

## Objectives and contents



**Objective** → Knowing the concept and utilities of social networks, as well as how to use them as a socialization tool promoting communication and active participation, also for senior citizens.

**Contents** → There are 2 main topics within this module:

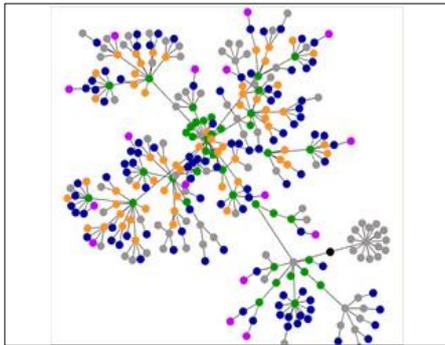
- Topic 1: What are social networks?
- Topic 2: Social networks as integration tool for elderly

### Topic 1: What are social networks?

- **Basic knowledge:** Web 2.0 and social network concept

- **Objective Pursued:** Understanding the utility of social network as a social integration tool and how they contribute to active participation.

According to British anthropologist Alfred Radcliffe-Brown and John Barnes, in a broad sense, **a social network is a social structure consisting of individuals or entities connected together by some kind of relationship or common interest**. Social networks are part of our life, are the way in which personal relationships are structured and we are connected, long before an Internet



connection existed. For example, in mathematics and computer science, graph theory is the social networks through nodes connected by edges, where nodes would be individuals and edges the relationships that bind them. All this forms a graph, a data structure for describing the properties of a social network. The same theory can be applied to virtual social networks like Facebook.

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In other words...**keep the concept and just change the tool** or the channel where social networking takes place nowadays. **The Internet and the ICT have changed the way we communicate and also the way we participate in society** and this is directly related to the web 2.0 idea.

Whereas **web 1.0 was static**, only permitting “reading” of information (as recipient), web 2.0 moves a step forward also permitting the provision of information (as creator), on a bi-directional basis where we all can become “*prosumers*”, meaning **producer + consumer**.



That’s why **web 2.0 is also known as social web**, since it facilitates and promotes communication and participation through a multi-directional information exchange, where all users can both, consume and produce information, opinion, points of view, ideas, etc.

**Social media** is the social interaction among people in which they create, share or exchange

information and ideas in virtual communities and networks<sup>2</sup>

### How do social networks work?

<sup>1</sup> Networks structure graphic. Image from Verarex; @flickr

<sup>2</sup> Ahlqvist, Toni; Bäck, A.; Halonen, M.; Heinonen, S (2008)

Social networks work through they users' interaction and information multidirectional exchange. So the service providers, allow a number of actions, among which the principal ones are:

- **Sharing content** – pictures, videos, links, texts, music, news...
- Sending **message to other users** - private or public.
- Taking part in **social games** offered by the service provider.
- **Commenting** contents shared by other users.
- **Publishing events** to announce them to your contacts.
- **Chatting real-time** through different channels.
- **Creating groups** of friends or contacts.
- **Showing your interest** about other users' publications or even *following* them.

To keep the control over everything you do in a social network, **remember to regularly check and update your privacy and security settings**. Service providers change them all the time and it is on your side to keep yourself in the safe side.

### Social networks as a tool of social integration

Changing things and improving the world needs visibility and a good communication strategy. Social networks are very useful for both, and can be our allies in achieving our goals if we know how to take advantage of them. For this is very important to keep in mind some good uses to ensure the transforming value of our message:



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- **WHAT** do I want to tell?
- **WHO** is it addressed to?
- **WHERE** is my target group?
- **COMMON INTEREST** as the starting point
- **KEEP** our **OBJECTIVE CLEAR**.
- **DO NOT** send **CONTRADICTIONARY** messages

<sup>3</sup> Ejemplo de cómo se usan las diferentes Redes Sociales. By [Grupo cooperativo TANGENTE](#).

## Topic 2: Social networks as integration tool for elderly

- **Basic Knowledge:** The integrative dimension of social networks
- **Objectives Pursued:** Identifying and promoting the integration potential of social networks for our target group



**Senior citizens are an important part of our society,** they have much free time for carrying out different activities and to keep developing themselves in many cultural and social ways. **Modern societies must commit to treasure, rescue and preserve their customs and cultures** and one of the best ways and sources to do that is **promoting the active participation of seniors, empowering and helping them in the use of the Information and Communication Technologies.**

### Barriers between elderly and ICT

As we already saw in the 1<sup>st</sup> online module, both, the **progressive ageing of our society** and the **increasing importance of ICT** make it **necessary to adapt and make virtual tools and spaces accessible to elder people**, who usually find some difficulties in it.

Age effects on the one hand and the lack of digital skills on the other one, require particular strategies to integrate Elder people in the digital world. Usability is a key concept in this process <sup>4</sup>.

**Usability problems:** usability can be perfect for most users, but not for all of them, i.e. elderly. Taking into account some elements can make things easier for them:

- **The learning process:** Is it easy for first users –especially for those with some difficulties - learning how to use a new tool, web, social network...? The interface design is a key element in this process. Keep it in mind!
- **Efficiency:** Once users get familiar with the interface design, the process will be easier and faster, and so efficiency will increase.
- **Easy to remember:** The easier to remember, the faster to learn...
- **Mistakes:** The number and seriousness of mistakes new users make is a good indicator of the usability of the tool.

<sup>4</sup> Diego Vilte, Viviana Saldaño, Adriana Martín, Gabriela Gaetán. *Evaluation of the Use of Social Networks by Elderly* (UNPA-UACO). Santa Cruz, Argentina.

- **Satisfaction:** The nicer the design is, the more comfortable the learning process is.

### **Benefits of using social networks for elderly**

Knowing how to use a computer and the Internet **break generational barriers** and according to some studies, it also reduces anxiety, isolation and negative feelings among elder people. Those able to search information, chat and communicate online, send emails, buy online, etc. are not only happier and more autonomous, but also more integrated into society. According to a research by the University of California it also have a **therapeutic effect**: online search is a good exercise for Elder people since it activate inactive parts of the brain improving some mental capacities like the memory.

### **In conclusion**

**Social Networks** generate and transform social uses and customs. Their functionality and ubiquity have a complex impact in society, at both, local and global level. Every minute a new utility arises. **When talking about elderly, integrating into this virtual world can have many effects that positively change their life.**



**Along this unit we will know some of the specialized social networks addressed to senior users...**