Social Networking Segmentation:
Celebrating Community Diversity in a Framework
A W3C Workshop on the Future of Social Networking Position Paper

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Abstract— Clearly, communities are not all the same. Industry segmentations are useful starting points for comparisons, discussions and analyses of business and technology strategies, they also help users understand what a community might offer them. Currently there is not an industry-wide accepted terminology for describing different categories of communities.

In the 2008 Mobile Social networking report [1], Informa segments mobile communities currently in the market and expected in the next five years on the basis of two orthogonal axes:

- the human need which is met by the community and
- the complexity of the technology upon which the service is based or, what some might refer to as the "richness of the user experience."

This position paper is contributed as a starting point for a rich discussion which leads to widely-accepted categories by which communities can easily differentiate themselves and set objectives for the future.

I. INTRODUCTION

There are some who only perceive communities from a distance. They only see that there are communities which "stand alone" and satisfy all needs, and micro-communities which may be focused on a specific product within a larger corporate Web presence (a forum for discussion, for example).

For most people who are familiar with Social Networking, there are segments. One of the distinctions is between those which are hosted by corporations for the purpose of engaging with their customers and those which are hosted for the general public (consumers) to adapt to their personal or professional objectives. This position paper focuses largely on communities for the general public.

We can segment communities open to the general public or an invited group by the access technology proposed to users. The distinction should not be between Web or mobile access. There are many mobile communities which are accessible via the Mobile Internet. Rather, we propose thinking about the tool which the community participant uses to engage with the community. Community platforms permit their community participants to learn about, express themselves, connect and communicate with one another in the three following ways:

1. "PC-centric" or "Fixed"= only using a PC on the dial-up or broadband Internet, the Web;

2. "Mobile-centric"or "Mobile"= only using a mobile data connection and a mobile handset (with some conditions, perhaps)
 or
3. "Mixed" or "Converged"= using either/both of these access methods.

This framework is hampered by its lack of recognition of the many intermediate types of devices between a PC and a mobile handset. Where do we account for those who access via laptops with a 2.5G or 3G dongle? Where do the Mobile Internet Devices (MIDs) belong?

More granular or fine-grained segmentations are necessary to understand the trends within the social networking industry and to better tailor services to their users. For purposes of sizing and analyses within mobile and converged communities, the Informa Mobile Social Networking market report proposes two approaches or frameworks for segmentation of mobile and converged communities. Community operators can better optimize a service to meet the needs of their target customer segments with services when they identify themselves in either or both of the following community segmentation frameworks.

The first of the two segmentation frameworks proposed is based on human needs. People vary widely in their needs, desires and interests. Each individual seeks self actualization and expression or fulfillment in his or her unique way. In fact, users frequently seek communities with different characteristics for different purposes. LinkedIn is a community which permits people to connect in professional domains but it is not where a person who seeks a community with which to support a political or humanitarian cause will be best satisfied.

The second segmentation approach differentiates communities based on the features/functionality offered in the community as a result of the technology platform. It recognizes and leverages the fact that users have different expectations and levels of aptitude with technology.

II. WHY ARE PARTICIPANTS HERE?

In order to align service features with the needs of target users, community architects should identify the human need (or needs) that they propose to satisfy with their community.

Although mobile community services tend to target a focused set of needs, a community can meet multiple needs. The use categories proposed in this segmentation (figure provided upon request) are not mutually exclusive. The platform on which the community is operating can have multiple services which meet different needs. For example, a community can make someone feel like they are part of a group (to belong, to reveal more about themselves, to share, to bond); this type of mobile community is classified as a 'friending' community. Then there are other services which focus on helping users have fun, entertaining themselves and one another with content to pass the time. For business people, there could be mobile communities focused on meeting productivity and/or professional networking objectives.

A. Friending

People join friending communities to satisfy their need to belong to a group – or multiple groups – in a community in which there are people known in the real/physical world, or people who were unknown but share a common interest or passion. In essence, this is the core of all social networking, regardless of connection or access network but in the context of this framework it is for personal networking with existing or new friends.

According to numerous studies over one third of US online adults said that connecting with friends and family was the biggest reason to use a social networking site. Informa estimates that in mobile communities, over 30% of those joining friending communities seek to find either a person to flirt with or develop a mutual attraction.

B. Entertainment and Curiosity

Mobile entertainment communities are designed to meet the need to have fun alone or in a group; this includes consuming all types of professional and UGC. Some of the mobile entertainment communities with UGC uploading, downloading and purchasing have some cross over with competition (see below) and could also generate revenues for users directly or indirectly. Entertainment communities could also involve sharing real world experiences and recommendations (for example, restaurants, clubs, outdoor activities, cultural activities, reckless activities, sports and musical performances).

C. Professional

A mobile community may assist its members to develop and/or meet their professional aspirations. For example, there are communities designed to support information exchanges about developing and mutual testing of mobile Web sites. Mobile web designers, mobile game developers and application developers already participate in communities such Nokia MOSH. Like entertainment-centered communities, the participants may sell their services to other community members and achieve fame or develop reputations.

D. Fame

Mobile communities that use editorial teams, sometimes in combination with user/member ratings, can be a good place for people seeking attention to contribute their UGC. One community shares its video footage of rare animals and those watching can ask questions of the person who is on location (think Jacques Cousteau community). In these communities, creative members dedicate their time to contributing digital content such as screen savers, ringtones, video clips and broadcasting these to the largest number of people possible. Examples of this type of community include MyNuMo, which assists artists with online musical or video 'properties' to reach new audiences accessible on mobile platforms. For those contributing to this type of community, content is their currency and the more people who see their content the better. Some community services sponsored and hosted by news organizations (citizen journalism), such as the BBC, are also classified in this category.

E. Causes

This category of community has existed on the Web but to date is only rarely seen on mobile platforms. Eventually, as the number of people with mobile-only Internet access increases, those who want to create social value around making the world a better place – promoting peace and social responsibility – will form dedicated communities. These community members could focus on hosting and organizing events, virtual or in the physical world, and campaigning for causes such as documenting social warming and preventing the destruction of fragile habitats (WWF Climate Witness and Endangered Species protection communities). Many of the places where causes need to be captured for others to witness and/or movements organized do not have broadband Internet access or PCs.

F. Social shopping

Online shopping portals and communities meet the needs of people who are connected to their broadband Internet connections when they have a purchasing decision to make. Those who do not have broadband connections and wish to have access to and participate in auctions and community shopping sites can find mobile social shopping communities on which they can ask questions about products they are thinking of buying, obtain recommendations from friends about a possible purchase, or can organize and negotiate low margin purchases based on pooling of needs.

This category of service will evolve quickly as advertisers combine their desire to attract new customers with shopper profiles. Another driver of this category of community is the high level of trust people place in the recommendations of their friends and family members. The degree to which this will influence purchasing decisions of others varies by the culture.

G. Competition

Mobile communities targeting young men with the purpose of satisfying the need to play multiplayer mobile games are already successful in South Korea and Japan. In the next two years, new ways of competing with others in a mobile community will emerge and cross over with desire to build a reputation in a virtual community based on skill level. These communities reward winners of mobile games with prizes and by keeping track of the user's worldwide ranking.

While the cross over with fame communities is high, the goal is more clearly articulated and quantifiable than in fame (which is relative). Furthermore, competitive communities are less focused on content, more on individual actions and results in one-to-one or one-to-many contests.

III. TECHNOLOGY COMPLEXITY

In social networks where Web 2.0 integration and APIs for independent application developers are not available, a greater number of possible features and activities or options indicates a higher technology investment on the part of the operator of the community (and frequently the part of the user as well), and potentially a richer, more engaging experience as a result of these investments.

They key to this segmentation approach is to view community platforms as being modular and continually being improved by the platform provider or third parties with new features. Some features alone are insufficient to be included as the basis for a community platform. Informa does not consider photo or video-album production services to be full communities. Rather, when considered separately, they are the special features or "enablers" that support richer user applications/experiences revolving around social media. Location based services another perfect complement to community platforms. Similarly, a phone book application with presence is not, in the Informa framework, considered to be a mobile community service. It is an enabling technology, which in some cases can be and is being integrated with mobile community features. Phonebook integration increases the appeal to users by including their phone book contacts in the community without further effort, or reducing the barrier to entry/access to the community or registration.

The simplest mobile social network services are at the bottom this segmentation. Other categories generally build upon the lower community platform elements, adding to the richness of features offered to community members. The definitions proposed in the following sections use feature categories defined in another part of the Informa report to distinguish platforms and services from one another.

A. Let Me In

With some early launches in this segment dating back as far as early 2000, *Let Me In* is the simplest type of mobile community service considered in this framework. Mobile network operators and mobile handset manufacturers supported this type of mobile community as a means of generating non-voice recurring revenues on 2G networks before SMS became a popular service and, for a few, this is the first service that comes to mind when discussing the topic of Mobile Social Networking today.

The providers of *Let Me In* communities focus on establishing and quickly enabling conversations between members of the community, for example, for flirting. The most common means of conversing is text chat; chat 'rooms' can be private or public. Public chat rooms usually have themes that indicate, using keywords, what the chat within the room should be

about. Users in *Let Me In* mobile communities are not encouraged to use their real names (the nickname is short, often only one word), although many of the services now have member profiles on which real names can appear. Some Let Me In mobile community services have photos on the user's profile, and the level of photo sharing support can differentiate the services within the category. Many of the services are also implemented using WAP so could be accessed via a PC or mobile web browser. However, people who use *Let Me In* services do not regularly consider the alternative access methods. They just use chat.

The most common business model for companies operating services in this category is a monthly subscription service charge or a prepaid debit for access (could be for a day or a month) via the operator billing.

B. Let Me Be Me

The focus of *Let Me Be Me* mobile community services is less on an immediate conversation. In this segment, greater emphasis is placed on broadcasting who a person is – their preferences, history, and their innermost thoughts – to the world. One way to think about this segment is that it feeds a very narcissistic side of people who may not feel comfortable or have other reasons not to disclose personal information in face to face conversations. Like the *Let Me In* segment, but far less reliant on conversational features, *Let Me Be Me* mobile communities satisfy many of the 'friending' needs felt by users. They can advance to the point of becoming services for the *Make Me a Star* or *Me and My Circle* segments.

Mobile community operators offering services in this segment will invest more time and provide a richer set of features than for the *Let Me In* communities to permit those users who wish to develop their personal billboards, 'rooms' or profile pages. Once logged into the mobile communities in this segment, the registered users create, modify and maintain their profiles and create secondary pages, in some cases, browsing and interacting with others using the types of features described in the 'conversing' category above, by way of their profile pages: contacting people on their friends list, participating in discussion forums, text chat and a messaging system integrated with the platform. Many of the *Let Me Be Me* features are implemented in xHTML so that the pages are viewable by a great number of people (e.g., anyone with a WAP 2.0-capable browser). Technology options for adding data and social media to the member's pages include SMS and MMS.

Companies offering services in this segment will differentiate themselves by their services' ease of use, graphic designs, level of personalization offered to the member, and offering support for photos and video content, as long as all the content is UGC. It is not surprising to have companies that require a small handset application for participation in this segment, though it is in no way a requirement. Search is an important component of a *Let Me Be Me* mobile community. The addition of features that support the user's management of the list of contacts and friends, to see, for example, who has visited their pages and to be alerted to the changes to the pages

of other community members indicates that the service or community is in the process of moving up the pyramid of complexity to another segment.

C. Merge My Online with My Mobile

In *Merge My Online with My Mobile*, the focus is on extending the reach of online social networks. Usually the features in the mobile communities of this type are more limited than the online versions. The most important differentiation features are receiving alerts on a mobile when there are changes in the community (messages sent, invitations, uploads of any social media) and uploading social media to the profile on a converged platform while mobile and away from a broadband Internet-connected PC.

Technology differences between the online access devices (PCs) and mobile handsets and networks present those developing services for this segment with many challenges which the community operators have not anticipated based on their Web and broadband experiences. Challenges are primarily in the areas of media presentation layers and device management, but are not isolated to these categories of the community development, deployment and maintenance processes. There are also matters of scalability and integration with aggregators and billing matters that do not exist online.

This category is blossoming with the entry and learning process of the largest online communities and slowly the initial problems will be resolved. The business models for the converged community services on mobile include extensions of the online advertising strategies and in some cases the mobile user pays a monthly subscription for access to the otherwise free online service. Informa believes that, after the initial difficulties are overcome, the segment may disappear and the converged mobile and online community services will mirror one another, however, with different user types and target segments. Eventually, the mobile sides of these converged services will be classified in one of the other segments, more clearly reflecting the feature sets which the community operator decides are part of the core 'identity' of the mobile offering.

D. Make Me a Star

In Make Me a Star mobile communities, the users want to receive all the attention they can get. Their focus is on showing (broadcasting, showing off) their exceptional features and content to as many people as possible. The people who have an insatiable drive to be well known, to be recognized and followed by fans have an important role in the physical world as well so it is not surprising that many mobile communities have identified these people and are providing mobile services to meet their needs.

In contrast with, but also building upon, the Let Me Be Me community services, circles form around the images and videos which are contributed to the community by its members. In addition to the creators who join the community, there are many people who want entertainment. Those seeking entertainment can discover, share and, when they are the first to identify new talent, they also can achieve fame/popularity.

From a technology requirement point of view, this segment is mid-way up the pyramid because it has a heavy emphasis on UGC in more formats than just text and images: uploading can be accompanied by tagging/keywords, for example. The uploading and downloading of UGC is most commonly achieved by way of e-mail to the service (on-deck the user is identified by their phone number), MMS, WAP push and, in some cases, an application (client) on the handset

Make Me a Star mobile communities have extensive support for rating and voting, counting the number of views and visits, and, in some cases, can support the monetization of the content by the content contributors themselves.

The most common business models for *Make Me a Star* mobile communities are advertising support and free-to-access with charges for premium services such as contributing or downloading content. When the sale/purchase of community UGC is supported by features within the platform, this is an indication that the community is moving up the pyramid into the *Me, My Circle and Our Content* segment.

E. Me and My Circle

Me and My Circle communities build upon the features offered in *Let Me Be Me* communities. Their focus is on the management of connectivity and conversation between users above the broadcasting needs so, in addition to profiles/posting for personal documentation, the features heavily emphasize searching and linking between people, their pages/content, lists of friends, management of relationships, rating and voting, gifting and otherwise raising personal status within a community.

There will increasingly be an angle in these mobile services which permits the user to post once and have the same media linked to/appear associated with multiple personae within one community platform or mobile and online social network services.

The most common business models for *Me and My Circle* communities are advertising support and monthly subscription service fees. Purchasing digital gifts is commonly supported but it could be using internal community currency, earned by playing games, performing tasks (e.g., treasure hunts which expose the user to brands or new features in a mobile community platform) and performing community maintenance functions (reporting spam or those who abuse guidelines).

F. Me, My Circle and Our Content

This segment builds upon some communities that begin as *Me and My Circle* communities and then expands to include more content-centric features, and other mobile communities that begin as *Make Me a Star*, which expand to add new connecting, conversing and content features. Members of *Me, My Circle and Our Content* mobile communities join because they want to share and comment on rich professional or social media *content*. Informa defines, for the purpose of this segment, 'content' to include any UGC or professionally produced and commercially published music, music videos, entertainment content (such as mobisodes or not made-for-mobile profession content), games and applications.

In future generations of this segment, there will also be rich content editing and enhancement features on handsets and on mobile network-accessible servers that will permit users to mash-up different pieces of content to create new and unforeseen experiences.

Although they could be developers looking at or posting their applications, this segment also includes all the game download communities. The community members first and foremost entertain themselves by consuming the content, then rating, recommending to friends, critiquing and otherwise using the connecting category of features. For linear media (video, audio), the matters of DRM can be circumvented by avoiding any download to handsets, but this then eliminates a very significant percentage of the potential mobile user population.

Since, where their high-value and high-cost content is being distributed, media publishers also expect to monetize their assets, many platforms enabling this segment of mobile community will most likely need to have either a billing system (e.g., pay for what you keep) or an ad service associated with it. Other suitable business models include revenue sharing and subscription for ad-free experiences.

G. The Future

This segment is, by definition, left open and vague. Informa predicts that many mobile community platforms will expand to place greater emphasis on the user's context. This will involve new features that make it easy for users to document and find other people or places. The features may include some or all of the lower segment features plus location-aware services. The only examples proposed are of community services that integrate location into prior segment service features automatically, without requiring the user to enter an address or any other indication of their location.

New mobile devices with entirely new form factors are also going to need the development of new features using mobile communities. For example, head-mounted cameras and new display technologies could capture the experiences of people during a special event or even in daily life. Consider a technology similar to Twitter only in the place of text entered by the user on a key pad and sent to a server, the capture is done by microphone and video camera. At the time of capture or at a later point, the data would be transmitted directly to the person's 'mobile media locker' in the mobile operator's network by the mobile device with (locally or server-based) automatic annotations such as the date, time, location and state of mind/mood of the user. The user could permit others to experience, in real time or at another point in time, their experiences. While such services are currently the domain of science fiction books and movies, their predecessors are found in virtual reality portals, games and environments. These are quickly moving from the solo experience to shared experiences. There is clearly room for the research and design of many new form factors of devices and new community features that would increase the accuracy or fidelity of what people are experiencing and documenting about themselves and their friends.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, community platforms and the operators/managers of communities seek to differentiate their services in order to attract new members seeking to participate in the network which best meets their human needs and their technology aptitude.

Consistently used and widely-accepted frameworks will make it possible for communities to more quickly identify themselves and communicate with their target customer segments.

REFERENCES

[1]   Perey, C., *Mobile Social Networking: Communities and Content on the Move.* London: Informa Telecoms & Media, 2008.