

The Research on the concept and characteristics of the Personal Community Service*

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Abstract

This is the research on the new services which are called Korean blog, personal media, etc and which showed large increase in usage rate in 2004. In spite of this increase there has been no effort to conceptualize these services. So, we researched whether these new services constituted an independent domain, in what aspects they were different with other established services, how could we conceptualize them with an appropriate name, what were characteristics of them. We used Interview and Delphi method with the participation of professionals in charge of planning and operating these services in 4 major service providers.

Key Word : personal community, personal media, social network, blog

1. Introduction

This is the research on the new services which are called Korean blog, personal media, etc and which showed large increase in usage rate in 2004. During 2004 these new services recorded surprisingly high increase. The number of members in Cyworld of Nate.com which is one of the internet portal sites in Korea increased from 3 million in August 2003 to 10 million in September 2004. The number of page view in Cyworld(<http://www.cyworld.com>) had been ranked at the first for 14 weeks since August 2004. According to the ninth research on the internet usage by the Korean Click, the firm which measures the activity of internet users, and The Research International, the professional survey firm, the answers that 'Mini-hompy' services or blog services were the main usages of the internet increased from 11% in March 2004 to 31.1% in August 2004 by more than 20% points. In addition, the association of the Internet corporations ranked the success of the mini-hompy service and blog service at the first

news of the "2004 internet top 10 news", which was released on December 14th, 2004. They explained that the hurricane of the personal media changed the group-centered online community like café and club, into the person-centered online community. This phenomenon is not unique to Korea. These new services are kept an eye on abroad considering that the word "blog" was selected as "the word of the year" in 2004 by the Merriam-Webster, the dictionary publishing company in U.S. As the influences of these service increased, the interest of the press increased. As a result, new service names have been used without accurate conceptualization to these services.

Due to this absence of conceptualization, the same service in one service provider has various names like the examples in the <Table 1>. So the clear conceptualization to these services should be performed as soon as possible. As the interest of the press increased, the press has tried to conceptualize them more actively.

But, in the academic world, there has never been active movement to conceptualize these services.

* This research was supported by the MIC, Korea, under the ITRC support program supervised by the IITA

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<Table 1> New names to these services

Names	Meanings
Korean Blog	The Blog which is influenced and changed by Korean society and culture
Personal Media	The Media through which an individual can publish his/her own opinion or thought
Personal Community	The Space where one to many communication is carried out centering around the one
Social Network	The Mechanism that connect the owner to other people and that help the owner to keep these relationships
Friends Network	The Network that offline relationships among friends are moved to online

Considering the economic effect from the internationalization of the service providers as well as the social or cultural effects, more active research should be performed in this area. To achieve this object, first of all, the fundamental researches about how can conceptualize these services, whether they consists of independent domain like mail service or online community service, what are the basic characteristics of them, and so on should be carried out. Therefore, we try to think over the concept, domain, and characteristics of these new services.

2. Literature Studies

The area where the research is performed most actively is the blog domain. Blood(2002) described blog as being frequently updated postings, with dated entries, and the new entries at the top or first on the site[1]. Winer(2001) used the key words ‘personal’, ‘Web’, ‘published’, ‘community’ to describe a weblog. He saw weblogs as components of the web community, connecting people together, “using the Web through common interests”[13]. Loft(2004) described blog as a chronological listing of links with commentary, which individuals thought worth posting, divided them into “filter blog”,

“diary or journal style blog”, “community or group style blog”[7]. Milne(2004) regarded blog as a media technology that comprised the construction of an online web-page personal journal, in reverse chronological form, with hyperlinks and loosely standardized formatting[8]. Beside these research, Wagner(2003) suggested that blog should be applied to education for increasing the effect of education[12], Oser(2004) analyze the capability of the blog as a marketing tool[9].

In Korea, the researches in this area are getting more activated. Kim(2004) defined blog as the activities that an individual wrote his/her unedited voice like diary in the web, or the services which helped an individual to act like that. In addition, he explained 8 characteristics of blogs[5]. Park(2004) had surveyed the motive of using weblogs to the university students, and extracted 13 factors. He published that, among these factors, 7 factors showed significant relationships with the satisfaction[11]. Lee(2004) analyzed the significance of the blog as a reliable information source, and explained how to use the blog for the advertisement, and what were the strength and weakness of the advertisement through blogs[6]. Park(2004) analyzed the difference between men and women focusing the motivation and behavior in using ‘Mini-hompy’ service of Cyworld[10]. Kim(2004) compared the blog with the BBS in relation to the communication and personal writing[4]. In contrast, Chun et al(2004) named the mini-hompy service and other similar services as social network services, and analyzed their trend and uses[2]. Although many researches have been performed as you see above, there has been no clear conceptualization to these services. As a result, researchers use various names (i.e. blog, social network service) to them without clear conceptualization. This absence of conceptualization makes the additional research to their characteristics or their social functions difficult. Therefore, We would try to

<Table 2> Research Questions

No.	Research Question
1.	Do the 'Mini-hompy' service of the Cyworld, the 'Hompy' service of the Sayclub, the 'Blog' service of the Naver, and the 'Planet' service of the Daum constitute an independent domain?
2.	What are the differences of these services from other established services for instance, online community service, personal homepage services?
3.	What is the appropriate name of these services considering their essential characteristics?
4.	Are these services separate services from blogs, or the blogs that are influenced and changed by Korean society and culture, or the higher level of services including blogs?
5.	What are the characteristics of these services?

conceptualize these new services and extract the characteristics and the domain of them through interview and Delphi method.

3. Research Questions

This research starts from researching whether these new services constitute an independent domain. If they constitute one, we will focus in what aspects they are different with other established services^a and how can we conceptualize them with an appropriate name. And then, we will research the relationship with blog, the domain and characteristics of them on the basis of answers to the former research questions. <Table 2> shows the research questions of this research.

4. Research Method

Because the objects of our research were these new services, for conceptualization we determined to use interview and Delphi method

^a For example, online community services, personal homepage services

<Table 3> Services and Service Providers

Corporation	Service
SK Communications	Cyworld's Mini-hompy service http://www.cyworld.com
Neowiz	Sayclub's Hompy service http://www.sayclub.com
NHN	Naver's Blog service http://www.naver.com
Daum Communications	Daum's Planet service http://www.daum.net

with the professionals in charge of planning and providing these services. Delphi method is the research method that takes out participants' professional opinions without professional debates. So, Delphi is a kind of procedure that brings out professionals' opinions and integrates them with regard to the specific forecast (Jung et al, 2004)[3]. Delphi was thought to be the proper method for integrating the professionals' opinions and leading to mutual agreement in a confusing situation that there wasn't any conceptualization about these new services. Therefore we took out our answers through the interview with the professionals in the service providers for the research question 1 and 2. And for remainders we used Delphi method to bring out our answers. Now, even though there are many service providers that provide similar services, we restricted our research to the representative 4 services. <Table 3> is the list of the services and service providers.

<Table 4> shows the schedule of the interview and Delphi survey. As a result of twice survey in

<Table 4> Schedule of the interview and Delphi survey

Method	Subject	Number of Participant
Interview	The chief of the team in charge of planning and providing service in 4 providers	5
1 st Delphi Survey	The employees of the team in charge of	20
2 nd Delphi Survey	planning and providing service in 4 providers	12

Delphi method, finally we could get 10 answer sheets.

5. Research Results

5.1 Interview Results

To the research question 1, everyone who was the subject of our interview answered that these new services constituted an independent domain. As the basis of this opinion, they pointed out that these new services had been established as major ones already in online services. Next, they based their opinion on that these new services had distinct characteristics from other online services. We will refer this basis more minutely at the part of research questions 2. Finally, they brought forth that users thought that these services were in the same category and that these services had constituted new domain.

To the research question 2, all interviewers answered that these services were clearly different from the similarly looking services for instance, online community services and personal homepage services. They based their opinions on that there was difference between these new services and personal homepage services in the way of creating and operating, and that new ones were constructed on the basis of network. Also, they brought forth that these services were distinct from existing online community in that the operator was an individual, not a group, and that communications were generated between one and many, not between many with many

5.2 Delphi Survey Results

After interview we carried out Delphi survey for conceptualizing these new services.

The first questionnaires were sent to the 20 participants at November 25, 2004. Finally, 12 questionnaires had been collected until February

24, 2005.

1. To the question 1, "Do the 'Mini-hompy' service of the Cyworld, the 'Hompy' service of the Sayclub, the 'Blog' service of the Naver, and the 'Planet' service of the Daum constitute an independent domain?" all participants answered that they thought these services constituted an independent domain.

2. <Table 5> shows the answers to the Question 2, "What is the appropriate name of these services considering their essential characteristics?"

<Table 5> List of Names answered

Name	Answer Rate
Personal Community Service	59%
Personal Media Service	8%
Network Community Service	8%
Personal Homepage Service	25%

3. <Table 6> shows the answers to the question 3, "Are these services separate services from blogs, or the blogs which are influenced and changed by Korean society and culture, or the higher level of services including blogs?"

<Table 6> Relationship with Blogs

Answer	Answer Rate
They are separate service from blogs	17%
They are the blogs influenced and changed by Korean society and culture	33%
They are the higher level of services including blogs	50%

4. 'Independence', 'identity (in online)', 'non-volatility (information accumulation)', 'connectivity (based on network)' 'openness (accessibility)', 'voyeurism', 'easiness in use', 'human relationship management', 'personal files or writings storage', 'self-contentment (self-decoration)' were surveyed as the answers to the question 4, "What are the characteristics of these services?"

The second questionnaires were sent to the 12 participants at February 24, 2005. Finally, 10 questionnaires had been collected until March 4, 2005.

1. 9 participants of the 10 answered that 'personal community service' was the most appropriate name of these services and only 1 participant answered that the personal media service was the most appropriate one to the Question 1, "What is the appropriate name of these services considering their essential characteristics after reading the result report about the first survey?"

2. 9 participants of the 10 answered that these new services were the higher level of services including blogs, and just 1 participant answered that these services were separate services from blogs to the Question 2, "Are these services separate services from blogs, or the blogs which are influenced and changed by Korean society and culture, or the higher level of services including blogs after reading the result report about the first survey?"

3. <Table 7> shows the answers of the participants to the question 3, "Do you agree or disagree to that each item extracted from the first

<Table 7> Agree or Disagree to the result of the first survey

Extracted Item	Agree	Disagree
Independence	100%	-
Identity (in online)	90%	10%
Non-volatility (Information Accumulation)	100%	-
Connectivity (based on network)	90%	10%
Openness (Accessibility)	70%	30%
Voyeurism	100%	-
Easiness in Use	80%	20%
Human relationship management	100%	-
Personal files or writings storage	90%	10%
Self-contentment (Self-decoration)	90%	10%

survey is pertinent to the characteristics of these services?"

More than 9 participants of the 10 answered that they agreed to the 8 items except 'Openness' and 'Easiness to Use'.

As mutual agreements had been brought out to the research question 3, 4, 5 as a result of the second survey, we finished Delphi survey.

6. Conclusion

Through this research, it was extracted that 'personal community service' was the appropriate name of these services and that they constituted an independent domain. We think it is because in Korea these services are used as a 'community service' focusing on connecting the personal space with other ones, not as a 'media service' through which a user can create and publish their own contents. As these services provide the users with the personal space where they can represent themselves freely helping the establishment of personal identity in online space, it is thought that the word 'personal' is emphasized in the name. In the existing online community, the majority of the community members, except few administrators and information providers, felt that they were tiny in that community. However, in personal community services, each user feels that he or she is the core of the space, and that he or she is the most significant person in there. So, personal community services give the unique usefulness like reinforcement of personal identity and fulfillment of social desire to the users. To the relationship with the blogs, the personal community services were surveyed to include the blogs. This is basically attributable to the trend that both services are mixed in Korea. In U.S. human relationship management services^b are provided separated from blog services.

To the characteristics of the 'personal community service', more than 9 participants agreed to the 8

^b For example, Friendster, Orkut

items. But, additional researches are needed because these items are divided based on plural criteria.

Although this research are performed to conceptualize new type of services and to bring out the characteristics of them, there are several limitations in this research. Above all this research was carried out on the basis of small number of participants in Delphi surveys, and the collection rate of the questionnaires was merely 50%. Therefore, if there will be another research, based on large number of participants, with quantitative method as well as qualitative method, it will contribute much to the activation of researches to the personal community services.

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