

This is a pre-print version on an encyclopedia entry to be published in:

Moulaison, H. L. (2011). Morocco. In G. Barnett & J.G. Golson (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of social networking*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Morocco

The Kingdom of Morocco is a developing country in the western part of North Africa. Moroccans are largely Muslim Arabs who respect tradition. Access to information can be gained through kinship networks and other affinity relationships cultivated by Moroccans. Traditional social networks make use of time-honored methods of communicating. Increasingly, they also use modern Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

Religion is the most important cultural element in Moroccan society the country as a whole and an overarching aspect daily life; the complex language situation also plays an essential role. Arab and Berber inhabitants of Morocco have both adopted Islam. While religion is largely uniform, with widespread tolerance for Jews and Christians, language and related ethnicity can differentiate peoples. The Arabic spoken in Morocco, called Derija, is dialectical; it is not the Arabic of the Koran. There are at least three Berber dialects in Morocco, and linguistic influences from European languages are strong throughout the country. During the French Protectorate (1912-1956), the introduction of the French language and educational system supplied additional means of indicating class and status. Education and language continue to be linked since courses at the primary and secondary levels are taught in Standard Arabic instead of Derija, and university courses may be taught in Standard Arabic, French, or English, depending on the university and the discipline. Traditional and modern social networks have developed and adapted to this particular cultural context.

Traditional social networks

Poverty, limited access to education, limited resources, and a fundamentally oral culture contribute to a society rich in social networks. Traditional social groups in Morocco tend to be composed of family members; neighbors can also form looser social groups. Established gender roles are generally respected in Moroccan society. As in other Muslim countries, men are comfortable in the public sphere and spend time in cafés, shopping and doing business, and at the mosque. Conversely, women are said to be in charge of the domestic or private sphere. Modern women work outside of the home and may be educated, especially if they live in urban areas. The split between the public and private spheres may encourage women to create and exploit informal social networks. The “daart” is an informal social and financial group of women that maintain their own micro-credit system. The women will meet regularly, and at each meeting, each will put money into a pot. The woman in the most need will take all of the contributed monies with her at the end of the meeting.

Modern social networks

As a complement to the traditional social networks, ICTs are being adopted in Morocco on a large scale. Mobile telephony is conducive to connecting non-literate speakers across distances. Mobile phones are very common, and Moroccans have adapted this tool to their existing social interactions. Moroccans may call and hang up without leaving a message as a way of requesting

contact or signaling a pre-determined event with a correspondent. Literacy rates in Morocco hover at 50%, but even non-literate Moroccans may use text messaging features on cell phones since airtime is expensive.

The Internet is another ICT that is enhancing traditional social networks with known persons, permitting novel interactions with unknown interlocutors, and enabling a combination of the two through social networking sites. Morocco has one of the highest Internet penetration rates in Africa with fast and stable Internet connections. With a large and active diaspora living and working in Europe and North America, families may use synchronous means like Internet video telephony to remain in contact with members abroad. The Internet also provides spaces like chat rooms where Web-savvy Moroccans can meet new people. Online anonymous chat is equally possible for men and women, and allows women in particular to save face by adopting online identities. Such online spaces complement society's traditional public and private spheres. Students in higher education are using social networking sites like Facebook for communication with each other since their schools may not issue email accounts. Student groups may organize meetings or send messages to absent students on behalf of an instructor, and individual students may try to enlarge their friend lists by inviting foreign colleagues to become part of their network.

Information and communication technologies can be seen as ways of extending and enhancing traditional social networks while working within the well-defined parameters of traditional Moroccan society.

See Also: Telecommunication Networks, Mobile Networks, Self-organizing Networks, Algeria, Tunisia,

Further Reading.

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