Discussion Paper

Online Social Networks: A Survey of a Global Phenomenon

by

Julia Heidemann¹, Mathias Klier¹, Florian Probst

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¹ University of Regensburg
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Abstract

Online social networks became a global phenomenon with enormous social as well as economic impact within a few years. Alone the most popular online social network, Facebook, counts currently more than 850 million users worldwide. Consequently, online social networks attract a great deal of attention among practitioners as well as researchers. The goal of this article is to provide an overview of online social networks in order to contribute to a better understanding of this worldwide phenomenon. In this context, we address for example the following questions: What are the major functionalities and characteristics of online social networks? What are the users’ motives for using them and how did online social networks emerge and develop over time? What is the impact and value of online social networks from a business perspective and what are corresponding challenges and risks?

Keywords: Online Social Network, Structural Characteristics, Business Value

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Name: Julia Heidemann*

Affiliation: Department of Management Information Systems, University of Regensburg, Germany

Short biography: Julia Heidemann is a strategy consultant at an international consulting firm. Her current projects focus on developing Social Media strategies and eGovernment. She received her doctorate in Management Information Systems from the University of Augsburg, Germany and her M.Sc. with honors in Finance & Information Management from the University of Augsburg and the Technical University of Munich, Germany. Her main research interests include Customer Relationship Management, Digital Markets, and Social Media with a special focus on Online Social Networks. She published her work at international conferences (e.g., International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS)) and scientific journals (e.g., Electronic Markets, Information Systems and e-Business Management).

*Corresponding author: julia.heidemann@wiwi.uni-regensburg.de
Name: Mathias Klier  
**Affiliation:** Department of Management Information Systems, University of Regensburg, Germany  
**Short biography:** Mathias Klier is Professor of Management Information Systems at the Faculty of Business, Economics and Management Information Systems of the University of Regensburg, Germany. He received his doctorate in Management Information Systems and his diploma in Business Mathematics from the University of Augsburg, Germany. His main research interests include Data and Information Quality, Customer Relationship Management, and Social Media with a special focus on Online Social Networks. He has published several articles in books and journals (e.g., *Journal of Information Science* and *Electronic Markets*) and presented his research at international conferences such as the *European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS)* and the *International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS).*

Name: Florian Probst  
**Affiliation:** FIM Research Center Finance & Information Management, University of Augsburg, Germany  
**Short biography:** Florian Probst received his B.Sc. degree in Business Administration from the University of Augsburg in 2007 and the M.Sc. with honors in Finance & Information Management from the University of Augsburg and the Technical University of Munich in 2010. Currently, he is a Research Assistant at the FIM Research Center Finance & Information Management at the University of Augsburg. His main research interests include Customer Relationship Management, Social Media, and especially Online Social Networks with a particular focus on dynamic and economic aspects. He has presented his scientific work at international conferences such as the *International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS)* and the *European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS).* His publications also appeared in journals such as *Business and Information Systems Engineering* and *Information Systems and e-Business Management.*