From Communities to Mobile Communities of Values

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INTRODUCTION

The discussion around the impact of information communication technologies in human social interaction has been the centre of many studies and discussions. From 1960 until 1990, researchers, academics, business writers, and futurist novelists have tried to anticipate the impact of these technologies in society, in particular, in cities and urban centres (Graham, 2004). The views during these three decades, although different in many aspects, share in common a deterministic view of the impact of ICT on cities and urban centres. They all see ICT influence as a dooming factor to the existence of cities. These authors have often seen ICT as a leading factor in the disappearance of urban centres and/or cities (Graham; Marvin, 1997; Negroponte, 1995). According to Graham, these views tend to portray ICT impact without taking into consideration the fact that old technologies are not always replaced by newer ones; they can also superimpose and combine into to something else. These views also have generally assumed that the impact of ICT would be the same in all places and have not accounted for geographic differences that could affect the use of information communication technologies.

This article assesses the significance of the theory of consumption value as an explanatory framework for mobile commerce (m-commerce) adoption and use. It discusses whether perceived values can define the characteristics of any discrete "community of use" (group) of m-commerce users. It discusses the significance of online communities and their relation with mobile commerce. We first discuss the impact of ICT in cities. Second, we present the theory of consumption values as a framework to understand mobile commerce use. Then we assess the relevance of communities' values as an explanatory theory to mobile commerce adoption. Finally, we explore the possibility that consumption values could be mobile-community-binding instruments.

There are a few weaknesses in these deterministic views of the impact of ICT on the development or dooming of cities. Most of them assume that technology impacts exactly the same way everywhere; that is, there is an assumption that a city is the same anywhere on the globe (Graham, 2004). This perspective, also, does not take into account the growth of physical mobility in urban centres (Graham) and the fact that technology does not promote only isolationism (Horan, 2004). Statistics show, for example, that there was a continuous rise in global motor vehicle ownership, from 350 million in 1980 to 500 million in 2001, and a forecast of 1 billion by 2030 (Bell & Gemmel, 2001). Moreover, "in 2001 more mobile phones were shipped than automobiles and PCs" (Clarke, 2001, p. 134). In 2001, out of the 200 million wireless devices sold in the U.S., 13.1 million were personal digital assistants (PDAs) and the other 187 million were mobile phones (Strauss, El-Ansary, & Frost, 2003). It is important, though, not to presume that some level of face-to-face contact is not going to be replaced by electronic technology. Refer, for example, to what is happening with many network-based services like online banking, EDI (electronic data interchange), or the DoCoMo phenomenon in Japan (Graham; Krishnamurthy, 2001). It becomes reasonable to assume that it is very unlikely that ICTs will bring death to the cities. On the contrary, they are deeply entrenched in urbanisation and social economic trends (Graham).

RELEVANCE OF COMMUNITIES

Many works in cultural geography, sociology, and anthropology refer to the mediating role of technologies in structuring the relationship between individuals and their social environment or community (Green, 2002).

Community can be defined as "the formation of relatively stable long-term online group associations" (Barkardjiva & Feenberg, 2002, p. 183). Traditionally, the concept of community is associated with many circumstances or factors; however, a common physical location was for many years considered to be a key factor to determine their existence (Graham, 2004). With the development and popularization of ICTs, in particular, the Internet and mobile phones, it is possible to say that the key factor to determine the existence of a community is accessibility (Webber, 2004)

In the social sciences, the concept of community has generated so much discussion that it has already reached a theoretical sophistication (Komito, 1998). However, this theoretical sophistication has not been transferred to the concept of ICT-mediated communities (Komito). The broad interpretation of the community concept in the network environment has many different meanings, ranging from definitions like "norm or values shared by individuals," "a loose collection of like-minded individuals," or "a multifaceted social relation that develops when people live in the same locality and interact, involuntarily, with each other over time" (Komito, p. 97). We consider virtual communities to refer to different types of communities facilitated by information communication technology.

Authors Armstrong and Hagel (1999) were two of the pioneers in using the term virtual community. By virtual community they describe a group of technology enthusiasts in San Francisco. These high-tech enthusiasts created a space in the early days of the Internet prior the World Wide Web. This was and still is a site where people can get together to discuss and exchange cultural information, and today it has migrated to the Web. "The well has been a literate watering hole for thinkers from all walks of life, be they artists, journalists, programmers, educators or activists" (The Well, 2003). Haylock and Muscarella (1999) on the other hand, use the term virtual community when referring specifically to the World-Wide-Web-based communities, but kept their definition of community quite broad. To them a virtual community is a "group of individuals who belong to particular demographic, profession or share a particular personal interest" (p. 73).

In his 1998 article, Komito discusses extensively the community concept and develops a taxonomy for virtual and electronic communities. He identifies three basic kinds of communities: the moral community (the character of the social relationship is paramount),

normative or cognitive community (existence of preset rules of behaviour), and proximate community (interaction happens not because of roles or stereotypes, but because of individuals). A moral community refers to people who share a common ethical system, and it is this shared ethical system that identifies their members. According to Komito, this kind of community is difficult to identify in a computer-mediated communication environment, with the moral purpose of the community being difficult to identify. The normative community is probably the most common type of community associated with ICT. This kind of community is not bound physically or geographically, but is bound by common meaning and culture, such as members being medical doctors, Jews, or jazz aficionados. The individual participants in these communities may never interact with all the other members of this particular community. Authors such as Komito believe that the concepts of community of interest and community of practice borrowed their framework from cognitive communities. Proximate communities have a social emphasis. In this model of community, the interaction between members happens not only in terms of roles or stereotypes, but at the individual level; it is in this kind of community where relationships are developed and conflicts managed (Komito). Although he presented a typology for ICT-mediated communities, Komito concludes that the most useful way of looking at ICT-mediated communities would be to treat the community as a background and concentrate on how individuals and groups deal and adapt to continuously changing environments in terms of social interaction rules. With this in mind, we suggest that a group of individuals who share the same consumption values in relation to mobile services could be members of the same community. The concept of consumption values comes from Sheth, Newman, and Gross' (1991a, 1991b) theory, described next.

THEORY OF CONSUMPTION VALUES: AN ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORK TO UNDERSTAND MOBILE COMMERCE USE

In reviewing the literature on the adoption and use of technologies, some dominant theoretical frameworks were identified as adaptations or extensions to Rogers' (1962, 2003) diffusion-of-innovation theory

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