social networks over mobile phones, entitled 'Security Issues and Recommendations for Online Social Networks'\(^{75}\). The report points out the risks and threats of social networking services and, among others, recommends an education and awareness raising programme to highlight the problems, avoidance techniques, and a systematic review and reinterpretation of the regulations governing data protection. In the following paragraphs, we will refer to those recommendations while we will also present issues that should be taken into consideration by SNSs, third parties, governments and data privacy protection organizations.

4.4.1. Cyberstalking/bullying measures

More than 25,000 children in 25 EU countries participated in the survey 'EU Kids Online'\(^{76}\), led by the London School of Economics, coordinated by Professor of Media and Communication Sonia Livingstone, and funded by the Community program 'Safer Internet'. The study revealed that while 70% of the parents talk to their children about their online activity in social media and over half of them offer practical advice and support, relatively few use the available electronic 'tools' to help them. In Greece, the results are disappointing, with only 24% of parents discussing with their children about these issues. Research shows that most children do not get upset or annoyed by what they encounter on the internet. Although children report that cyberbullying is relatively uncommon, those that have been bullied were more likely to report that this experience was deeply unsettling. However, Greece and other Southeast European countries have the lowest percentage in the phenomenon of bullying (17% or over on the internet or in real life).


\(^{76}\) EU Kids Online, Enhancing Knowledge Regarding European Children’s Use, Risk and Safety Online, London School of Economics. Source: http://www2.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/Home.aspx (retrieved 23.01.11).
It is not questionable whether there should be strict punishment over cyberbullying. National, European and worldwide legislation should provide a complete and up-to-date regulatory framework in regards to how those offenses can be instantly recognized and prevented, as well as effectively punished and eventually reduced to a minimum. The application as well as the content of legislation however should not be exercised in hysterical\textsuperscript{77} and unreasonably justified manners.

Especially in the case of children and youngsters receiving a cyberbullying attack, parents and educators are key factors in preventing further damage and in order to avoid tragic events of the past. Some of the things they should be instructing children to do is to delete suspicious email messages, to learn how to use panic buttons, to familiarize themselves with communication blocking technology and filters, as well as to discuss about any notion of cyberbullying with those that can offer help. Furthermore, children’s online time at home should be supervised without giving them the sense of patrolling or that they are performing a bad action, something that can be achieved by placing the computer in a common area of the house (living room, kitchen). Additionally, schools should provide information about the issue to the students and should also explain to them how local communities and organizations dealing with the subject can be a good referential source, in combination with their family and tutors.

We realize that a critical parameter is to increase awareness through every possible means and to create more resources and helping points in order to reinforce and protect users from being bullied online. Already,

\textsuperscript{77} Katherine Evans, a senior at Pembroke Pines Charter High disliked her English teacher. To vent her frustrations, she logged onto Facebook and started typing negative comments about her. Two months later, Evans - an honours student with no disciplinary problems - was suspended for three days for cyberbullying and disruptive behavior, pulled out of her Advanced Placement classes and 'forced into lesser-weighted honors classes,’ according to a federal lawsuit filed on her behalf this week by the American Civil Liberties Union. This is a typical example of applying force onto a minor issue, compared to others which involve sexual harassment, rape, murder or suicide. Source: \textit{Student sues following suspension for allegedly cyberbullying teacher}, The Guardian, 10.12.2008. http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2008/dec/10/facebook-usa-florida-suspension-cyberbullying (retrieved 28.12.2010).
various campaigns, ran by several non-governmental organizations\textsuperscript{78}, are in effect and can perform both as advisory institutions as well as mechanisms through which users can report cyberbullying incidents to the police. Additionally, a number of businesses and organizations are in coalition to provide awareness, protection and recourse for the escalating problem. Some of them (including websites such as YouTube) aim to inform and provide measures to avoid as well as effectively terminate cyberbullying and cyberharassment.

On the technical side, services should provide efficient mechanisms for detecting and reporting cyberbullying attempts. Several brands are addressing the problem and have developed ways to help parents combat cyberbullying. In 2008, the company Vanden unveiled a tool that allows children to instantly notify selected adults when they are bullied or harassed online. CyberBully Alert also documents the threatening message by saving a screen shot of the child’s computer when the child triggers an alert. Recently, Facebook announced that it will allow a ‘panic button’\textsuperscript{79} application on its social networking site. The button application, which was originally resisted by the service, will report abuse to the UK Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre\textsuperscript{80} (CEOP) and Facebook. This idea, which is already active in several SNSs such as MySpace and Bebo was suggested and promoted by CEOP, the government law enforcement agency, which is tasked with tracking down online sex offenders.

Finally, SNSs should provide clear and explanatory terms of use as well as sufficient technical capabilities of tracing offenders, without violating data privacy laws. Specifically for this reason, there has to be a well defined

\textsuperscript{78} NGOs include the Protégeles, Pantallas Amigas, Foundation Alia2, the non-profit initiative Actúa Contra el Ciberacoso, the National Communications Technology Institute (INTECO), the Agency of Internet quality, the Agencia Española de Protección de Datos, the Oficina de Seguridad del Internauta, the Spanish Internet users' Association, the Internauts' Association, the Spanish Association of Mothers and Parents Internauts, the Plan de Prevención del Ciberacoso y Promoción de la Navegación Segura en Centro Escolares, the portal Viveinternet, and the UK's Act Against Bullying.


\textsuperscript{80} http://www.ceop.police.uk/
framework that would keep conflicts between data privacy and suspect tracing to a minimum.

4.4.2. Raising awareness

As described in the previous chapter, implementing educational programs in schools to explain to children the negative and positive aspects of social networking is a fundamental way to inform and protect. However, those campaigns should not be restricted merely to providing information in regards to protection from criminal intentions but should also address data privacy matters and help young users understand the importance of protecting personally identifiable information. Parents should also receive relevant education concerning the ways in which they can protect their children; they are expected to look carefully at the pictures and video material that their children are posting on SNSs and identify if there is more information in this content than what was intended, concerning their hobbies and interests. With all certainty, they should not be scolding their children, instead they should be exposing the dangers with examples and without exercising behaviours of strict discipline, as the results could easily be worse. They should also be aware of technical measures that they could apply to their home-based computer, without implying any banning of social network use.

At the same time, users of all ages and social backgrounds should be properly informed about the potential threats that occur from negligent use of social media. They need to understand the key role of third parties and how their data can be violated in order to satisfy marketing, business and financial needs, external to their own pursuits while using social media for entertainment, socializing and community participation. Therefore, awareness-raising campaigns should not be restricted to schools but should also extend to universities and working environments, carefully avoiding to frighten users but to constructively explain how social media, if used with caution, can be a very effective and qualitative socializing medium. The purpose is to support SNS usage not to prevent it; this can only happen if
users familiarize themselves with terms such as 'identity theft', 'image recognition', '3rd party aggregation', 'cyberstalking' etc.

SNSs should also confer their terms of agreement through user-friendly community guidelines rather than ‘terms and conditions’, which are usually perceived as intimidating and uninteresting. Accessible language should be used so that users can easily understand the rules of the service – the clearer the guidelines, the more likely users are to abide by them. Also, it is argued that during registration, services should give detailed information about the fields that users need to fill in, through big-sized fonts, friendly interfaces and in conspicuous regions of the webpage. This information should explain both the dangers and/or benefits of providing certain information, according to the current legislation. Software developers can provide significant aid in this direction, by encouraging security-conscious development practices and by improving corporate policy towards social networking.

4.4.3. Legislation

The current legislation has proven insufficient to cover every aspect of the emerging risks of SNSs. This appears to be a worldwide problem and the fact that law indicates major differences between Europe and the US, it holds even harder to target the problems via an international approach.

In order to overcome those issues, legislation (and especially data privacy law) should be revisited, re-evaluated and, when necessary, revised by lawmakers and governmental bodies. To succeed in this area, the legal position of SNSs, third-party applications and users should be clear and discrete, with specific legal penalties in the case of abuse and violation of personal information. For example, there have been incidents where security breaches originating from third parties, could not be resolved due to unclear legislation concerning the responsibility of each part, including the user who has been affected by an attack. The regulatory framework needs to provide data protection authorities with the ability to intervene in threatening situations. To achieve this, when and in which cases should SNSs or other
bodies interfere with user content that implies infringement, should be well defined. Additionally, image and video tagging, further processing of user profiles by third parties or the SNS itself, the definite deletion of a user's profile and any association to it based on the user's preferences, as well as other issues should be clarified through laws and regulations. To clarify the roles and procedures taking place in social media, transparency should be a key determinant for the harmonic evolution of social networking. To allow transparency, SNS practices need to respect the existing data protection legislation and allow for transparency in the purposes for which data is collected, processed and distributed. Users should be notified of every possible use of their information during signup and use of a particular service as well as in concern with the duration of publicly available information after deletion or deactivation of their profile (for which SNSs should explain to users the differences between the two).

4.4.4. Privacy Control

First of all, the default settings provided by SNSs during new user signup, should prompt users to disclose only the necessary information, avoiding any recommendations or implications to reveal personally identifiable data. If users desire to change those and add more information about themselves afterwards, it should be held their responsibility, only as long as the service has clarified and explained the potential risks and dangers of information disclosure. Nevertheless, it should be questioned whether several types of information should be completely excluded from being publicly available, without suggesting any violation of human rights, an issue that needs to be further explored in the coming years.

Secondly, users should be able to perform any privacy changes in their profile settings as easily as they can post comments, follow other users or upload pictures and media content. Every possible option in adjusting privacy, service notifications and to who is able to view the content on their page, should be given to users during their SNS membership. Regardless of any notification settings that users may have selected, it is vital that they can accept or reject any content in which they are being tagged (for example, by
default in Facebook, when a user is added by another user to a group, he is not able to exclude himself from the group until he logs in to his account and chooses to cancel membership).

Additionally, suspicious online activity should be both easy to report and trace. To achieve this, information systems and dynamic policies for handling any illegal actions that oppose terms and conditions as well as legislation, should be built into the design of the application.

When members report spam, abuse, offense or criminal behaviour, there should be an immediate, effective internal mechanism to deal with these reports. Therefore, there has to be a well-documented procedure that will separate fake reports from justified user concerns. If no significant action is taken when users report abuse, they will most likely lose faith in this procedure and will eventually stop bothering about notifying SNSs of any suspicious behaviour.

4.4.5. Technical measures

There are many underground forums selling personal information. With personal information being mined and stored until an interested party pays to obtain it, this information is then used to acquire birth certificates, passports or other documentation required to fake an identity in the real world. Furthermore, email addresses that come from social networks can be also entered into databases that are later used for spam campaigns. These can then be further categorized to improve the impact of the campaign; race, age, country and other factors can be used as filters in such a database so that its market price is higher than just any normal database of email addresses. Moreover, targeted campaigns known as spear phishing use emails as sender addresses since using a known contact from a social media networking site’s friends list adds credibility to the malicious email. This in turn increases the chances of a successful attack.

With a large amount of opaque procedures taking place, for which users are completely ignorant, it is strongly suggested that authentication techniques during signup, adding friends and posting comments should be well defined, secure and hard to crack. When MySpace was still the most
popular SNS, various services (FriendBlaster, FriendAdder etc.) were made available to users of the service, through which they could send massive comments, request friendship to large amounts of users. To do so however, they had to insert their username and password to the third party, which would then redirect them to their MySpace page and would use an algorithm to produce massive requests. While the service used captchas to ensure that users would not be spamming requests, the problems were mainly two: captchas would not appear every time a request was made, since that would come into direct conflict with users who did not perform massive requesting while also it was impossible to ensure that personal information entered in those third-party applications was not stored in external databases and processed by others for marketing or other unauthorized purposes. While the newest modifications in SNSs have provided ways to block access to their services through unauthorized external applications, new third parties are constantly being created to satisfy the needs of users who aim to increase their friends list fast, or businesses who pursue wide infiltration to SNS users. To resolve these matters, automated filters and algorithms that identify and block any inbound third party connection should be consistent and effective. SNSs should deploy technical measures which are hard to circumvent and leave little space for security breaches.

There are also issues regarding the domain names of SNSs. To give an example, if a user types in his internet browser 'www.youtune.com' instead of 'www.youtube.com', which is the correct domain for the YouTube service, he is taken to the following screen:
There, he is prompted to enter his mobile phone, e-mail and full name in order to join a competition for one of the ‘gifts’ shown in the picture. A very common mistake resulting from incautious typing leads users into a page that resembles the one they were looking for, although belonging to a totally different service of an unknown purpose. In other cases, users can be directed to a webpage that looks identical to the SNS and offers a login dialog box, in which users are prompted to enter their username and password. Those services will then have complete access to user profiles and can sell important information to others. It is strongly suggested that large social networks do all the necessary efforts to acquire domain names that resemble the originals and have a high possibility of being typed in by rushing users out of mistake.

Finally, SNSs should only allow third parties which meet the necessary requirements to be hosted by their services. There are numerous examples of authorized third-party applications running on social media platforms without having provided detailed information and proof in regards to how personal information is used. In reference to external, non-compliant third applications, special notice has to be taken concerning services that offer unification capabilities between social networking profiles. Measures have to be implemented, in order to prevent gathering of user information from different online sources in one single, unified profile, which can be made accessible by various offenders. It is strongly suggested that effective decentralization of social networking should happen to protect users from malicious data privacy violations.

4.6. How can users protect themselves

In general, there is a number of rules that SNS users should always be aware of, in order to avoid unwanted results and know their rights in each case. The following should provide a brief but essential guideline to those who actively converse through SNS.

Firstly, discretion is an important factor, therefore it is strongly advised that users never type anything into a profile page, bulletin board, instant
message or other type of online electronic form that will expose them to unwanted visitors or enhance the possibility of identity theft or malicious threats. This includes personal and business names and addresses, phone numbers, job titles, birth dates, schedule details, daily routines and business or family information. It is considerably better to communicate in generalities than to reveal information that unscrupulous individuals may someday use maliciously.

Secondly, no matter how cyber-educated one feels, users have to be skeptical. Skepticism should be applied in every case of communication with others, since people on the Internet are not always who they seem to be. Until users can independently verify someone's identity, they should never reveal personal, business or financial information. Moreover, since SNSs are full of useful business information, as well as substantial amounts of useless disinformation, it is well recommended to treat anything one sees online (stock tips, advance news, personnel gossip and so on) with a high degree of skepticism. It is more than likely that some people will lie in order to boost their own agenda, while others will spout unsubstantiated information out of stupidity or sheer ignorance.

Additionally, users have to be careful when expressing their opinions publicly as those can be used against them in various ways. Therefore, SNS users should consider avoiding outrageous claims, slander, obscenity and insults and, in some cases, the more energetic some opinions are the more possible it is for stalkers to be interested in the user. This should not imply that users have to be over-moderate in their thoughts, as expressed on social media. When doing so however, they should be careful in regards to the information they have chosen to make available to others and make sure that the possibilities to receive harm are extremely low.

Finally, although the majority of users prefers to skip these parts when joining or using an SNS, it is very important that they read and understand the privacy policies and terms of use of each of the social media they’re using. Social media should give those through an easy-to-read presentation method. All major social network services have specific privacy guidelines that are published on their web sites, so it is advised that users take the time to read and understand these documents, since they include the type of information
that the latter can potentially reveal or sell to third parties, as well as a number of other factors and parameters. In the unlikely case that an SNS does not provide any of those, it is highly advised to users not to join the service.
Chapter 5  Awareness, Freedom of Expression & Political aspects

5.1. The decline

The recent financial recession, other than producing a large variety of economic and social changes, has also seriously affected the way people, and especially young citizens, look upon politics and politicians. The uncertainty about the future paired with the already obvious negative impact of the recession in job vacancies, salaries and capabilities of professional evolution, have had a strong effect on voters; the conditions have induced less confidence to politicians and the political system, as people recognize their hopes as unaccomplished, fragmented and, eventually, futile. Especially in the UK, the following occur from Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley’s thesis, in regards to the decline of civic engagement:

‘It appears that, with the possible exception of protest demonstrations, collective forms of participation have declined in Britain over [the last forty years] and that this decline has been reinforced by a weakening of the norms which sustain such participation. Put simply, individuals are less likely to believe that citizens should participate, and because of this fact they are less likely to actually get involved... [W]e conclude that Britons are atomised citizens’ (2004: 275, our emphasis).\(^{81}\)

However, negative attitude towards political participation has been an issue of far more than just one decade. It appears that young citizens present mainly a lack of faith in the effectiveness of political engagement, rather than a disbelief in regards to the act of participating itself. In other words, the majority of people desire to be politically active, however they do not believe that their actions have any influence to important decisions and policy

making. Some of the most common statements in this regard are the perceived inability that one person alone is unable to contribute anything new to the world, that political matters are both a time-consuming, hard to follow and even harder to participate issue, and finally, the perceived impression (mainly in the young ones) of general apathy in the world in relation to public affairs. Moreover, children coming from a politically active family environment can be negative towards participation, due to reacting to their parents' persistency or political beliefs.

Regardless of the various intellectual movements in sociology as well as the overall approach to the matter by users and citizens, it is a widely acceptable position that participation in politics is vital to preserve the essence of democracy.\textsuperscript{82} In the last two decades, decline in electoral participation appears to be a worldwide phenomenon, even in countries with a strong history of political activity and public interest around crucial national issues. Party memberships, electoral participation and political opinion through established means of discussion around important topics is in a state of hiatus, longing for new ways of expressing opinions and arguments. Why this is happening is simply a matter of information and awareness. The rise of internet and web-based information has allowed for free thinking and the creation of more objective news outlets, as opposed to the propagandistic and highly controlled output of television and radio. People associate the traditional means of voting, decision-making and debating with corruption, greed, ineffectiveness and inadequacy.\textsuperscript{83} This is the reason why citizens of western countries have justified reasons to despise politics and only recognize them as evil and shrewd.

\textsuperscript{82} Philosophs and analysts of different schools of thought such as Jean Jacques Rousseau, Aristotle, Max Weber and Bertrand Russell show common thinking in this regard.

5.2. Opportunities for electronic political participation

As traditional systems fail, there needs to be a more productive approach towards enabling citizens to regain interest in public matters and politics. As Putnam\(^8^4\) highlights in his study on the political awareness of US residents, the way news are broadcasted to citizens through television and internet in most occasions, raises little or no interest around state and governmental issues and therefore results to isolation and disengagement from political participation. The more television people watch, the more they turn to entertainment TV channels rather than to informative shows and politics-oriented programs. It is this particular point of view that needs to be changed and SNSs could be a potential solution towards resolving the fragmentation. Being negative against the way reality is presented is simply not enough for evoking change. It is a common truth that non-thoughtful, sole disapproval of the methods through which governments exercise their duty while occasionally exceeding their role for favour of personal interest and wealth, is a dispassionate and non-promising solution to unsettling conditions. Discomfort and dissatisfaction requires a stronger network of spreading thoughts, ideas and innovative theories.

Aside from politics, global awareness also appears to be a suffering sector in terms of participation. This is not surprising or extravagant, as the majority of individuals taking part and expressing opinions on ecological topics, human rights, and other issues of global interest are usually those presenting a rather energetic involvement with political matters as well. If political awareness can be achieved, so will global, at least to some significant extent.

There have already been fine examples of successful group mobilization through the internet, already in the pre-SNS era: the movement of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation\(^8^5\) in Mexico made prosperous efforts to diffuse their oppositional and liberating message to people around

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\(^8^5\) Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion National (abbr. EZLN).
the world through the internet, suggesting therefore a different way of societal organization and actively pointing out the issues they had to deal with in their own country. In this case, a national issue becomes a matter of international interest and raises concerns across the globe. The Independent Media Center (Indymedia) is another successful example in this direction. It suggests an international organization and community, a global participatory network of journalists that report on political and social issues. It originated during the anti-WTO protests worldwide in 1999 and remains closely associated with the global justice movement, which criticizes neo-liberalism and its associated institutions. Indymedia uses an open publishing and democratic media process that allows anybody to contribute as long as their opinions abide with its anti-neoliberal grassroots. While Indymedia contributors often use SNS for spreading news and expressing opinions widely, the community itself features social networking modules, through fora, comments and embedded blogs as well as the semi-user-controlled flow of information and articles within the website. Therefore, Indymedia can be accredited as one of the first communities with a fundamental social networking substance that successfully emerged through the electronic interactive union of its online members worldwide.

A first step towards enabling higher involvement should be made by people running e-participation and e-government initiatives. Young people tend to be sensitive to ill-conceived marketing strategies, and misdirected messages can have a negative impact. That is why issues such as their Internet preferences in terms of information provision and communication should be further studied by analysts, in order to effectively encourage them to use SN tools for electronic participation. To conclude, in our days, while intense protesting activation is a predominant modus operandi for certain countries such as Greece, France and Spain, there is an urgent need for framing these actions as well as other ideological political concepts within a stronger philosophical and ideological context. Revolting with riots, protests and

86 Indymedia is also heavily criticized by both corporate as well as other leftist or socialist activists. Several parts occasionally connect Indymedia with terroristic incidents and argue that the community promotes anger and hatred for the sake of mass reaction, against governments and institutionalized exercise of democracy.
strikes against harsh and unfair decisions of the state is only a first (for some, doubtful) step towards providing a dignified framework of opposition across the faultiness of undesirable political measurements. Aside from protesting, different voices and propositions ought to be given a more significant meaning, with the capability of being publicly expressed and provide alternative solutions and different political views. Therefore, there is a forceful need for new platforms and ways to communicate skeptical and well-justified thoughts to others, in search of a more active and conscious exercise of what representative democracy stands for.

5.3. How can SNSs aid global and political awareness?

While social network services are mainly seen as entertainment tools by the majority of users, their vast capabilities have already shown how they can effectively be used as a means for debate around political topics on a real-time basis. Even users who have never been occupied with such topics, are passively exposed to timeliness through their online friends’ posts. Imagine this in the way television advertising works: one can have no interest in chocolate advertisements, as he himself is not a fan of chocolate. Ads of a specific chocolate brand will most likely leave him unaffected, in the sense that he will probably not be able to recall anything from the advertisement he has just seen. However, if at some point he decides to buy chocolate, it’s most possible that he will pick this specific brand, as this is how advertising usually works. Even though the case is totally different and the previous example is both humoristic and cynical, we understand the association between the two: being exposed to a stream of information on a daily basis, regardless of how interesting this is to an individual, the frequency of its appearance has the ability to raise more interest and achieve a wider infiltration of information.

The fact that simpler, widely used communicative tools such as e-mail,
electronic fora, blogspots\textsuperscript{87} or online information-giving communities have been met with increased interest by internet users in the recent years, gives even more confidence to how widely SNS should be used in this subject matter. In the next categories, we will explain some of the directions to which social networking can be a useful and innovative expressive instrument of consultation.

5.3.1. Groups

Although the formation of small online communities had already begun in the previous decade by websites such as Yahoo and AOL, the rise of the social networking trend gives a broader and more potent definition of the term 'cyber group'. An online group is usually a small community within a bigger service, that members of the latter can join and interact with people that share a common preference in music, literature, political views etc. When a member posts an article or comment, members of the group can be instantly notified through the service by e-mail, depending on the notification settings they have selected when signing up for the group. While MySpace, Bebo and other services encouraged the formation of groups through their websites, the idea was placed in the foreground and ideally carried forward through Facebook; there, each user can create his own group and invite other members from his list of friends to join. Because of how the service's algorithm works in terms of generating interest around a specific subject, the more members a group has the more possible it is that there will be a link to it (usually accompanied by a picture) on other non-subscribed users' pages, occurring from their own use of certain keywords. For instance, Facebook is more likely to generate links to an 'Animal Protection' group on the page of a

\textsuperscript{87} The Greek blogspot 'troktiko' managed to exceed the limit of one billion visits in 2009, a few months the service's main founder, Sokratis Giolias was violently murdered by a local terrorist organization. For almost two years, troktiko as well as other blogs were the main, if not the exclusive, informative source for a large number of Greek citizens, a daily reading which expressed political views openly and sometimes, rather aggressively. Readers of troktiko were able to send their own articles about matters of regional or national importance and, due to the blog's bidirectional nature, those would often be approved by the editors and posted on the website. This might suggest a healthier way of expressing one's political opinion openly, regardless of his educational or social background.
user who regularly posts news bulletins against animal cruelty. It will therefore be quite possible for him to join this specific group, an action which will be instantly made public on his own profile and, through it, to other users. In this case, two purposes are served: users with specific interests, as those are gathered by their use of keywords, will be directed to relevant groups and the community’s popularity will increase simultaneously with its gradual, membership growth.

5.3.2. Non-governmental activity

Aside from their websites, most non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been among the first to take practical advantage of social networking possibilities by forming online communities as an additional method of interaction and communication with their followers. Nature preserve organizations, human rights activists and other associations can spread their beliefs through newsletters and real-time information feeds without the necessity of expensive campaigns. Well-respected NGOs such as the Amnesty International, Avaaz or Doctors Without Borders, are represented through their official electronic communities on SNSs (pages on Twitter, groups on Facebook etc.). With NGO representation on social media, we are witnessing the erosion of barriers between organizations and the supporters and employees that make them real. The movement in this direction is challenging older notions of how NGOs should operate and the current status indicates a shift towards a more nimble and supporter-oriented approach. Matters such as protection of human rights, privacy of personal information, environmental threats due to industrial activity although not considered matters of political interest, need political action in order to produce positive results. Users significantly more aware around these topics than those in the pre-SNS period validate for an encouraging prospect towards highlighting global problems and bringing those to a wider number of people.

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88 An RSS feed is a common way of importing news streams from one website to another.
In this respect, electronic petitions are yet another tool towards mobilizing governments and legal authorities to take measurements against problematic topics. Social networks are often used as platforms through which a petition can be signed, even though some of these movements are pure slacktivism. However, it should not be overlooked that several of those have little or no effect, due to the ease of creating petition systems and promoting them, without being exercised under official certifications of use. A positive direction is given by several government agencies and officials, such as The Scottish Parliament with the e-Petitioner system (from 1999), the Queensland Parliament in Australia, and Bristol City Council in the U.K, which have adopted electronic petitioning systems as a way to display a commitment to their constituents and provide greater accessibility into government operations.

Serving the above purpose, a third-party Facebook application named 'Causes' was recently launched in order to motivate activism and enable fundraising on global awareness issues. Causes is run and forwarded by a for-profit organization, being the largest online platform for activism, with over one hundred million registered users and over $25 million raised in account of its NGO collaborators. Mindless of any, otherwise fairly sensible, questioning of the service's integrity and its controversial pursuits, the figures are rather encouraging: in 2007, Case Foundation organized and hosted the 'Giving Challenge', an international competition of philanthropic character, 

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89 The word originates from the linguistic blend of the words 'slack' and 'activism' and describes measures in support of an issue or social cause, that have little or no practical effect other than to make the person doing it feel satisfaction. The acts tend to require minimal personal effort from the slacktivist. Awareness ribbons, t-shirts or bracelets carrying a political or other message, belong in the same category. Further reading: http://mashable.com/2010/05/13/slacktivists-activists-social-media/

90 Causes as well as other similar applications/organizations (Crowdrise, Jumo, Causecast etc.) frequently receive large donations by companies, big brands and other associations, in the form of sponsorships. The fact that these applications act as intermediaries between NGOs and activists is concerning as to where donation money goes in each case and whether Causes and the rest are also taking a cut of users' contributions. Consequently, allowing a donation or charity-based action to be potentially corrupted by an intermediary platform accounts as a misfire for the NGO. Further reading: Stephanie Strom, Social Networks Meant for Social Good, but at a Price, New York Times, 19.12.2010 (retrieved 12.12.2010).
which conducted exclusively online. Causes\textsuperscript{91}, being one of Case Foundation's affiliates through which Giving Challenge was hosted, provided its Facebook users with the opportunity to create and promote their own cause communities through the SNS. The response was overwhelming and the total amount raised by NGO affiliates exclusively through user donations exceeded the merit of $500,000, number at least double the prize money offered by the Case Foundation.

Similar events continue to take place through Causes, although a large amount of people (including NGOs) demand a less shady relationship between the service and its members, as to furnish, protect and validate the substantial ethics of global awareness, in its exercise through social networking. While it remains a question as to how non-governmental activity through SNSs can mobilize non-activists and bring important matters in the spotlight, it is nevertheless encouraging that the possibilities for being informed and keeping up-to-date with these issues through one's preferred social network are endless.

5.3.3. Opinion-sharing / The chain reaction effect

Writing notes, posting status updates and comments on other users' pages about work dissatisfaction, salary cut-downs, relationship failures and other personal problems is a common habit among social media users. Although personal data legislation specialists would agree that this information should be kept personal and confidential, users often fail to realize the limits where one should draw the line. The reason why information disclosure happens largely on SNSs is mainly that users feel the need to share their problems online, in hope that other users will sympathize and encourage them with humorous replies or 'helpful' tips or, at best, agree by describing a similar problem they themselves have come across. It consists of an attempt to reach common grounds and have others prove one's rightness, just as somebody would expect a 'real' friend to do, even though

\textsuperscript{91} The application was only 6 months old at the time and had one tenth the number of registered users that are currently subscribed to Causes.
SNSs are only simulating reality, not being 'real' society (yet).

Mark Zuckerberg suggests that people use Facebook 'to stay updated on what’s happening around them and share with the people in their lives.', a statement which appears rather true. According to research\(^92\), more people use Facebook to share links than any other service -- including, to our surprise, email. However, Twitter is already about half as popular in terms of sharing with only about one-tenth as many users. This matters since content-sharers are the human crawlers that power both Facebook and Twitter's real-time search engines--which could turn out to be the way both startups result in increasing income.

![Facebook Leads Sharing](chart.png)

In many cases, revealing information about an unbalanced relationship between employers and employees can be both unethical and dangerous for the person that publicly expresses his discontent. The same applies to cases where personal information belonging to an individual, is unreasonably widespread by other users throughout social media. We shall not investigate this issue any further, however we will be focusing on a different effect of opinion-sharing through SNSs, that of chain reaction. As Facebook makes full

use of a keyword-based algorithm, article, conversations and links are selectively posted on each user’s news stream, according to the match between keywords most frequently inserted by the user and the keywords that other users within his friend circle apply to similar issues. The higher the interest on a specific topic, the more possible it becomes to attract more users to a conversation; while in the first place, ‘friends’ will be the first to be notified of an interesting\textsuperscript{93} topic, other service members who are associated with these specific users - although not necessarily with the initiator of the discussion - , are likely to be involved, express their own opinion and, as in chain reaction, generate more interest (their friends will move the topic along to their friends and so on), which will consequently be multiplied and carried on to other users. The recent example comes from WikiLeaks: when its founder, Julian Assange was prosecuted over sexual allegations on the 7th of January 2011, the response was immediate: hundreds of thousands of his followers and supporters changed their picture (avatar) on Facebook to solid black. The peculiarity of seeing profiles with a black image instead of a regular photograph, raised increasing interest among users and helped exposing the matter to an international and particularly wide audience.

This pattern of opinion-sharing, occurring from the multiplication of appearances through increased interest, meets an even greater application when opinion-carriers are people of high publicity (writers, musicians, painters, actors etc.). Before the appearance of online social networking, persons of certain public recognition were at most unapproachable and distant. Their followers were able to discover more about them, aside from their work, mostly through interviews, which are usually inadequate in order to obtain a proper impression of someone’s personality, view and expressive qualities. With the arrival of SNSs, a large number of people belonging in this category set up their own user account and used it as both a means of promotion as well as an expressive tool to speak out their opinion and personal view on politics, religion, nature etc. through a medium where fans and followers would be able to comment and even discuss directly with this person through the social media platform. Under those circumstances, the chain reaction effect is met with enormous success and the multiplication

\textsuperscript{93} According to Facebook’s AI perception.
effect takes place rapidly.

It is quite often that people coming from the artistic world (literature, music etc.) and would publicly express their position on national or international topics are usually free spirits willing to promote freedom of speech and libertarianism. From Plato to Schubert and from Russell to Cage, it is widely recognized that arts and literature are to aid in the creation of a less miserable and cloudy state of being, merely through the power of both their content as well as the personal qualities of their bringers. Having a medium through which their opinions can be transported and taken into serious consideration by massive numbers of SNS users is an important step towards firmly associating creators of intellectual works with matters of public interest and, therefore, allowing for a different and, hopefully, freer movement to evolve.

5.3.4. Bridging opinions expressed on SNSs with the 'real' world

It is important that political opinion expressed on social networking media is connected with reality, in the sense that the thoughts and wishes of SNS users, as expressed online, should somehow lead to action and changes in various aspects of social life; otherwise, this model is likely to fail, as traditional political interaction and communication seem to have failed with younger generations.

First of all, the tools: if politicians, managers and organizations that promote the idea of awareness and participation recognize there is practically a need for young citizens to be involved through social media and online sources, they have to pursue ways to intrigue them and give them proof that their involvement will be of significant importance. In order to do so, they have to provide them with the necessary evidence that their actions will be characterized by effectiveness. We are living in the age of speed and the stimuli of our environment are both abundant and rich in information, hence the danger of being overloaded with information is always present. Regardless of the fact that new generations grow up side by side with information and communication technologies, the amount of inhaled information exceeds adequacy and requires them to apply filtering techniques
to almost every piece of knowledge that is directed towards them. In this sense, given that SNSs are some of the most penetrative and addictive habits of young people, there has to be a common ground of educating the latter regarding how social networking should be used as a vital component of electronic participation. Through examples, ideas and future planning presentations, it has to be made clear that SNSs can be an effective way of being involved with political matters, as both a contributing or opposing force.

Moreover, it has to be addressed that public matters is not someone else’s problem, as some think. In fact, youngsters tend to associate political issues with old-fashioned methods of civil power exercise that belong to the past, therefore they disassociate them with their practical needs and everyday life. As R. Gerodimos highlights:

‘the other major factor determining young citizens’ response to a call for civic action is the extent to which they can relate a public affair, issue or cause to their day- to-day reality. The concept of the “everyday life” has almost become the zeitgeist of a consumer- oriented society that puts emphasis on the individual’s welfare and choice. Many scholars have observed the blurring of the boundaries between civic participation and consumer practice (Keum, Devanathan, Deshpande, Nelson and Shah 2004) noting the potential for empowerment (Scammell 2000) or disenfranchisement (Marquand 2004).’

What he suggests is that self-centeredness together with consumerism do not leave room for civic engagement. Young people take part in activities that are directly attached to what happens in their every day life. Having lost faith in politics and believing them to better fit with people of an older age, makes them indifferent towards both offline and online participation. Assuming that young SNS users do not reject democratic politics, public affairs or civic participation overall, the ways to raise interest is, according to Gerodimos, by creating mobilisation which:

94 Gerodimos, Roman, How to Mobilise Young People: Recommendations for NGOs and Civic Organisations, University of Swansea, Wales, 04.2008.
1. is relevant to people’s everyday life
2. combines macro-social change with micro-social benefits
3. creates an ongoing narrative
4. reinforces a consistent message
5. sets clear and feasible objectives
6. puts emphasis on results
7. provides citizens with the tools to make a difference
8. maximises the audience
9. invests in attractive and accessible design
10. (still) depends on the ‘old’ mass media

Examining how SNSs can be associated with the above to achieve this purpose, (1) is obviously fulfilled as social networking is among almost every young person’s daily activities; (7) refers to the communicative medium, which in this case are services such as Facebook, Twitter and the rest and, given the desired credibility, they can serve as a user-friendly and effective tool of participation; (9) is certainly satisfied since SNSs that attract the majority of users are usually well-designed and offer relaxing and convenient graphic interfaces. Another matter to argue is in regards to how possible it stands for electronic participation through social networking to actually deliver fruitful results. Whether this tendency will create more slacktivists rather than people actively involved in political and global issues is only a matter that time will unveil. Regardless of the concerns whatsoever, it is important that this aspect of social networking is further explored and granted the time and space needed in order to produce results, both negative and positive.

5.3.5. The electronic government in social media

The internet has brought numerous possibilities in exercising democracy through electronic means (e-democracy) alongside its traditional application, affecting policy/decision making and governance. The term ‘e-government’ suggests:
'the use of information and communication technologies to broaden and deepen political participation by enabling citizens to connect with one another and with their elected representatives'.

For example, US President Barack Obama has his own Twitter page, so does the Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou. They or their representatives both use it for posting political-related issues (decisions, official governmental opinions etc.). The number of users following them on the service is rather high, proportionally to the overall population of the United States and Greece respectively. The same applies to a large number of politicians, governmental associations and ministry secretariats. We can assume that there is an intimate connection between politics and social networking, not only within the citizens/users side but also within the circles of decisions makers. So far, it appears as it serves a ‘window shop’ purpose, only to make citizens feel closer to politicians and to provide them with a sense of self-importance in the online world of political expression. In that sense, it would be possible to set issues of national significance into consideration through both e-government websites as well as social networks. Both information sources would be then equally taken into consideration in regards to deducting useful data about public opinion and the potential impact of a decisive measure.

What should be questioned here is whether procedures like this can produce accurate or relatively accurate results. Social networking users can create numerous online profiles and, therefore, it is almost impossible to be certain about the integrity of one’s opinion, however this should not be an obstacle towards further research on the matter.


96 Less participation in Greece, higher in e.g. the Scandinavian countries.
5.4 Social movements and information communities in social networking: a threat to institutionalized establishments?

5.4.1. The example of Egypt

While these lines are being written, the Egyptian people’s revolt against their president Hosni Mubarak and his 30-year cabinet was proven successful, having exceeded the number of one million protesters in Cairo’s main square, Tahrir, on Tuesday, the 1st of February of 2011 and achieving new elections scheduled for Fall 2011.

Being granted a significant boost by the recent, massive protesting activity in Tunisia which led to significant social changes and the former government being overthrown by the Tunisians, the movement in Egypt has been persistent, large and passionate. Regardless of the violence that the protesters were met with by the police, the number of people on the streets would increase day by day, gradually engaging citizens of all ages.

It all started on the 25th of January 2011, with the initial protest being set up by A6YM\(^{97}\), a local opposing force and non-governmental community of activists, which was meant to play a major role in the organization of the entire revolt. It is generally accepted that economic, political, and social conditions in Egypt have deteriorated over the past 30 years and therefore thinking of a one-to-one connection between this movement and the one in Tunisia is not entirely correct. As a matter of fact, underlying oppositional groups have pre-existed in Egypt, growing larger and more efficient with the aid of social media tools, and it is this existing opposition which made possible the protests that lead Egyptians into open collision.

A6YM, which is actively represented through social media, managed to push the movement outside Egypt and bring it to worldwide attention through Facebook and Twitter. The community served as a powerful source of information and has been responsible for communicating the needs of the people and the positions of the government, realizing how significant the

\(^{97}\) April 6th Youth Movement.
internet has been in creating sympathy and supportiveness to the protesters across the whole world. In addition to this, there is also an anonymous Facebook page administrator who goes by the nickname El Shaheed\(^98\) and appears to have played a crucial role in organizing the demonstrations, the largest Egypt has seen since the 1970s, that now threaten the country’s authoritarian regime. As far as information goes, yet even Egypt’s most active activists are not aware of the anonymous organizer’s identity. El Shaheed’s Facebook page, simply named ‘We Are All Khaled Said’\(^99\), begun as a campaign against torture and police brutality. But this on January 2011, shortly after the Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was brought down following weeks of grassroots protests inspired by Bouazizi’s self-immolation, a post appeared on the Facebook page, announcing a day of protest in Egypt – Tuesday, January 25. On his Facebook page, El Shaheed took pains to avoid political and religious language in the posts, in his desire to bring together groups that had otherwise often competed. Stripped of ideological overtones, the page became a draw for long-time activists as well as regular users.

Even though traditional media in other countries have occasionally presented a false image\(^100\) of what the Egyptian revolution has been about, the huge movement on SNSs and the unexpectedly high amount of involvement, enthusiasm and participation by people from around the globe, has brought these matters to international focus. NGOs such as Avaaz and Amnesty International have been promoting supportive campaigns with petitions and fundraising auctions, which by all means give credit to the seriousness of this large social movement. At the same time, protesters were flooding Cairo’s main squares and Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, and Flickr flooded the Internet

\(^{99}\) http://www.elshaheeed.co.uk/

\(^{100}\) During the protests, more than 6,000 Egyptian prisoners managed to escape federal prisons in Egypt. Many of them have been involved in looting operations and criminal activity since then, taking advantage of the intense situation. Several countries such as Germany have presented the entire movement as a situation of anarchy, looting and limitless criminality through their own media, avoiding to express the actual facts as those happened throughout the days. Without SNS, Germans would simply see this as a distant, uninteresting state of chaos in some distant country, instead of a huge, social mobilisation.
with updates\textsuperscript{101}. Supporters of Egypt’s protesters around the world spread information in updates so rapid and numerous that the collective coverage could probably be classified as viral.

In response to that, the local government tried to use the media in order to pigeonhole A6YM’s movement as merely an Internet phenomenon (slacktivism) using terms such as Twitter revolution. A6YM made it clear that using social media tools like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. were extensions and intensifiers of traditional forms of social interactions, not replacements for them. The bulk of their work is done on the streets, organizing protests through traditional means (fliers, posters, SMS, word of mouth), campaigning at universities, and engaging with neighborhood leaders. Since the cabinet’s efforts to silence and stain the importance of the movement proved unsuccessful, The regime decided to block\textsuperscript{102} any access to Twitter, though Egyptians still accessed the site using proxies or simply by calling friends outside the country and having them tweet for them. The #Jan25 hash tag (the designated tag for the protests) was receiving more than 25 new tweets a minute in the middle of Tuesday. Many of those still seemed to be coming from Cairo and other parts of Egypt, while tweets were filled with everything from warnings of tear gas to notifications of free food being handed out to protesters. Shortly after, Mubarak’s government decided to ban internet access as well as mobile telephone communication. While this consists of an

\textsuperscript{101}Alongside SNSs, Google provided their own ‘crisis response’ page, through which they gave details regarding how people in Egypt can use a ‘speak-to-tweet’ service without the need to be connected to the internet.

\textsuperscript{102}Exactly as it happened with Egypt, soon after the protests began in Tunisia, local government ramped up its attempts at controlling the internet. These started simply enough, with straight-up site blocking. It soon got much worse: the Committee to Protect Journalists said its own research found that “the [state-run] Tunisian Internet Agency was harvesting passwords and usernames of bloggers, reporters, political activists and protesters by injecting hidden JavaScript” into many popular site login pages. This extended to sites like Facebook, where the main login page mysteriously had ten additional lines of code inserted when it arrived at Tunisian computers. (Such code injection is technically simple using various pieces of deep-packet inspection gear, and it was made easier by the fact that the Tunisian government would periodically block secure HTTPS connections.) Obviously, there is no law against internet service abuse by the government or other organization in Tunisia. Source: Nate Anderson, Tweeting Tyrants Out of Tunisia: Global Internet at Its Best, January 14th 2001, http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2011/01/tunisia/2/
unquestionably non-democratic action, the result has been opposite to weakening the union between protesters. In that case, people having access to social media from all over the world were spreading information about how to 'tweet' and communicate the conditions in Egypt through dial-up or other ways that did not require a network connection. Once more, the power of information sharing and the global network connection through social networking proved unstoppable.

To conclude, it appears that this is a clear victory of public opinion expressed through SNS mediums over well-established governmental institutions. Robert Springborg, Professor of national security affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School in the US, however presents a different opinion: the protestors have already lost their battle for democracy.

'Paradoxically the popular uprising has even ensured that the presidential succession will not only be engineered by the military, but that an officer will succeed Mubarak.'

Thus, he suggests that whatever follows will not be democracy, but business as usual.

'The military will now enter into negotiations with opposition elements that it chooses. The real opposition will initially be ignored, and then possibly rounded up.'

Nevertheless, the attempts to stigmatize the Egyptian revolt as it came through the internet as 'slacktivism' falls dead, by simply taking a notice of the actual facts. Social media played a key role and continue to be more than significant in organizing opposition, although not being the opposition themselves. SNSs are both a communication tool and a social relationship intensifier, due to their ability to continue a relationship despite time and

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103 Springborg, Robert, Game over: The chance for democracy in Egypt is lost, Foreign Policy, 02.02.2011.
distance and just as businesses and NGOs use social media to sell products and communicate with their constituents, social movements use social media to organize their contributing parts and take action. If this leads to awareness, participation and information sharing (and in this case it did), why shouldn’t we invest more in the power of educating, informing, connecting and participating in matters of social and political significance through social networking? The regular criticism of social media’s role in political change fails not merely in its blindness to the risks taken by social media activists and the powerful effects in matters of worldwide interest; it fails also when supposing that the importance of social media is concocted by Westerners who are over-impressed by their own technology; it fails because social networking is not a technology of the young or the few – social networking is not anymore just online entertainment; it is worldwide media. And the rest of the world is finding the tools of social media to be a potent tool in times of revolution.

The graph shows Twitter’s ascending procession, reaching a peak in January 2011, during which the Egyptian protesters and their supporters were flooding the service with news reports and helping messages.
5.4.2. The example of Wikileaks

The example of Egypt introduces our research to the influence of social networking on social movements, to a vast number of factors and information to consider. Both the extensive use of SNSs in order to inform and spread a worldwide message as well as the social networking entities themselves with their aid towards the revolt, have opened up an entire field of study. While sociologists, political analysts and IT engineers are discussing those matters, it is still doubted whether there will be a societal impact as big as the protest itself, in the long term. History often repeats itself and it has shown cases where massive demonstrations were followed by new totalitarian regimes and dictatorships. Nevertheless, the role of social media in this particular case defies all speculations of slacktivism and positions SNSs into a category of communication mediums that can connect pure activists as well as simple supporters, while aiding coordination with increased efficacy. Of course, the reaction was harsh and unjust, with the regime shutting down network connection in the entire nation. It is doubtful whether citizens of Egypt would have been deprived of their connection with the rest of the world through the internet, should there not have been social networking; a tool which appears powerful and worrying against totalitarian governments that seek complete control of authority.

As it derives from the above, opinion censorship can become a weapon against SNS users, if control moves significantly off the hands of those in power. Eliding network connection is an obvious act of nuisance, brought about during chaotic conditions, thus being obvious and there for everyone to comprehend. In the case where intense political opinion starts being publicly expressed through SNSs in wealthier countries such as Germany, Denmark or the UK, should citizens expect electronic censorship in terms of governmental limits to search terms, web services and online communications? Or worse, should those who represent censorious and politically aggressive organizations/communities be afraid of their own physical integrity? We will attempt and insightful focus on these questions through the examples of WikiLeaks and Troktiko, an international publishing NGO and a Greek blogspot respectively, both popular in their own territory.
WikiLeaks is a non-profit media organisation, aiming at bringing information to the public, which comes from any reliable (according to WikiLeaks) source and can be submitted to the service anonymously though a 'dropbox' feature. WikiLeaks describes its founders as a mix of Chinese dissidents, journalists, mathematicians, and start-up company technologists from the United States, Taiwan, Europe, Australia, and South Africa. Julian Assange, an Australian internet activist, is generally described as its director. The people behind the website are said to be heavily influenced by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, using this in support of their thesis on defending freedom of speech, the improvement of common historical record and the support of contributors in order to create new history. Assange himself has become a public figure, giving numerous video and written interviews on TV, blogs and popular magazines on a continuous and consistent pace since 2007. While the service has received various awards and distinctions for its actions, it has also been heavily criticized by governmental and non-governmental organizations and individuals, most notably by U.S. government officials for the exposure of classified information, harm to national security, and compromising international diplomacy. In April 2010, Assange and his collaborators released 'Collateral Murder', a video documentary from the inside of a US helicopter, showing a case of mass murder against unarmed Iraqi citizens from back in 2007. Only three months afterwards, Wikileaks posted a compilation of more than 76,900 documents about the War in Afghanistan, being publicly shown for the first time, followed by the 'Iraq War Logs', a package of almost half a million documents in coordination with major commercial media organisations. According to this, every death in Iraq and across the border in Iran, was able to be mapped. Finally, since November 2010, WikiLeaks has been releasing U.S. State department diplomatic cables, infuriating US government and

104 The organisation has won a number of awards, including The Economist’s New Media Award in 2008 and Amnesty International’s UK Media Award in 2009. In 2010, the New York City Daily News listed WikiLeaks first among websites ‘that could totally change the news’, and Julian Assange was named the Readers’ Choice for TIME’s Person of the Year in 2010. The UK Information Commissioner has stated that ‘WikiLeaks is part of the phenomenon of the online, empowered citizen’.

105 http://www.collateralmurder.com/
authorities overseas. For those reasons, the US are frantically looking for possibilities to prosecute Julian Assange, and bring down his famous whistle-blowing website. Moreover, bowing to political and public pressure, various major corporate organisations are lining up to publicly disassociate themselves from WikiLeaks. The latest to adopt an opposing policy against the organisation have been Amazon, which provided web services, and PayPal, the payment processor, both claiming that WikiLeaks violated a terms of service agreement.

The UK newspaper 'The Guardian' features a permanent WikiLeaks column in both its printed and online version.

WikiLeaks owes much of its publicity to the power of social media. If external pressure managed to shut down the website, it would be almost impossible to fight against its strong presence on SNSs. Due to social networks, much of their messages' content - and news about where the site is active - can be propagated today through major SNSs like Twitter and Facebook. At the moment, users can follow their group on Twitter, where

106 WikiLeaks is a heavily mirrored website, with hundreds or thousands of mirrors across the world. Therefore, while it could in be brought down for a while, that would only be until the DNS records are updated to point to the newly active mirror.
there is an ongoing battle between those who would like to silence the service and WikiLeaks's attempts to keep their site up and running. 'WikiLeaks servers in Sweden are under attack,' announced a recent Tweet from WikiLeaks, while another boasted that 'WikiLeaks is now hosted at 507 locations, planet wide. Twitter announcements are also carried by over 15,000 other 'lists' on the SNSs - essentially gatherings of announcements for people with particular interests. At the same time, WikiLeaks's Twitter account itself is followed by almost half a million other Twitter users. Although as with other enablers of WikiLeaks, there have been calls for Twitter to remove the organization from their accounts, so far the service has refused to do so. The organization has, accordingly, an equally strong representation and supportive community on Facebook, where so far, more than almost 1.5 million people are following its updates, with a potential of growing larger and stronger within very short time spaces.

The most interesting assumptions from the case of WikiLeaks are the following:

a) Regardless of criticism and the organization's potential faultiness in handling important international matters and exposing specific persons and political figures, WikiLeaks constitutes a new, interesting chapter of global awareness-making and information spreading. Its political impact is already obvious, however it is still too early to predict whether WikiLeaks can literally influence social conditions as heavily as to cause political change. Without the internet and the tremendous promotional distribution offered by SNSs, the organization and its action would be known to far lesser amount of people, and most likely would be characterized as yet another 'conspiracy theory group'. Nevertheless, if it was sought dangerous towards public affairs and political interests - as is now, of course -, there would be much less matters at stake and, therefore, a definite closure would be immediate and facile.

b) War documents, logs, facts and proof of events that governments are more likely to prefer kept hidden have found an output of large societal appreciation and approval. Whistleblowers such as Daniel Ellsberg,
intellectual liberals such as Noam Chomsky, international media such as the Guardian and NGOs such as The Amnesty International are all active supporters of WikiLeaks. The more the organization grows and gains respect and international admittance, the more possible it is for other organizations with similar pursuits\textsuperscript{107} to publicly provide proof and evidence about important social matters.

c) The significance of WikiLeaks, its massive penetration to internet and SNS users worldwide and its increasing growth, are already met with aggression and hostility by powerful corporate and governmental institutions, leading to discussions about the organization being currently a life-risking movement. Already, there have been various attempts to prosecute Assange and some of his collaborators, with little or no practical impact (yet). Of course, not all attempts to prosecute persons involved in the case have been pointless: Bradley E. Manning, a United States Army soldier charged in July 2010 with the unauthorized disclosure of classified information for the documentary, is being held in "maximum custody" at the Marine Corps Brig, Quantico, Virginia, and is expected to face a pre-trial hearing in May 2011 to determine whether he should be court-martialed. Manning was charged under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ)\textsuperscript{108} with violations of UCMJ Articles 92 and 134 for:

\begin{quote}
'\textit{transferring classified data onto his personal computer and adding unauthorized software to a classified computer system in connection with the leaking of a video of a helicopter attack in Iraq in 2007,}'
\end{quote}

and,

\begin{quote}
'\textit{communicating, transmitting and delivering national defense information to an unauthorized source and disclosing classified information concerning the national defense with reason to believe that the information could cause injury to the United States.'}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{107} Already, similar organizations have emerged in various countries: OpenLeaks, BalkanLeaks, Brussels Leaks, RuLeaks and TradeLeaks are only some.

\textsuperscript{108} http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/10/stApIlch47.html
As for Assange, a cynical thought would say conditions are such as if he is facing an assassination contract, since having him removed from the current state of things would provide relief to several sides of direct interest. With this being considered a mere threat to democracy and a forced attempt to silence freedom of speech, would social media be controlled in the case of forceful, external pressure? He is already facing charges for supposedly sexual offenses and other crimes irrelevant to WikiLeaks, although obviously seen as countermeasure attempts to obstruct his goals. If those methods continue to fail, would WikiLeaks or any other digital society that has created high-profile enemies be taken out of the equation, by atrocious and anti-liberal methods such as banning, censorship or closure? In that case, every assumption for freedom of expression would prove utopian and futile, while social media would no longer be acquainted as potent as before.

![Traffic Rank](image.png)


### 5.4.3. The example of Troktiko

It took only three years for 'Troktiko' to become the most popular Greek blogspot and a favourite information medium for - mainly - young
people. Having started during the early days of blogging in Greece, Troktiko served as a medium for expressing the opinions of independent readers and eyewitnesses to events of social and political interest, in combination with the articles posted by the editors themselves. It is now believed that reporter Sokratis Giolias had been the main person behind Troktiko, although he had never implied any linkage between him and the community, throughout the blog’s short history. It was only until Giolias was brutally murdered by a local terroristic organization before it was widely known that he was attached to Troktiko, the website having reached almost 1.5 billion visits until that point. At the moment, with various new blogspots (e.g. Troktiko2, tro-ma-kto) appearing to be the continuers of Troktiko, it remains uncertain how blogging in Greece will continue to evolve.

While recognizing the fact that several of the articles posted on the website were of rather questionable quality and content, it appears that its fast penetrative ability was worrying for some. Speculations regarding Giolias' death refer that he was about to reveal important figures and statistic evidence in relation to several incidents of local state corruption\(^\text{109}\).

Troktiko owes much of its publicity to social media, with users sharing and re-posting articles they were reading on the website. Soon after the Greek media took a negative stance against it mostly due to its simplistic, badly-written language and occasionally offensive content, there was a first shakeout with a successful attempt to shut the website down. For more than 24 hours, there was no access to the webpage and, as soon as Troktiko was back online, its response was aggressive and eruptive. In the meantime, the general support by its readers was majorly expressed through Facebook and Twitter and managed to create an overall feeling of sympathy towards Troktiko, mainly among young users.

As with WikiLeaks, it is argued whether online attempts which point to freer and more open means of communication will manage to create awareness and influence young generations to reject traditional media, for favour of self-expression through social networking and active participation through online communities. The example of Troktiko is disappointing in this

\(^{109}\) Giolias can definitely not be seen as purely libertarian or leftist. His somewhat supportive opinions towards the Vatopedi scandal and several persons behind athlete doping matters render him a whistleblower of significant controversy.
regard due to its somewhat tragic suffix, although it remains a local and less significant matter, as opposed to global SNS infiltration. If current legislation, governmental or non-governmental tactics opposed to certain social movements being realized through electronic means can stand between free speech and unobstructed information transmission, then new generations have to revisit legislations and fundamental social structures and values.
Chapter 6 Conclusion

Whether we are to see a Gibson-like future with the evolution of social networking, a transformation of digital society and a massive impact on human connection, or if all of it is yet another temporary trend that will, in turn, give its place to other ways of entertainment and socializing, is something to be questioned and only time will show. However, it appears certain that information sharing, news broadcasting and public awareness will be different in the next decades, due to the vast number of information sources and online relationships between users.

For the moment, analysts, intellectuals and academics seem to be divided between various opinions and principals. Some consider social networking to be a harmful and self-damaging activity that deprives youngsters from establishing normal social relationships and, instead, creates a problematic, if not fake, perspective on life and friendship. To strengthen this argument, the unsettling amount of criminal incidents indicates that further research needs to be made, if societies desire to protect their citizens and active members. Moreover, the role of social networking is questioned regarding its potentiality to aid revolutionary ideas spread and social movements to take international substance and to be distributed to worldwide media channels in a way that could induce change. Some position against their role in large movements, often characterizing them as Facebook or Twitter revolutions. Various academics argue that as unconstrained and limitless a tool as social networking is, it can lead to a deterioration of social values and local traditions.

At the same time, others present a more positive view: they recognize social media as the 'traditional' media's biggest opponent, as a new way of self-expression and as a superior instrument for electronic participation, information distribution and coordination of purposeful action. Defenders of free speech, social movement leaders and human rights activists use social media as a main source for spreading knowledge, promoting and organizing activities. So far, the most recent examples of Tunisia and Egypt as well as the fundraising campaigns of various NGOs have rendered SNSs a vital medium
in order to serve those purposes with efficacy. Furthermore, those believing in
the potential of SNSs to envelope and expand human relationships to a better
state of interconnectivity between different worlds, argue that crime is not a
new matter: it is every wide phenomenon that comes with both innovation as
well as abuse and malicious exploitation of its capabilities. Both national and
international law needs to address those topics and create regulatory
frameworks that allow for safe, uncensored use of those services.

In this study, it was attempted to present the impact of social
networking on two distinctive levels: the social threats that SNSs can impose,
juxtaposed upon our abilities to construct adequate mechanisms in order to
prevent malfunctions, while also how SNSs can help people become involved
in public affairs and aware of civic matters (social movements, protest, access
to information etc.) and phenomena of global interest (global warming and
environmental change, human rights etc.). Given that the risks to be taken
should be effectively dealt with, international legislation has to be revised,
enriched and provide space for interdisciplinary collaboration between
legalists, scientists and sociopolitical analysts. Organizations, politicians,
independent groups and communities should all provide better methods for
electronic participation and explain to users how their involvement with
important matters through SNSs can have a significant impact upon topics of
political and sociological interest. International law should be specific and
strict towards services, in order to achieve transparency and quality. It is
suggested that societies, institutions and educational systems become more
welcoming towards social networking, providing users with all the
knowledge and protection that is required in order to ensure that societal
bonds are not breached and the contacts being established can lead to
creativity, action and the emerging of innovative ideas and new schools of
thought. Regardless of the arising issues and worries spread among different
theories concerning social media, the arrival of Web 2.0 and the endless
possibilities that networks offer, abandoning social media would be a
regressive attempt to obstruct the natural evolution of physical society and
information technology.
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