Chapter 15

WorldCupinion:
Experiences with an Android App for Real-Time Opinion Sharing During Soccer World Cup Games

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ABSTRACT

Mobile devices are increasingly used in social networking applications and research. So far, there is little work on real-time emotion or opinion sharing in large loosely coupled user communities. One potential area of application is the assessment of widely broadcasted television (TV) shows. The idea of connecting non-collocated TV viewers via telecommunication technologies is referred to as Social TV. Such systems typically include set-top boxes for supporting the collaboration. In this work the authors investigated whether mobile phones can be used as an additional channel for sharing opinions, emotional responses, and TV-related experiences in real-time. To gain insight into this area, an Android app was developed for giving real-time feedback during soccer games and to create ad hoc fan groups. This paper presents results on rating activity during games and discusses experiences with deploying this app over four weeks during soccer World Cup. In doing so, challenges and opportunities faced are highlighted and an outlook on future work in this area is given.

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INTRODUCTION

Mobile devices are increasingly used for mobile social networking. One explanation for this development is that mobile devices are almost always with their users, have continuous wireless connectivity, and feature increasingly capable user interfaces. They can thus serve as ubiquitous input devices and sensors for user reactions, emotional responses, and opinions around large public events (Diakopolous & Shamma, 2010).

The goal of the work presented here is to investigate mobile social software as a tool for research on opinion sharing in large user communities. We picked the soccer World Cup 2010 as a use case for this research because it is an event with extremely high public attention in many parts of the world and many people have a high emotional involvement to (at least some of) the matches. The matches are also synchronized in time with many simultaneous viewers and thus many potential users. We focus on exchanging spontaneous emotional feedback between users who are part of a virtual fan block.

The particular test application, WorldCupinion, is an Android application that lets soccer fans express their opinions about events and moments in soccer matches while watching them. Through this application users can support their favorite teams and share their opinions with other fans. As we expected that users’ focus of attention is mainly on the match itself and short bursts of usage occur when interesting events happen, the design focus was on simplicity and quick usage. When not actively used, the app mostly served as an ambient display that conveyed the aggregated opinions of the active users.

This work addresses the following aspects and research questions:

- How to share experiences and opinions effectively in real-time across a large number of mobile devices?
- How to design for awareness of group opinion in a loosely coupled ad-hoc group?
- How to visualize information related to shared experiences?
- How to distribute and maintain a free Android app for ambient mobile communication?

In the following sections we first discuss the concepts of Social TV, real-time opinion sharing, and the utilization of mobile phones as a research tool. We then give an overview of the design and system architecture of our test application and discuss the distribution and publication channels for the application. After that we present results derived from log files as well as from a subsequent online-questionnaire and report on the experiences we made with the public prototype. We conclude with recommendations for research in the large and with giving ideas for future work.

RELATED WORK

Social TV

Various researches have been exploring the idea of using additional communication channels in parallel with watching TV. “AmigoTV” (Coppens et al., 2004) was an early social TV system that used voice chat communication in combination with broadcast TV. It also provided emoticons and a buddy list with online status. Motorola Labs developed a series of prototypes called “Social TV” system (STV), which allowed users to engage in spontaneous communication with their buddies through text or voice chat while watching TV (Harboe et al., 2008). The system also included an additional display to convey views of the current TV-watching users. Harboe et al. (2008) give a comprehensive overview of social TV systems. Further, various user studies investigated the communication modalities. Geerts (2006) as well as Baillie et al. (2008) compared