

## Social Network

A social network refers to a social media site on the internet that people use to stay in touch with their friends, family, colleagues, or customers. According to Cambridge's dictionary, a social network was defined as "a website or computer program that allows people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer or mobile phone."

Social networks allow individuals and organizations to connect with each other to develop a relationship and share information, ideas, and messages. Family members who are far apart may still be connected through social networks, where they can share photos and updates about what's going on in their lives. People can also connect with others who share the same interests, even with strangers, through groups, pages, and hashtags.

In the digital age, social networking sites are the primary base for marketers who want to attract customers. Businesses often use social networks to increase brand recognition and foster brand loyalty. It allows the company to reach new customers and keep connecting with existing customers. Some businesses use social networks for everything, from storefronts, customer contact to payment and delivery. Businesses in the digital age rely on customer reviews and comments to increase brand credibility and reach. This leads to increased sales and higher rankings in search engines.

### Types

There is a wide range of social networks. Some famous on video sharing, such as YouTube and TikTok. Some focus on photo sharing, such as Instagram, Pinterest, and Snapchat. LinkedIn is another popular service that helps connect employers and applicants and keeps business contacts. Some platforms fully integrate payment systems and marketing tools, such as WeChat and Line Application.

## Meta Platforms

### Facebook

Facebook is a social networking system currently under the Meta Platforms. The system provides text and photo sharing and allow users to like and share posts. These are common features of all social media platforms.

Facebook allows users to create open and close groups and allows businesses to run pages. Note that the instant messaging feature has been moved to another service called 'Messenger.' Video sharing is also moved to Facebook Watch, which is still linked with the main system.

The information from Statistica shows the most popular social networks worldwide, as of October 2021, ranked by a number of active users. Facebook is in the top rank with nearly three billion active users, followed by YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram.

As of January 2022, Facebook has roughly 500,000 new users every day, or six new users every second. India has the largest active Facebook users, leaving the US in the second position and Indonesia in the third (Brazil in some polls). Note that Google remains the most-visited website with 92.5 billion visits monthly, followed by YouTube with 34.6 billion visits.

## WhatsApp

WhatsApp was founded by former Yahoo! employees. In February 2014, Facebook, Inc. (now Meta Platforms) acquired WhatsApp for \$19 billion, one of the largest acquisitions in history.

WhatsApp is one of three social networking platforms with more than 2 billion users. WhatsApp is primarily focused on text, audio, and video messaging, not on marketing channels like other instant messaging applications.

WhatsApp services are tied to mobile phones and phone contacts. Hence it may not be popular in some countries due to user preferences.

## Messenger

Messenger is an instant messaging app owned by Meta Platforms. It was originally developed as Facebook Chat in 2008. Later, Facebook separated the messaging functionality from the main Facebook app, allowing users to access the service through the web interface or standalone mobile apps.

Besides its common functionalities to send messages, photos, videos, stickers, audio, and files, Messenger seamlessly integrates with businesses on Facebook by allowing them to manage their business contacts, get insight information, and install chatbots.

Facebook reports that more than 40 million businesses use Messenger to interact with potential customers. And more than 20 billion messages are sent between businesses and consumers every month.

Although Messenger still lags behind WhatsApp in terms of the number of users worldwide, Messenger is the more popular choice among people in the United States.

## Instagram

Instagram is the world's most popular photo-sharing app, with approximately 1.4 billion users worldwide in 2021. The app allows users to upload media that is editable with filters and organized by hashtags and geo-tagging. Posts can be shared publicly or with approved followers. Users can browse other users' content by tags and location and see trending content. Users can like photos and follow other users to comment on their personal feeds.

In April 2012, Facebook Inc. acquired Instagram for approximately \$1 billion. Instagram originally allowed content frames to be in a square aspect ratio (1:1) to match the display of early iPhones. These restrictions were lifted in 2015 together with the addition of other features like direct messaging (DM), the ability to combine multiple photos or videos in a single post, and a 'Story' feature similar to Snapchat.

## Google Platforms

### YouTube

The second most popular social media platform is YouTube, with over 2.29 billion registered users. However, users can watch videos on YouTube even if they are not registered or uploaded any video. Therefore, YouTube popularity may be measured by total views.

YouTube was first launched in 2005 and has become the second most visited website after Google, with more than a billion hours of video views every day. Its primary income was initially from advertising.

In October 2006, Google bought YouTube for \$1.65 billion. It has also added additional monetization models outside of ads, such as YouTube Premium and Google's AdSense program.

YouTube is one of the social media platforms that are very popular among children. It was found that around 8/10 children have watched YouTube videos. In January 2022, the 'Baby Shark Dance' by PingFong became the first YouTube video that reached 10 billion views. Among the top-10 most-viewed YouTube videos, five of them are kid videos.

### (Discontinued) Google+

Google+ is a social network owned and operated by Google. The platform was launched in June 2011 in an effort to challenge other giant social networks. It links other Google products such as Google Drive, Blogger, and YouTube.

Circles are a key feature of the social platform. Google+ allows users to organize people into groups or lists to selectively share content only within the circle.

Due to low user engagement and software design flaws that allow third-party developers to access users' personal data, Google+ announced it was discontinuing its public service in March 2019. Business users have migrated their data to other Google services

## Other US-based Platforms

### Twitter

Twitter is a social networking service on which users post and interact with messages known as "tweets." Registered users can post, like, and retweet.

Tweets were originally restricted to 140 characters, but the limit was doubled in November 2017. Audio and video tweets remain limited to 140 seconds for most accounts.

As of 2019, Twitter had more than 330 million monthly active users. As of January 2022, the top-3 most-followed Twitter accounts are @BarackObama @justinbieber and @katyperry.

### Snapchat

Some people say that whatever is uploaded to the internet will last forever. That's not Snapchat's approach. The platform allows users to share photos, videos, and posts for a limited time before they are deleted. This gives each Snapchat interaction a speed that resonates with younger mobile internet users.

Snapchat has seen tremendous growth both in and outside the United States. Since 2016, Snapchat has been the most popular social network among teenagers and young adults.

### Pinterest

Pinterest is an image sharing and social media service designed to make information discoverable on the internet using images in the form of Pinboards. This website has more than 478 million monthly active users as of March 2021, with most users in the United States.

## Reddit

Reddit is the American social news, web content rating, and chat site. Registered members submit content to the website, such as links, text posts, images, and videos. Posts are organized by subject in user-generated boards, known as "Community," covering topics such as news, politics, religion, science, movies, video games, music, books, sports, fitness, cooking, pets, etc.

Other members can vote up or down against posts. Reddit is said to be the "first page of the internet" because more upvotes will push that post to the top of the topic. And if they get enough upvotes, the post will be on the site's home page.

Reddit currently has over 2.2 million subreddits. Although the posts are community-generated, they will be moderated regularly to exclude toxic content.

No matter your interests, you'll find a community of like-minded people who are ready to educate, listen to opinions, and make you have fun.

## China-based Platforms

### Weixin/WeChat

WeChat is an application developed by Tencent, China, first released in 2011. With a variety of functions, users can do everything from sending text messages, voice messages, video calling, video games, photo and video sharing, and location sharing to digital payments and business use. It has been described as an "App for everything."

WeChat has over 1 billion monthly active users and is used in all ages, unlike other social media that tend to be popular among teenagers.

Due to China's cross-border data transmission requirements and regulations, information inside and outside the country will be handled differently (Weixin and WeChat). There are also restrictions on subscriptions made by international users.

### Tencent QQ

Tencent QQ, also known as QQ, is an instant messaging software service and web portal developed by Chinese tech giant Tencent (the other is WeChat). QQ offers everything from text and voice messaging to online games, music, shopping, microblogging, and movies.

There are 768 million active users as of March 2020. QQ was the first social media platform to hit the market. This helps build a solid foundation for the company.

Unlike other platforms, the international version of QQ does not integrate with its core products. International users usually subscribe to play Tencent games. Also, subscribing from abroad is quite limited.

### Douyin/Tiktok

Douyin is a social network service of Chinese company ByteDance Ltd. It was first launched in the Chinese market in September 2016. The platform focuses on posting different types of short videos taking from 15 seconds to three minutes.

TikTok is an international version of Douyin released in 2017 for iOS and Android in markets outside mainland China. Two years after its social media presence, TikTok is in the top five most downloaded apps in the world and rose to number one the following year.

Both platforms share the same parent company and share the same core functionality. But they are two different apps and are marketed in two different demographic groups.

In China, Douyin serves as a marketing channel for luxury brands. Also, it allows users to monetize their videos mainly by integrating with popular Chinese e-commerce platforms like Taobao.

### Sina Weibo

Sina Weibo is a Chinese microblogging website launched by Sina Corporation in 2009, with the international version available since March 2017.

Weibo is one of China's largest social media platforms, with more than 523 million monthly active users as of June 2020.

Unlike other Chinese platforms, Weibo focuses on creating, delivering, and consuming user-generated content. It is an information center recognized by businesses, journalists, influencers, and the general public, including international brands that want to introduce their businesses to the Chinese market.

### Kuaishou

Kuaishou is China's second-largest video-sharing social network. Currently, it has about 80% of Douyin's active users.

The platform focuses on the Chinese market, but there are also international users. Kuaishou is a popular live-streaming platform with a robust content recommendation system. This made it famous in the e-commerce segment for sales and gaming.

## Russia-based Platforms

### VK

VK is a Russian social networking service. It is available in multiple languages, but it is mostly used by Russian speakers.

Besides its common functions like messaging, posting, and media file sharing, the platform offers a wide range of games, music, and entertainment. The platform has its own music awards and festivals.

As of August 2018, VK has reached 500 million accounts.

### Telegram

Telegram was launched in 2013 by co-founders of the Russian social network VK. Telegram provides end-to-end encrypted voice and video calls and optional end-to-end encrypted "secret" chats.

Information is encrypted between the app and the server so that ISPs and other third parties on the network cannot access data. Due to its high security, Telegram is favored by blockchain users and crypto-currency traders who take personal data very seriously.

Telegram's popularity stems from dissatisfaction with privacy policies of various giant platforms, including exchanging customer personal data for business or political gains. Many people stopped using Facebook and turned to Telegram.

### Worthy of mention

The following social media platforms are not on the top list, but they are worth mentioning.

#### Line Application

The Line app provides free instant communication on electronic devices. The service is operated by Line Corporation, the Tokyo subsidiary of Softbank Group, and Naver Corporation in Seoul. Users can exchange text, images, video, audio, make a voice call and video conference for free (data transmitted through the internet).

The highlight of this service is the sending of cute stickers, which users can design and sell their own creations. The Line app also offers services such as digital wallets (called Line Pay), news streaming (called LINE Today), and video-on-demand (called Line TV).

The Line app is integrated with several marketing strategies using official accounts (called Line OA) to keep their engagement with customers through e-coupons and loyalty cards.

#### DingDing/DingTalk

DingTalk is an enterprise communication and collaboration platform developed by the Alibaba Group, founded in 2014. It is one of the world's largest professional communication and management mobile apps in China, with more than 100 million users.

The platform expanded to the international market in 2018. When you see two separate names for a Chinese platform, you know that one is for domestic use and the other is for international use.

Besides the chat, voice, and video messaging that every social media platform has, DingTalk provides a full function of corporate communication such as attendance, collaboration, workflow, and project.

#### LinkedIn

LinkedIn is an online service for business and employment. It was launched in May 2003 and is now a subsidiary of Microsoft. This platform is mainly for professional networking and career development. It allows job seekers to post resumes and employers to post jobs. Most of the company's revenue comes from selling access to member information to recruiters and sales professionals.

As of September 2021, LinkedIn has 774 million registered members from over 200 countries. LinkedIn allows members (both workers and employers) to create profiles and connect with each other in social networks that may represent real-world professional relationships.

LinkedIn can also be used to organize offline events, join groups, write articles, publish job postings, post photos and videos, and more. It's important to note that posts and user profiles on LinkedIn are always official.

## Advantages and disadvantages of social networking

Social networks allow individuals to stay in touch with family and friends who are far away. People can also connect with other people who share the same interests and develop new relationships.

Social networks also help companies connect with potential and existing customers. Companies can also use social media to build, promote, and increase brand awareness. More positive customer feedback leads to increased sales and higher rankings in search engines. Businesses also rely on the reviews and opinions from their customers to improve their services, provide assistance, respond to customer inquire, make a clarification, and apologize.

On the downside, social network users can spread false information or fake news. And they spread like wildfire. There are rumors that fake news tends to spread faster than facts, causing damage to the person, organization, or company they mentioned.

Negative posts can spread on social media just as quickly as positive comments. This can create a lot of trouble for the PR. People in charge must have a lot of maturity and patience in responding to those comments.

Although most social networks are free, creating and maintaining a company profile is time-consuming and costly. Businesses need a large number of followers before social media marketing campaigns can start generating positive income. Advertising on social media also requires a budget.

Addiction to social media has caused many people to forget what to do in the real world, undermining their health and causing a range of mental and physical ailments. The use of social media should be within a reasonable period. And users should consider the etiquette of living together as in a real society.