The field of social network analysis has been an active research area in social sciences for a long time. In the last couple of years primarily via the manifestation of social networks of large scale through web applications the field has enjoyed active research participation from multiple communities. Recent applications such as social networking sites (MySpace, LinkedIn, Facebook, to name a few), media sharing and collaboration sites (e.g., Flickr, YouTube), blog applications (e.g., Blogger, LiveJournal, NotePad) gave rise to structured and adhoc social networks of massive scale. Social scientists, physicists, computer scientists and engineers are trying to study and understand the properties of these networks and the challenges they pose.

Distinguishing characteristics of these networks to those studied before is their massive scale and their dynamic nature. Such characteristics pose certain challenges to handle the data volume and their dynamics and need to be carefully understood. Moreover, they enable new applications and raise research challenges both at the modeling and algorithmic level. Data management has a lot to offer in terms of addressing such challenges.

The purpose of this volume is twofold. First, to collect and present works that highlight some of the research challenges lying ahead that our community started to address. Towards this end we have collected articles listing challenges in information management in a social networks context (articles by AnHai Doan et. al., and Amer-Yahia et. al.) as well as articles demonstrating interesting problems and techniques resulting from the structure implicit in such networks (articles by Singh and Getoor and Bender et. al.,). The article by Adar and Re presents an interesting connection between problems in the social networking area and the recent work on probabilistic data management. The second purpose of this volume is to bring the perspective of social scientists that have been working on social network analysis to the table. The article by Bernie Hogan provides a brief overview to social network analysis from the social sciences perspective and presents the data management problems part of this community faces when dealing with social networks of large scale.

The research challenges lying ahead are important and likely to become more significant as the web evolves to a global dynamic and interactive collective. It is important to remember that we are not into this alone, other communities are contributing to this effort and we need to foster interaction among communities and exchange of research ideas. I sincerely hope that this volume contributes towards this direction.

I wish to thank Mr. Dimitris Tsirogiannis from the University of Toronto for editorial assistance with this volume.