Chapter III
Semantic Social Software:
Semantically Enabled Social Software or Socially Enabled Semantic Web?

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, the combination of Social Software with Semantic Web technology has been gaining significant attention in the Semantic Web community. This is exemplified by the surprisingly high number of submissions and attendees of the 1st Workshop on Semantic Wikis (Völkel & Schaffert, 2006) that took place at the European Semantic Web Conference 2006 (ESWC06) last year, as well as the ESWC06 best poster award for the Semantic Wikipedia (Völkel, Krötzsch, Vrandecic, Haller & Studer, 2006).

This chapter describes what I believe makes Social Software attractive for the Semantic Web community, and what makes the Semantic Web attractive for the Social Software community. It also derives challenges for the Semantic Web community to address that seem relevant to us based on our experience with Social Software and the Semantic Web. In the remainder of this introduction, I briefly introduce Social Software, the Semantic Web, and the combination of both, which I call *Semantic Social Software*.

Social Software

According to Wikipedia, Social Software is software that "enables people to rendezvous, connect or collaborate through computer-mediated communication and to form online communities."[1] Although this definition in principle also includes technologies that have already existed for a long time (like e-mail or Usenet), the term Social Software usually only comprises more recent developments like wikis, Weblogs, instant messaging (e.g., AIM, ICQ), social bookmarking (e.g., del.icio.us), media sharing (e.g., Flickr, YouTube), and social networking systems (e.g., MySpace, OpenBC).

Today, huge amounts of content are available in Social Software systems. The free Web encyclopedia Wikipedia now hosts over 4 million entries of partly astonishing quality. The social networking site MySpace is one of the most popular Web sites overall (ranked number 4 by Alexa, following closely after Google, Yahoo, and MSN). According to the Web log index Technorati,[2] there are currently about 40 million blogs with a

doubling time of about 6 months and around 1.2 million blog posts every day.

What makes Social Software interesting is not only the huge amount of content but that it considerably changes the way content is created and consumed, maybe even more so than the Web did some 15 years ago: where the traditional process of publishing content was expensive and time consuming, Social Software allows virtually everyone to publish on a mouse click. To speak in market terms, with Social Software, *consumers become prosumers*. Because of these radical changes in content production, I consider Social Software a *disruptive technology*.

Semantic Web

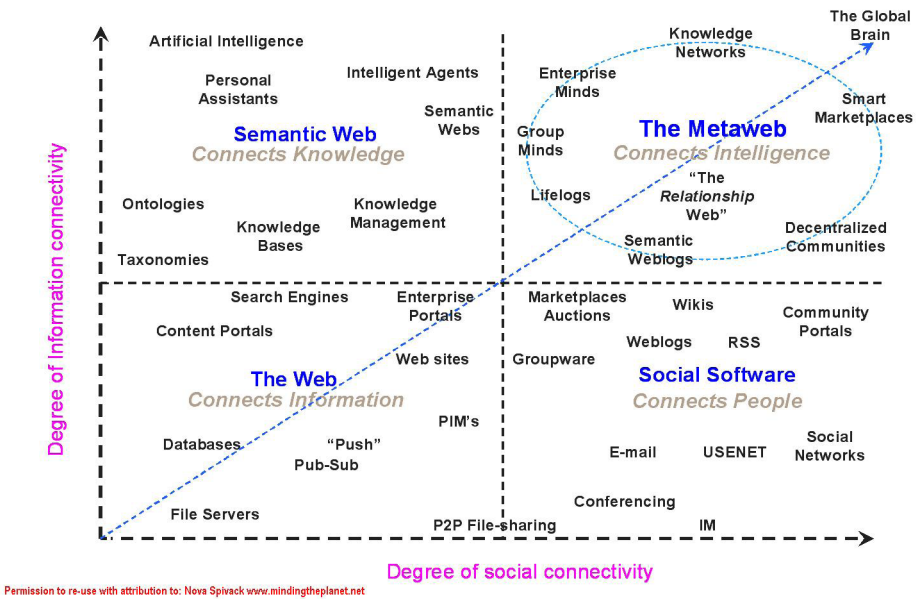
The vision of the Semantic Web is to move from "dumb" content that is suitable for presentation only to "smart" content that may be processed by machines and used in different settings. It is also to move from application-centric systems to data-centric systems, and from a Web focused on information to a Web focused on relations between things. According to W3C founder and chair Tim Berners-Lee, the Semantic Web will be *the next big thing*.

The current Semantic Web approach may be briefly described as enriching the existing Web with meta-data and (meta-)data processing so as to provide Web-based systems with advanced (so-called intelligent) capabilities, in particular with context-awareness and decision support. What distinguishes the Semantic Web from previous AI approaches is that it assumes a distributed but strongly connected web of small pieces of formal knowledge rather than big, centralised knowledge bases.

Semantic Social Software

Semantic Social Software is the combination of Social Software with Semantic Web technologies. Its basic ideas are on the one hand to improve usage of Social Software by adding metadata and on the other hand to improve the process of

Figure 1. Nova Spivack's "Metaweb"



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