

Chih-Hui LAI – James E. KATZ

***A Multi-stakeholder Investigation
of Ethical and Usage Issues of Mobile Social Networking***

A late 2007 study found that mobile social networking services were being used by about 50 million users, or 2.3% of mobile users worldwide (Perey, 2008). A comparable study, also done in 2007, found that 3.5% of American mobile subscribers were using mobile social networking, 2.8% in Italy and 2.5% in the UK (M: Metrics, 2007). These figures fall short of earlier optimistic press and industry forecasts. Academic studies that could shed light on the disincentives to initial or continuing mobile social networking participation are few. However, among them is one by Lai who looked at the reasons for non-use. She concluded that users felt that there was "no need to be connected all the time" (Lai, in press). A study by Humphreys' (2007) concluded that a particular mobile social networking service (Dodgeball) served to reinforce users' existing social networks on a small scale and provided documentation of their lives. However, abusive behavior by some drove out many others. As clearly helpful as these studies are, we believe a high-level synthesis of expert and user opinions could shed useful light on system design and ethical considerations. This paper reports on a multi-stakeholder study of the obstacles and opportunities facing mobile social networking. Based on an online survey, we present data on the range and strength of assessments by three groups involved with mobile social networking: academic researchers, practitioners, and users. An inventory will also be presented of issues as perceived by these groups concerning ethics and usage of mobile social networking. The implications of this inventory for the ethics of mobile social networking will also be discussed.

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