

Question 1

According to Jones & Hafner (2012) the development of social networking sites are a “natural outcome of the web’s inherent capacity for connecting things, ‘an evolution from the linking of information to the linking of people’”

- A. State the three ways that, according to Jones and Hafner, the Internet has brought about changes in the way that people interact online.

(6 Marks)

- B. Social networks are characterised by a combination of what are known as ‘strong ties’ and ‘weak ties’. What are the advantages and disadvantages of strong and weak ties in a social network?

(14 Marks)

- C. Jones & Hafner point out that “equipment for displaying information in online social networks consists of things like profile information, profile pictures and photo albums.” What is the role of the ‘selfie’ in social media, and what do these images allow people to express about their identity?

(20 Marks)

- D. Describe what draws people together in a social network such as Facebook or Twitter.

(10 Marks).

Solutions: Question One:

A. According to Jones & Hafner social media can be conceived in online groups by the following affordances:

- First, people's online interactions began to focus more on people that they already knew offline than on anonymous 'net friends.'
- Second, people were now able to organise their friends into groups not just according to interests but according to connections and to expand their social networks and those of the friends by introducing friends to one another.
- Finally, people began to see the internet as a tool for presenting and promoting their 'real selves' rather than for taking anonymous action"

(6 Marks)

B. The advantage of online social networks is that they improve our relationships with our core group of close friends with whom we already have strong ties, and that they help us to meet new friends that we might not otherwise have encountered before. Communicating with already established friends is reinforced and the ties become stronger, while the weak ties are given scope to facilitate contact with casual acquaintances. Social networks are comprised of 'connectors' and 'mavens', according to Malcolm Gladwell. Mavens are people in possession of, or access to things that are beneficial to other people. Connectors act as bridges, facilitating the flow of information, goods and services between different groups or clusters of people. The first step in understanding how to manage connections in social networks understands the nature of those connections.

(14 marks)

C. Jones and Hafner people 'perform social identities, and they perform different identities to different people. Drawing on the work of Erving Goffman, they describe how "we cooperate with one another in performing various roles. A large part of these performances consist of managing our 'information preserves': deciding what information about ourselves we want to reveal to others and what information we want to hide from them. We have many different sides to our personalities and there are many different kinds of information about us that we might choose to reveal to other people. And so, being yourself is a kind of performance." Social networking sites allow people either to reveal their identity or to conceal it. Identity in social networks is not static, and the performance that people have to undertake to manage their identity is a constant process of designing a profile and updating their status profile with relevant information. Our lives can come to feel like mini-dramas, and as we interact within our networks of a people we know we have to think about the 'performative' nature of the information we are managing. The selfie is a recent addition to the repertoire of self-representation choices that have become available to people. The affordances of digital smart phones now allow people to take high-quality photographs of them and to share them instantly across their social networks. Some people are very open with their privacy settings and post many images of themselves on a regular basis.

(20 Marks)

D. In a social network such as Facebook or Twitter people are joined together not just by an interest in a topic, activity, or cause, but also by social relationships. Bonding between friends with strong ties increases motivation and commitment for a cause, and bridging relationships help spread this commitment to other groups linked to one another through weaker ties. The combination of bonding and bridging is one reason social networking sites are an effective tool for memeing and sharing content, such as images and videos. Social networking sites make it easier to 'crowdsource' information and to collaborate in the production and development of work.

(10 Marks)