The Future of Social Media in India: From Text to Voice

Bill Thies
Microsoft Research India

Joint work with Shubhranshu Choudhary, Arjun Venkatraman, Anoop Saha, Thomas Smyth

November 18, 2011
What is the Largest Social Media Service In India?

Source: UnwireIndia, Sep 2010
What is the Largest Social Media Service In India?

Facebook

Source: UnwireIndia, Sep 2010
What is the Largest Social Media Service In India?

Source: UnwireIndia, Sep 2010
What is the Largest Social Media Service In India?

- **Based on Mobile Phone**: 850 million subscribers
- **Based on Internet**: 85 million users

### Bar Chart

- **Facebook**: 20 million users
- **Orkut**: 20 million users
- **SMS GupShup**: 850 million subscribers

**Source:** UnwireIndia, Sep 2010
Voice Remains Primary Interface for Mobile Subscribers in India

• Most subscribers lack smart phones
  
  Smart Phone: < 5%
  Feature Phone: ~45% (e.g., music player)
  Basic Phone: ~50%

  Mobile Internet: < 3% of subscribers

• Text interfaces hindered by:
  – Low literacy
  – Language diversity

Source: McKinsey, IDC India
Interactive Voice Response in India

• In 2010: over 25% of Rs. 15,000 Crore revenue from value-added services due to IVR
  – Expected to grow to Rs. 50,000 Crore by 2020

• Examples:
  – Ringtones, music, jokes, astrology
  – Booking movie tickets, travel, mobile commerce
  – TATA’s Behtar Zindagi program: information for farmers with over 10,000 voice prompts
  – Screening for Kaun Banega Crorepati
What will become the Web 2.0 for India’s 850 million mobile subscribers?
Your Facebook, in your **voice**.

Now express emotions that words can't with Facebook Voice Updates on Aircel.

Aircel & Facebook partner to introduce Voice Status Updates. Now express your emotions and much more on Facebook in your own distinctive voice. Just dial 51555* from your Aircel mobile to record and update your status, without even having access to the internet. The recorded voice clip will appear on your Facebook wall as your status update. So go ahead, voice your mind!

Call: 38645 12345 for Kolkata & 98510 12345 for ROWB or 121*

aircel.com
Egypt protesters use voice tweets

Google and Twitter have launched a service which circumvents the ban on net services in Egypt.

The so-called speak-to-tweet system allows people caught up in the unrest to post messages without any need to use an internet connection.

The service, which is already live, allows people to dial an international telephone number and leave a voicemail message.

The message is then sent out as a tweet with the hashtag #egypt.
Journalism in Tribal India

- **Kui**
  - Number of speakers (in millions): ~1

- **Kurukh**
  - Number of speakers (in millions): ~1.7

- **Gondi**
  - Number of speakers (in millions): ~3

Legend:
- **Red** Number of speakers (in millions)
- **Blue** Number of news outlets (print or audiovisual)
CGNet Swara: A Voice Portal for Citizen Journalism

with CGNet, MIT and the International Center for Journalists

- Anyone can report news, issues, etc. in local language
- Submissions are reviewed by moderators over the Web
- Appropriate submissions are published:
  - For playback on audio channel
  - For browsing on Web
  - Some submissions seed stories for posting on CGNet site + list
Deployment: Since Feb 2010

Calls per Day

Posts per Day
Father struggles to get NREGA wages, son dies in hospital

Supriya Sharma, TNN, Jan 21, 2011, 10:04pm IST

RAIPUR: A week after he lost his ailing son, and ten months after he worked on a village road project, Pitbasu Bhoi finally got the ten thousand rupees he had earned under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Program (MNREGA).

"Of what use is the program if I lose my son? I have just one son, and he is gone, and I received half of what was due to me," Bhoi said.

The MP government had decided to double the wages of workers under the scheme, but Bhoi said he received only half of what was due to him. He said that the government had promised to pay him Rs 30,000 for the road project, but he received only Rs 15,000.
Research Challenges

• How to scale?
  – While maintaining usability
  – While maintaining quality

• How to pay for distribution of content
  – Leverage peer-to-peer media sharing
Conclusions

• Social media looks to the phone in India
  – Mobile SMS services are the norm; voice is growing
  – Simple voice interaction allows high-impact content

• Huge untapped potential
  – 40M GupShup users vs. 850M mobile subscribers
  – Can we define the next social network on mobiles?