Mobile Video Improvements to Enhance Mobile Social Networks

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YouTube

Introduction

Videos have become an important element for many users of social networks. Users embed their own self-made videos and favorite videos from other sources as a way to express their ideas, views, and interests.

As users of social networks move to mobile and other platforms, they will naturally expect video content to be available as it is today on the PC-targeted web.

Unfortunately, today there is poor integration of mobile browsers and mobile video players. This makes a disjointed, confusing, and unsatisfying experience when mobile users attempt to watch videos that are embedded or linked in web pages.

The solution up to now has been to build native applications for mobile platforms that provide a more seamless user experience. However, native applications are expensive to write and maintain, do not integrate well with other applications, and must be successfully discovered and downloaded by users.

In-line playback of videos on mobile browsers is necessary to expand and improve the use of video with social networking websites on mobile phones.

YouTube for Mobile

Virtually the entire catalog of YouTube videos is available on mobile phones. Access is provided both through a mobile web site (http://m.youtube.com), and through custom applications written, for example, in Java.

Hundreds of millions of YouTube videos are watched every month on mobile phones. Approximately half of those videos are accessed via native applications on iPhone and HTC G1 (Android) handsets, despite the relatively low sales volumes compared to other smart phones and feature phones.

This usage data implies that users prefer the native applications to watch videos. Clearly, users prefer an experience that is integrated and high-quality, something that is not possible with today's mobile browsers and media players.[1]

Recommendations

Mobile video should be universally accessible and available as a key element of mobile social networks, without the need for custom native applications. For this to happen, mobile operators, manufacturers, and software vendors need to take action:

1. Mobile operators should make in-line playback of video a mandatory requirement for terminals they purchase.

2. Vendors of mobile browsers and mobile video players should work together to implement in-line playback of mobile video.

3. Manufacturers should source browsers and video players that are integrated and provide support for in-line playback.

Whether this is done via the <video> tag of HTML 5, via Flash, or other methods is not as important as simply getting in-line video to work smoothly across all handsets.

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[1] Note that the iPhone and G1 are both sold with mandatory data plans, unlike most phones. While people with data plans tend to watch more videos, the difference is not enough to explain the huge difference in usage numbers between native applications and browser-based access.