

# Beyond Eyeballs: Improving Social Networking Metrics

## A W3C Workshop on the Future of Social Networking Position Paper

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**Abstract**— The problem this position paper raises and the topic which the W3C workshop could begin to answer is how to best describe—to provide the quantitative parameters that best express—the many dimensions of communities.

This paper recommends that community operators/managers develop (and ultimately agree upon) a set of metrics to express a community's dimensions beyond simply the number of eyeballs and revenues. In addition to the number of people who have created an account or pages which have been seen, we need to know more about the behaviors of participants. We propose two categories of metrics, but many more are available and could be discussed.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Reliable and relevant service usage statistics permit companies to plan investments on the basis of quantitative information. As a result of metrics about what pages or topics are of interest to users, resources are better allocated, a service is continuously improving for its users, and, in some cases, share holders' interests are better served. Similarly, automatically collected, reliable and relevant data about social media, communities and the roles that they play in people's lives – and the roles of users in their communities – permits a virtuous circle in which the users and communities can be enriched and better served by strategically-managed, healthy companies.

If asked to describe a community quantitatively, most managers with services on the Internet (fixed or mobile) will begin with two statistics:

- the number of users who have created an account and
- the number of page impressions per month.

Increasingly the number of unique logins in a month is also provided. Companies which use a client application can tell how many people have downloaded or installed a client.

These metrics are provided because businesses have learned, particularly in the early "land grab" phase of this industry, that their value is directly correlated to their reach, the "eyeballs" whose attention they have or have had. Businesses based on advertising can, in some cases, translate page impressions into a revenue stream. While eyeballs are an important metric, they fall far short of the potential we have as an industry to look beyond just eyeballs. Companies who manage communities, and the social networking ecosystem partners, should begin measuring their communities' (and industry) activity with a much deeper set of metrics than are currently used.

### II. WHY BOTHER?

The reasons for expanding investments and increased consistency in the area of usage metric gathering (and data mining) among both online and mobile communities include:

- Improving the fit between a user's context or needs and the advertising or social media which is shown.
- Improving the community operator's ability to detect trends within the community and to respond appropriately.
- Better (quantitative) assessment of the value chain contribution of different partners in an ecosystem.

There is an additional incentive which has less to do with a company's internal operations. Many companies benefit from those *outside* the industry being able to track growth, in total and by segment. When a market size is known or estimated with a low degree of error, the participants in the industry can calculate their market share. If metrics are collected using consistent guidelines (best practices) and these data are gathered from businesses (social network operators) and consolidated (pooled) and the top-level results published by an independent and trusted body, community operators can also view (compare) their community's metrics in the context of a national, regional or industry segment average.

### III. SOCIAL NETWORKING METRICS

#### A. Demographics

To understand their community needs and potential for monetization, many community managers turn to demographic information. Demographics typically begin with distributing the community by age interval. Further treatment of data by gender is possible in most communities. Beyond these two data sets, however, community operators are not consistent about if/how they gather or report demographics.

Profiles of the age and gender of people in communities do not reveal enough to achieve many business and technological objectives.

#### B. User Profiles

Community participants can be described on the basis of their behaviors or activities. One person is likely to have different activity levels or profiles/personnae in different communities.

A person who is in a new city and looking for a good local restaurant will log into their most popular community service

to ‘collect’ information (Collector). Then, the user might want to see what family and friends are doing or to share a few photos with the community and, in that situation be a content contributor (Creator) in another community. This example illustrates that, while people have different roles in their mobile as well as online and physical communities, they will also participate in multiple communities at different levels.

In contrast with a similar community member taxonomy proposed by Forrester Research for online community user types from which the following is adapted, the mobile community user types proposed in the Informa Mobile Social Networking market research report do not include two significant categories. Forrester begins at the bottom of a ladder of community engagement with the Inactives; these are people who are online but not participating in social media in any way. Effectively they are part of the addressable market for an online community; however, this analysis does not count them in its model of mobile community users. Likewise, this framework omits the Spectators (those who are only browsing and reading) identified in the Forrester ‘ladder of online communities’ for the same reason: getting into a mobile community is not a matter of one click on a link and there is low likelihood of a Spectator spending more than one or two visits before either engaging as a Joiner (see below) or deciding that mobile communities are too cumbersome or otherwise not meeting the user’s needs.

In the framework used for the Informa Mobile Social Networking report [1] and in the model which predicts the users and usage patterns in the future, there are four user profiles:

- **Joiners:** they establish a presence on a mobile community platform for the purpose of learning how to use the service and/or finding others with like interests with whom to engage in some sort of a relationship.
- **Collectors:** they are actively creating connections between people and between pieces of content/social media. They frequently use community search functions and pay attention to the new content generated by others. They like to be the first to see and link to exceptional content and are regular purchasers (hence Collectors) of digital content. Unlike the online users described by Forrester Research’s technographics report, mobile community collectors do not (yet) use RSS, partly because these are rarely if ever found on mobile portals. Where and when they are available, Collectors are avid users of tagging. In the future, when tools become more readily available on their handsets, Collectors will become avid creators in a ‘virtuous circle’ of content as described in the market study entitled “A Glimpse at the Next Episode” by Nokia (published December 5, 2007).
- **Critics:** like the category proposed by Forrester, mobile community critics are those who first digest the content of others and subsequently take an active

role in the community by offering value through comments, ratings and voting tools to provide creators the feedback on which they thrive. The critics are vital to the health of mobile as well as online communities because they return value to those who have created original comments or content. Though they may not be striving for fame, they can establish a reputation in a community and drive log-ins from other user groups who trust and seek the critic’s point of view.

- **Creators:** at the top of the community engagement ladder are those who are actively (at least weekly) generating new social media for themselves and others. They capture and upload or document their world, or create new music, photographs or video clips for their friends, family members, fans and – in some mobile communities – to generate income for themselves.

These (or a different set of) categories of user types should have a behavior distribution curve associated with each. By providing a few metrics about the behavior of creators, critics, collectors and joiners for a community, a lot will be known about the interactions within a community. These interactions, or community engagement levels, can be built into revenue forecasting models. This taxonomy has other uses for mobile community operators. For example, those developing new features for their communities can test usability with only the target user segment. To drive adoption of new features, such as might be possible with the design of reward structures (e.g., points) for usage, the incentives could appeal directly to the different user segments.

The above user profiles are not assumed to work for all communities. The proposed profiles can be adapted to incorporate complementary frameworks. For example, there are experts in the analysis of human relationships who place a greater emphasis on the number and types of connections the user has with other people.

### C. User Profile Metrics

The user profile metrics could include (for each user profile):

1. Activity level within a community (average and distribution ranges)
  - a. # of giving actions
    - contributions/changes to profile: text, photo, video, applications
    - postings/rating/voting or comments on the pages or social media of others
  - b. # of receiving actions
    - views of other community members’ contributions
    - downloads of other community members’ social media
  - c. # of “policing” actions such as reports of spam or inappropriate behaviors
  - d. # of “gardening” actions such as recommendations for new features and other

- contributions to improve the overall quality of the community
- 2. Number of friends (connections) an average user fitting a profile maintains
  - a. range of friend numbers (min and max)
  - b. average number of friends with whom users communicate
  - c. rate of growth of connections
- 3. Number of days, weeks or months for a new community participant to achieve their profile (if ever), or the days or sessions to rise to a new profile
- 4. Number of communities to which the user matching a user profile belongs (“multiple community index”)
- 5. Frequency a community receives the user in this profile’s attention: logins/day
- 6. Number of profiles or pages viewed by the participant of this user profile per day, week or month
- 7. Duration of a visit, cumulative time spent by people in this user profile in a community per day
- 8. Number of messages a typical community participant with this user profile sends to the mobile community platform (MO) per day, week or month
- 9. Number of alerts and messages sent by the mobile community operator to the user in this profile (MT) per day, week or month

#### D. Community Metrics

Community-wide activity or behavior metrics ALSO matter and need to be gathered in consistent ways across communities before they could be used by third parties or by the community management itself for new business models. Beyond total registered users and page impressions these could include:

1. Unique visitors per month
2. Total # of log-ins/day;
  - a. average number of log-ins/day/person
  - b. periodicity of the log-ins (hour of day)
3. Peak simultaneous active users per day (or week or month?)
4. Ratio of non-registered visitors/registered users
5. Number of groups (could be private chat rooms) within community
6. Viral marketing (acquisition funnel)
  - a. number of people invited by average user
  - b. ratio of invited to acquired new users
7. # of new registered users by method of discovery
  - a. responded to advertisement in another community
  - b. search
  - c. invitation by existing member
8. # of people (or percentage of total users) in different user types
  - a. creators
  - b. critics
  - c. collectors
  - d. joiners
9. The rate of attrition, especially with new members

- a. What is the appropriate definition of a “dead” member?
- 10. Average duration of a visit in the community
- 11. Total number of social media units mashed (connected by lists) in the community
- 12. Total number of purchases made within the community
  - a. digital goods (music, UGC, video clips, games) downloaded to the handset
  - b. digital goods for raising experiences e.g., cyber furnishings
  - c. digital “gifting” (gifticons)
  - d. physical goods or services purchased in the community and consumed outside
- 13. Total number of pieces of content uploaded in different categories by day, month, user averages
  - a. photos
  - b. videos
- 14. Total number of messages sent within the community
  - a. mobile terminating
  - b. mobile originating
- 15. Total number of ads served (if ad sponsored)
- 16. Total number of calls originating from within the community
  - a. voice
  - b. video
- 17. Total number of minutes of live conversation between people within the community
  - a. voice
  - b. video

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, if gathered and used strategically, detailed community behavioral (activity level) information about groups and individual user profiles within a community are more useful than community demographics. Well-integrated community activity monitoring platforms combined with appropriate analytical tools will offer those managing communities a better understanding of their customers’ evolution and needs over time.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Perey, C., *Mobile Social Networking: Communities and Content on the Move*. London: Informa Telecoms & Media, 2008.