

Preface

This is not another book on network analysis, despite the fact that both “networks” and “analyses” figure prominently in its pages. We were motivated to write it by a gap that we observed in network analysis as it relates to the epistemic underpinnings of social networks—specifically, the gap in our understanding and in our representations of what networked human agents know or believe. Bridging this gap is necessary for network-based explanations of behavior and a genuine representation of network dynamics, but it cannot be straightforwardly done by work in fields such as epistemic game theory or artificial intelligence, which emphasize formal models for dealing with interactive states of knowledge and belief. For this reason, this book introduces a language that researchers can use to explain, predict, and intervene in the epistemic fabric of social networks and interactions.

Because we are building a language that is meant to be used (and perhaps sometimes abused), it is useful to think of this not only as a book but also as an “application”—or “app”—in the computer software sense of the term. An app is a set of representations and the procedures for manipulating them that allows users to accomplish new tasks. Think of Microsoft Excel, Google Chrome, or the video game Rock Band. An app should be both *usable* and *useful*. Unlike a “theory,” which lives in a purely representational space, an app is embodied and made useful through repeated use. Thus, our goal is not simply to introduce another way to describe the cognitive and epistemic states of networked agents but to do so in a way that is “plug-in compatible” with the discursive and empirical practices of the fields that study social networks.

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MM and JB