Video Microblogging: Your 12 Seconds of Fame

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Abstract

Microblogging is a recently popular phenomenon and with the increasing trend for video cameras to be built into mobile phones, a new type of microblogging has entered the arena of electronic communication: video microblogging. In this study we examine video microblogging, which is the broadcasting of short videos. A series of semi-structured interviews offers an understanding of why and how video microblogging is used and what the users post and broadcast.

Keywords

Microblogging, social networking, online communities, video content

ACM Classification Keywords

H.4.1 Information Systems Applications: Groupware

General Terms

Human Factors

Introduction

Recently the phenomenon of microblogging, the broadcasting of very short messages to the public or a limited group of receivers, has become popular through services such as Twitter and Facebook. This communication form has many similarities to both

instant messaging and e-mail but without the explicit receiver. Microblogging can be considered a combination of blogging and the text messages familiar to mobile phone users due to their accessibility from mobile devices and their limited size This leads to a more casual and informal style with microblogging than with regular blogging. For example, microbloggers post "on-the-go" updates about what they are thinking and doing at the moment.

Twitter (http://www.twitter.com), currently the most prominent microblogging service, allows users to post and broadcast short text messages — so-called "tweets" — of no more than 140 characters. Users can "follow" other users (have those users' tweets show up on a stream in their primary Twitter page) and be followed. The service is highly integrated with mobile devices and external websites and applications. In a study of Twitter, Java et al. found that tweets often address specific contacts, giving such posts the appearance of a conversation [1]. Microblogging is also integrated into the social networking service Facebook (http://www.facebook.com), where the users have a profile from which they build up social ties to other users, join and interact with interest groups, and share information such as short status messages and pictures. A very recent evolvement of microblogging is the *video* microblogging where people post short video clips from their own life, often recorded with camera phones. In this WiP we explore the new phenomenon of video microblogging.

Even though the number of personal blogs has exploded, McFedries points out that many blogs are abandoned [3]. As possible reasons he mentions that blogging is hard and time consuming, and that a given

blog might not receive much attention/readership. Java et al. on the other hand, point out that microblogging is less time consuming, requires less commitment and can be updated as part of the everyday communication flow [1]. Video blogging (also known as vlogging) is defined as blog posts made up of video. Parker and Pfeiffer argue that video blogging will be an important tool for journalists and an extension to television [5]. An example of an online news medium extensively using video is The Copenhagen Voice (http://www.cphvoice.com). The Copenhagen Voice is an independent online news medium promoting citizen journalism. Their primary reporting method is live videos recorded by video-enabled mobile phones. They use video microblogging both as a reporting form but also as teasers for longer videos.

In a study of videos recorded with mobile phones Puikkonen et al. found that the target of the recordings often is the creator himself and/or a limited group of typical family members or friends. The most used methods for sharing video clips was by e-mail or instant messaging [6]. Transferring and distributing short video clips is the primary challenge for users [2,6]. Here we present a qualitative study of video microblogging, which indicates that video microblogging services can help users overcome this challenge because such services provide tools specifically for sharing and distributing short videos on social networking sites and in online communities.

Method

During the fall of 2009 we conducted an interview study of video microblogging. The purpose was to gain insights into how video microblogging is used, why users select this medium, what they video-microblog

about and by what means they use video microblogging. Participants were recruited from the video microblogging service 12seconds.tv, a relatively new video microblogging service. Each interview lasted roughly 15 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured, which allowed a dynamic conversation still covering our set of questions. The conversations were recorded and analyzed.

12seconds.tv
For this study we used the service 12seconds.tv. This service is a video microblogging service for posting short videos. Posted videos can have a maximum length of 12 seconds. Users can follow other users and be followed, similarly to Twitter. Videos can either be public, i.e. available to everyone, or private, and hence only viewable by approved contacts. The videos can be accessed directly from the site or from external services or tools through feeds. 12seconds.tv is closely linked to other social networking sites, especially Facebook and Twitter, and the site is highly integrated with some mobile phones and applications. This integration is promoted by 12seconds.tv, which also offers an application programming interface (API). This integration allows user to "cross-post." Cross-posting is when a link to a posted video either automatically or manually is posted on one or more social networking sites, such as Twitter and Facebook. Videos can be posted directly from the website or from external sources such as mobile devices and external applications. 12seconds.tv is an independent service but, due to the integration options with other services, 12seconds.tv can be considered a technical framework for video microblogging.

Participants
We interviewed 17 English-speaking participants, seven female and ten male participants. They ranged between the age of 19 – 49 and the mean age was 34. All participants, except one, reside within the US and were located in several different states, including states on the West Coast, East Coast, in the Midwest, and in the South. One participant was located in the United Kingdom. The participants were found through a random selection at 12seconds.tv. At the time of the study, the internal messaging system at 12seconds.tv only allowed video messages and only to users that are mutual friends on either Facebook or Twitter. Instead we identified potential participants and then contacted them either via e-mail or Facebook. Had people chosen to add information about their Facebook account to their 12seconds.tv account, a public-available link was shown on their 12seconds.tv profile. At the time of this writing it appears that the public-available Facebook links have been removed. Furthermore, when users linked from their profiles to a blog or website, it was possible to find contact information that way. For these reasons, we were only able to contact users using several different social networking sites, but we do not believe this has any impact on our results. To prevent self-selection by participants we did not advertise on public forums or other similar means.

Selection
For the selection we identified some basic requirements for including a user. To be considered, we required a minimum total post count of 20 videos with at least one video posted within the week previous to the time they were contacted. In addition, we looked for a consistent posting "flow" of video clips. For example, users that had posted a majority of their video clips within a short

time span and then posted a few video clips one or two a months later would not be considered. Of the 70 people we contacted, 17 of them replied and were available for an interview.

Findings

User characteristics

Overall our participants can be categorized as early adopters and interested in how new technology can be used. They were especially interested in online social networking services and services involving user-generated content such as blogging and online communities. We found that all the participants were active users of other social networking services and were regularly online. The participants had a wide range of backgrounds and professions including graphic design, programming and other IT sector jobs, communication, journalism, and the creative arts. A common denominator for all participants was that they saw the Internet as a "playground" and liked to experiment with new online social phenomena. A 19-year-old woman from Michigan explained 12seconds.tv as a visual version of Twitter. This combination was especially appealing for many users because they liked the option of making visual expressions or of showing a given situation as opposed to simply explaining it through text. At the same time they liked the speed and informality of microblogging.

Perceptions of video microblogging

The limit of 12 seconds was considered a plus because it only requires 12 seconds of one's life and, according to several participants, it makes people get to the point. This also applies to the posting of videos, as posters only need to spend a few moments recording their experience. The limitation defines the service and

differentiates it from other video services such as YouTube. Posters found it easy to use and some reported setting goals, e.g. to post at least once a day.

Posting and watching videos

At 12seconds.tv, videos are recorded either with a webcam or mobile phone. Most users who recorded videos using a webcam reported that they did so because they lacked a mobile phone with video capabilities. None of the participants were using any kind of professional equipment and only a few edited their videos before posting them. Instead of editing, it was more common to do several 'takes' until a satisfying result was reached. However, several participants explained that the videos were often recorded spontaneously, making it impossible to do a retake. Mobile devices were also used to watch videos; some reported that they would watch videos to kill time when waiting in line, etc. Some participants complained that poor video quality on some mobile phones 'completely destroyed the experience'.

Online social networking strategies and cross-posting

All users had their 12seconds.tv account linked to other social networking sites. They linked either to Twitter, Facebook or both. This, in turn, made cross-posting between the different sites very common. We believe the linking capability built into 12seonds.tv is the primary reason for this common practice. A 34-year-old woman from South Carolina reported that she specifically chose to use 12seconds.tv because it offers close integration with other social networking services, especially Facebook and Twitter. Using video microblogging is only part of an online networking strategy. People want to be represented in different online communities and want their messages to reach

as many of their social contacts as possible. The users we interviewed did not want to be limited to a single online community. By using cross-posting they were able to effectively distribute their content to a broad range of social ties and interact with several social networking sites as if they were a single network. Integration of different networks was an important part of users' motivations. For many users, 12seconds.tv was seen as an extension or virtual "plug-in" for Twitter and Facebook, as those services currently do not have true video microblogging integrated. We also found that the use of external tools was common, both for posting and for watching videos. The application Tweetdeck was mentioned in particular. This desktop application lets the users organize and customize the stream of messages from, for example, Twitter and 12seconds.tv.

What is being recorded and broadcast?
We found that users recorded "everyday things" and generally did not plan recordings in advance. Participants said they made posts to describe their life, share fun episodes, and in some cases to promote themselves. A 24-year-old male from South Dakota used video microblogging to inject life into his messages and to promote his websites and regular blog posts. A 28-year-old woman from California used video to show a short glimpse of what was going on in her life at the moment. People made video of themselves, family members, pets, and what they experienced on a given day. They felt that the posts represented the experiences that made up their everyday lives.

Why are people using video microblogging?
Somewhat to our surprise, a large majority of the users reported that the use of video microblogging had an impact on their life and had become an important part

of their social networking interaction. For example, two 30-year-old women, both from California, reported that video microblogging had helped them connect with more people and to be more social. Using a visual medium for communication makes it more personal. For example, showing one's face to the world is for many people a big step. For some of the participants the border between "real life" friends and Internet friends was disappearing. Many of the users reported that they considered their social networking contacts (contacts that the might not have met in real life) just as good and close friends as people they engaged with face to face; they simply used a different medium for communication. The same participants reported being interested in meeting up in person with contacts made in online communities. Still other users just used video microblogging as status updates. A few participants reported they used video updates simply to announce their presence and say: "Hello, I am still here."

Many participants used video microblogging for one-way communication; similarly to what Naaman et al. point out, microblogging often consists of "me-oriented" small messages that function solely as self-oriented expression [4]. Puikkonen et al. found that short videos recorded on mobile phones often are self-portrayals and not necessarily documentation of the context in which they are recorded [6]. Our analysis suggests that the exciting aspect of video microblogging is the process of recording and posting video. as opposed to the end product. Even though the updates can be a service for friends and family to keep in contact, the main motivation seems to be the entertainment provided by recording the videos. Interestingly, only a few users found the number of followers important and a motivator to keep posting

new videos. Instead it was about having the "right" people to watch the videos such as social contacts from both the 12seconds.tv community and other online communities. None of the participants used video microblogging directly for work-related tasks, but a 30-year-old self-employed women from Wisconsin mentioned that she sometimes received assignments through her social ties.

Conclusion

Our results indicate that, in accordance with previous findings of text-based microblogging [4] and recording of short video clips [6], the intention behind video microblogging is not only about making videos available for others to watch. The process is often more important than the product. To users, video microblogging is a part of a larger social networking strategy composed of several services. Cross-posting between different network services is very common and the video microblogging service 12seconds.tv is not used independently but as an extension or 'plug-in'. Integration with other social networking services is important, since the users are represented in many different communities and want to reach as many of their social contacts as possible. It is insufficient to only use one social networking service as each provides different options and contacts. A video microblogging service such as 12seconds.tv can be considered a technical framework making it easy and fast to video microblog. In general, users post videos for entertainment, to announce their whereabouts, and for simple self-expression. At the same time, video microblogging is closely related to mobility. It is about making spontaneous recordings here and now without planning in advance. This is also in accordance with a previous study by Lehmuskallio and Sarvas [2].

Further Work

We have gathered a set of publicly-available videos posted by our participants. Our goal is to analyze these videos and try to get an understanding of what people post and if the results of this analysis fit with the information provided in the interviews. We are also interested in how video microblogging differs from text-based microblogging. Further, we want to provide a more in-depth analysis of the completed interviews and compare with other video communication phenomena.

Acknowledgements

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