Mobile Social Software -
Potentials and Limitations of Enabling Social Networking on Mobile Devices

Oliver Bohl & Shakib Manouchehri
University of Kassel
{bohl, manouchehri}@wirtschaft.uni-kassel.de

Sebastian Ammermueller & Oliver Gerstheimer
Chilli Mind GmbH
{ammermueller, gerstheimer}@chilli-mind.de

Abstract

Driven by the increased usage of information and communication technology (ICT) the typical behavior and the acting of users in private as well as in professional settings changed dramatically over the last years. Modern applications of ICT are seen as instruments to fulfill the wants and needs of heterogeneous user groups. Above of all, the event of the Internet as well as the omnipresent availability of computing systems and mobile technologies altered the communication between users. For instance nowadays a lot of them regularly use web-based search engines to search for information, they chat with friends, upload and share pictures which they took for instance with their mobile phone camera, and last but not least they download and share music files to listen to them on their mobile devices. Against this background the users already experience the medial convergence which they have to create actively.

Within the context described above one of the most important influencing factors from a socio-technical perspective and from a user-oriented point of view is the altered understanding of the community-term. The activity that single individuals come together to form and organize networks is seen as a central part of human nature. Everyone has the need to feel important in her/his own particular way and to be respected and admired by others. While some excel at presenting themselves in public, others search for alternatives to gain respect. Nevertheless everyone usually is a member of several communities or personal networks – be it the own family, a circle of close friends, be it an apartment community or the neighborhood, work colleagues or sports clubs. The Internet provides new opportunities to realize these relationships. Small online communities have grown into huge portals, weblogs have established themselves as a new medium and a form of social contact and the number of private websites and personal repositories (such like on myspace.com) is enormous. Furthermore a lot of people are using virtual worlds to present themselves to others. Anonymity and the ability to meet people on a non-personal basis have made it easier for many to present oneself. It becomes almost an essential need for all of us to be a member or part of one or more web-based social groups. To this end, then, users turn their attention more and more to such social networks regardless of customer group, age, sex, educational level, career, or social background. They have needs for organizing their everyday lives, planning their time and arranging meetings, while on the other hand they also want to discuss personal experiences. Wanting to satisfy these needs, people turn to ICT-supported content sharing platforms, weblog communities etc. where they can make available self-created content to closed or even public circles of people. In this context several examples illustrate that the permanent networking at any place is evolving to a central need for several user groups.

From there we aim on providing starting points, how the currently existing media and technologies can grow together in meaningful ways. At this our research aims to illustrate potentials and limitations of using social software on mobile devices. In more detail it is aimed on identifying, analyzing and characterizing potentials and driving factors on one hand, as well as limitations and hindering factors on the other hand for the widespread diffusion of social software and social networking tools on mobile devices. This is done with the goal of analyzing some of the important aspects mobile services and infrastructures contain for the future provision of user acceptable mobile social networking services. Drawing on typical community users and networking examples, our work highlights the most important needs and targets with regards to mobile social networking. At the same time, however, these aspects also form the foundations for deriving the requirements and success factors for mobile social networking.