Chapter XLVIII
Mobile SNS from the Perspective of Human Self-Extension

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ABSTRACT

Mobile social networking services (MoSNS) are a yet unexplored environment for human networked socialization. By introducing the concept of self-extension in this chapter, we emphasize the necessity for a human participant to materialize his or her daily pursuits that are partially realized through virtual communication and interaction. We argue that mobile social networking services potentially best fit each participant's self-extension desire as compared to personal-computer-based ones by describing and analyzing the state of the art of mobile social networking services in Japan and discussing mobile SNS peculiarities to support our view. Further, we envision the emerging of new mobile multimedia with the evolution of mobile SNS and discuss challenges and issues that have to be addressed in order to realize a mobile social networking breakthrough.

INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development of information technologies, the World Wide Web (the Web) has gradually come into people's lives. With an everyday contact to the Web, the Web has become an essential part of a modern person's life. And humans, as social creatures, have projected their social values and relationships onto the parts of the Web with which they interact directly. Examples of this phenomenon are Web chats, Web diaries, weblogs (blogs), social networking services (SNS), and other services around which new social norms and values are formed. SNS can probably be named as the most salient one. Social network(ing) services focus on building and verifying Web-based social networks for communities of people with similar interests or who are engaged into similar activities and interested in exploring interests and activities of others (e.g., Wikipedia). Social networks conceal a wealth of social information that can be mined to get new insights about communities (Yokoyama, Kashihara, Okuda, Kadobayashi & Yamaguchi, 2007) and often serve as an environment for novel media genre emergence (Paolillo, Warren & Kunz, 2007). Social networking services have already become a topic of an increasing research interest. However, generally such research is aimed at services usually accessed with personal computers (further referred to as PC SNS), and few (Smith, 2005; Ziv & Mulloth, 2006) consider them in a mobile context, probably because mobile social networking services (MoSNS) are still a relatively new phenomenon in social networking systems. To our knowledge, currently there is no work making a close examination of mobile SNS characteristics and peculiarities as compared with PC SNS. In this chapter, we make an attempt to outline the peculiarities of today's mobile social networking services such as a fusion and collision of PC and mobile social networking services, analyze them with the emphasis on user activities within the services, envision future directions in

mobile multimedia evolution, and outline urgent tasks MoSNS have to accomplish to realize social networking breakthroughs and become a significant element of ubiquitous society. The study is done with a focus on Japan as a unique telecommunication and cultural environment and a special care to mobile multimedia as having vast potential to the emergence of new types of multimedia.

STATE OF THE ART OF MOBILE SNS IN JAPAN

Japan is well known for its cellular phone sales incentive system that makes possible selling multimedia-rich high-tech handsets at discount rates, or even giving them out for free. The system is not unique and can be observed in other countries such as the UK and Germany, but it stimulated the wide use of cellular phones; an increase in a variety of functionalities such as one-segment television, wallet phone, pictograph symbols, and others; and fast migration to third-generation networks. Informally, cellular phone ("keitai denwa" in Japanese) is shortened to "keitai." This phenomenon emphasizes the decreasing role of the cellular phone as a pure telephone device and accentuates the importance of other nontelephone functionalities. According to the investigations conducted by Japan's Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, the number of people who use cellular phones as a voice communication facility only continues to decrease, while the number of people who access the Internet through their cellular phones increased up to 70.86 million during 2006 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications of Japan). Another interesting investigation is done by MMD Research Institute. Polling almost 10,000 people, the institute found out that about 44% of them almost never use telephone call functionality, and about 35% use it less than three times a day. This phenomenon can be explained by indispensability of the cellular

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