

Google backs research to improve social networks

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Cornell researchers will collaborate with Google experts to improve group interaction in online social networks. The work will be supported by a grant of \$800,000 from Google Inc.

The interdisciplinary group of researchers -- including economists, sociologists and computer scientists -- seeks to better understand the social and economic factors behind online social networks and apply what they learn to make such groups run more smoothly. The new design and management techniques will also be used to improve the effectiveness of social groups that collaborate to solve problems or build online knowledge resources.

One of the challenges is that most [social networking](#) systems create links between people, but the links lack important levels of detail, said Jon Kleinberg, the Tisch University Professor of Computer Science and principal investigator. Today's systems, for example, do not provide natural ways to represent the attitudes that people have toward each other, or the roles that various individuals play in a person's life.

"Current representations of [online social networks](#) are not able to capture the full richness of [social interaction](#) in users' real lives," Kleinberg said.

The team also hopes to find ways to shape the design of social networks to make them less likely to fall into social disorder and to encourage members to produce more useful content.

"There is still relatively little understanding ... of what distinguishes healthy, successful groups -- those with productive discourse and beneficial interactions -- from groups that are dominated by conflict or that tend toward inactivity," the researchers said.

The Cornell research team also includes economists David Easley and Larry Blume; [computer scientists](#) Éva Tardos, Lillian Lee, Robert Kleinberg and Dan Huttenlocher; information scientist Dan Cosley; communication professor Geri Gay; and sociologist Michael Macy.

The group has been collaborating for some time on similar research, working as the Center for the Interface of Networks, Computation and Economics. On this project they will work closely with researchers inside [Google](#), allowing investigations that can draw on Google's vast amounts of data and widely used applications. Google hopes that insights from the research can inform future social networking applications.

Provided by Cornell University

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