
Supporting Local News Sharing with Mobile Crowdsourcing and Large Display Technologies

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Motivation

Traditional sources of local news and information (e.g., newspapers, TV, radio) are covering smaller and narrower sets of issues in their respective communities. Reductions in staff and declines in revenue have forced newsrooms to cover only those topics that impact a critical mass of a viewing or reading audiences. These changes pose serious challenges for local governments, businesses, community groups and citizens. Non-profit organizations, law enforcement, government agencies and civic organizations in smaller geographic locales find it increasingly difficult to reach the public with useful and important information. Citizens are increasingly limited to face-to-face or ad hoc online sites for information and discussion about critical issues so they can work collectively toward community goals.

Several community informatics efforts which aim to inform citizens of important community information have used computer-mediated communication to address some of these local needs (e.g., i-neighbors.org, Next Door, AOL Patch). However, these projects focus on disseminating news and information gathered by professionals, an increasingly scarce resource at the local level. They also focus on desktop computing experiences, yet people increasingly access

news through mobile devices, and large display technologies as public information sources have shown considerable promise. Our prior work, the Virtual Town Square (VTS) [2] has taken a different approach by attempting to aggregate, sort and cluster existing local information sources and social interactions at a single portal. For this workshop, we are interested in discussing ways that local news aggregators like VTS can be integrated with mobile crowdsourcing and large display technologies to support a more informed public.

Vision

Our vision is to create a mobile application that allows members of the community to create news content that is relevant to them. The app would provide a mechanism for members to post news about a specific location in the community, inspired by scaffolding systems like NewsPad [3]. Other users will be able to view the news near them and add to that content with text and images. For example, one member may post photos of a new construction site in her area with a question asking what is going to be built there. Another member may add to the story by providing links to relevant local news articles. A third member may volunteer to talk to site workers and post video footage or notes from their interview. A fourth member may include links to relevant town council minutes that discuss the construction plans and schedule. This set of micro-tasks makes each person's own knowledge accessible to others and minimizes the burden of contributing. The app's design will emphasize location, curation, and rich visuals to foster engagement [1].

Beyond an individual's mobile app, we're interested in ways that people can consume and interact with local news using a more public interface. We have access to

a 48-inch display in the public area of a campus building, and are experimenting with ways to design fruitful "second-screen" interactions that for information gatherers. During the workshop, we hope to share our early results, prototype new ideas, and learn from others' experiences using these technologies for community information dissemination.

Longer term, we hope that the information generated by this project begins to compensate for the loss of local news coverage in small towns and city neighborhoods across America. Today, most decisions are made by local governing bodies on behalf of the public before citizens are fully aware of the initial situation being considered. By taking a proactive stance toward awareness and understanding, communities are better able to respond to short- and long-term planning opportunities and challenges.

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References

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