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USING SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS TO VISUALIZE SOCIAL MEDIA THREADS

Social media are used to connect a variety of networks: families, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and more. This study examines a neighborhood app called "Nextdoor." The website for this app states,

"Neighbors around the world turn to Nextdoor daily to receive trusted information, give and get help, get things done, and build real-world connections with those nearby — neighbors, businesses, and public services" (https://about.nextdoor.com/). When you sign up for this app, you receive brief, periodic emails (sometimes several a day) from your neighbors and surrounding community members who post information about area crime, restaurant reviews, reports of suspicious behavior, lost pet information, or just to say hello. Clicking the "see more" tab takes you from your email to the app where you can follow the various threads to see entire discussions of whatever the topic might be.

This and similar community-building apps are examples of how people naturally organize into networked systems. The study of social networks typically examines sets of communicative nodes, or network members who are linked by some relational characteristic and/or technology that enhances discussion amongst them. Social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and neighborhood apps such as the one considered for this study are very popular networking forms.

On the theory side, there are two main approaches for understanding social networks: formalist and relationalist views. This study focuses on the formalist perspective which emphasizes the structure of a social network. The formalist view is rooted in a structuralist explanation of Georg Simmel's theoretical work. Simmel is known as the father of social network theory. He outlined a neo-Kantian program for determining a priori categories of relational styles and patterns that function regardless of cultural content or background. Essentially, he argued that society is nothing more than a network of interconnections. Simmel maintained that the main task of social science research should be to analyze patterns among interactions, which he called forms (thus the "formalist" approach), rather than individual motives, emotions, ideas, sentiments, and beliefs.

Applying igraph software and content analysis, this study visualizes a variety of threads from the Neighborhood app for my community in Las Vegas, Nevada. The results show visualizations of social networking, specifically, discussions, or threads of posts and

replies. Thus, insights into the visual structure of day-to-day social network conversations are discussed in this presentation.