Social Media: Future or Fad in Supporting Collaboration?*

*And some thoughts about distributed collaboration

John C. Tang
Microsoft Research

What are Social Media?

- **Social media** are primarily Internet- and mobile-based tools for sharing and discussing information... that integrate technology, telecommunications and social interaction...*
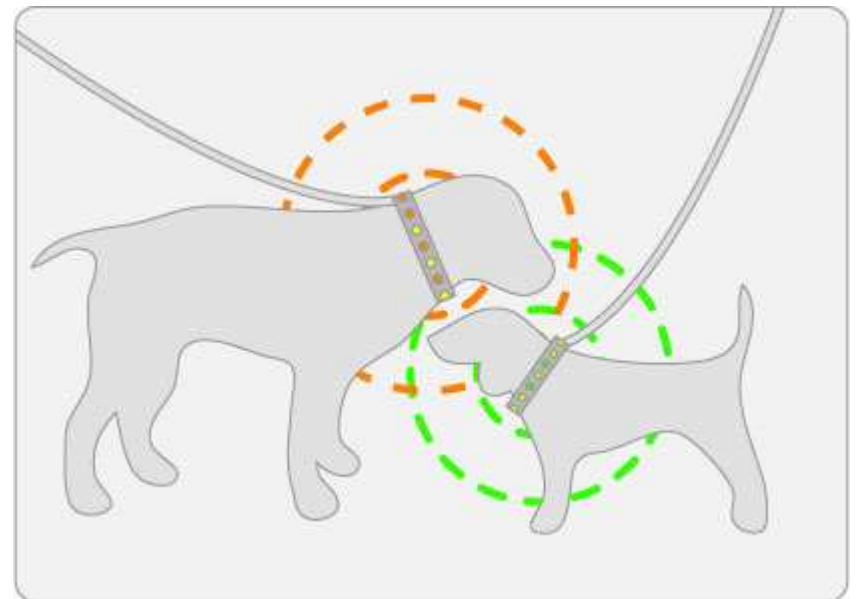
Social networking

*http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media

Further-out prototypes

- Lovegety (Japan)

- SNIF (MIT Media Lab)

Usage of Social Networking

Divergence of Twitter usage

Use of Twitter by Age Group

A chart titled "Use of Twitter by Age Group" with a y-axis labeled "% Population Using Twitter" ranging from 0 to 25, and an x-axis labeled "Age (yrs.)" with categories: 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, over 65.
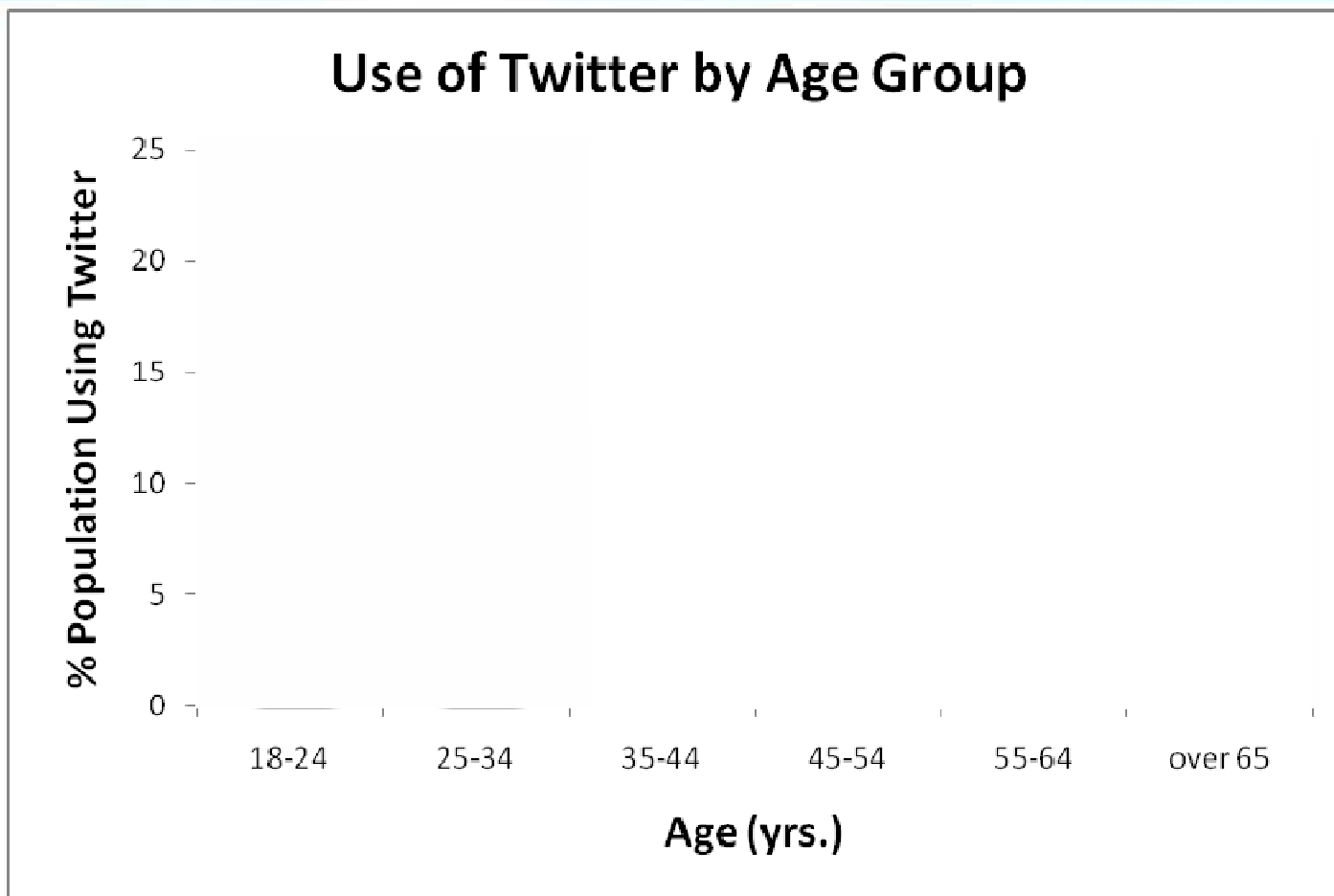
Pew Internet & American Life Project, Twitter and status updating, February 12, 2009

Attempts to deploy in enterprise

- IBM
  - Dogear
  - Beehive
  - ResearchWiki

- MS studies (Jonathan Grudin)
  - Divergence by age
  - High "failure" rate of wikis

Issues around social networking*

- Deployment across devices (desktop, mobile)
- Managing invisible audiences
- Confused context
- Managing privacy
  - Do users understand the privacy implications?
  - Building a robust user model for privacy
  - Communication encoded in context
- Divergence of user reactions
  - Largely generational
  - That generation entering the workforce

*Thanks to dana boyd

Reflecting on Distributed Collaboration

Distributed Collaboration

- Sun Microsystems, Inc. (1990-2004)
  - Distributed between Sun Labs West (CA) and East (MA)
  - Regular visits to each site
  - Virtual lunch/afternoon tea
  - Email, IM, screen-sharing
- IBM Research (2004-2008)
  - Distributed team among IBM Research Almaden (CA), IBM Silvergate developers (Argentina), IBM home office worker (PA)
  - Never met face-to-face
  - One Argentine traveler to CA
  - Weekly phone conferences, IM, email, wikis, no video

Distributed Collaboration (2)

- Microsoft Research (2008-present)
  - Distributed between CA, Redmond, WA, and Maine
  - Virtual lunch, weekly meetings
  - Asymmetrical relative to Redmond HQ

Trends in distributed collaboration

- Largely still depends on face-to-face meetings
- Technology hasn't fixed the problem
  - Telepresence is not video conferencing
  - It's not a technical problem
- Developing social practices
  - Building social relationships
  - Trust
- The impact of culture on collaboration
  - International Workshop on Intercultural Collaboration