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Method, apparatus and system for social networking

Abstract

A method, apparatus, and system for social networking is provided. In an embodiment, the system comprises a plurality of mobile devices that can connect to each other over a network. These devices generate user profiles based on individual attributes. The devices can additionally connect to a server. This server maintains a profile schema and a template application. The profile schema and template application can be used to generate profiles for users for each of the mobile devices. Furthermore, the system facilitates social networking functionalities within specific service areas, enabling devices to determine a conceptual distance with others and provide services over the network based on this distance.

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Background/Summary

(1) This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 17/343,171, filed Jun. 9, 2021, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 16/281,532, filed Feb. 21, 2019, now U.S. Pat. No. 11,064,318, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No.

15/410,490, now U.S. Pat. No. 10,257,675, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 14/973,210, now U.S. Pat. No. 9,572,001, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 14/634,610, now U.S. Pat. No. 9,247,405, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 14/160,153, now U.S. Pat. No. 9,002,948, which is a divisional of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/921,625, now U.S. Pat. No. 8,661,081, which is a U.S. National Stage entry of PCT/CA2008/000475, filed on Mar. 11, 2008. This and all other extrinsic materials discussed herein are incorporated by reference in their entirety. Where a definition or use of a term in an incorporated reference is inconsistent or contrary to the definition of that term provided herein, the definition of that term provided herein applies and the definition of that term in the reference does not apply.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

(1) The present invention relates generally to telecommunications and more specifically relates to a method, apparatus and system for social networking.

BACKGROUND

(2) The proliferation of mobile devices is changing the way people interact. Mobile devices are also increasing in power, sophistication and features further changing the way people interact. Social networking is an application of how such interaction is evolving.

(3) One area of evolution is matching algorithms, including ad hoc matching algorithms. The prior art indicates that most available ad hoc matching algorithms are primarily designed for infrastructure-based distributed systems and do not necessarily address the volatile and low power characteristics necessary for ad hoc networks. One example of such prior art (though it does not even address matching algorithms) is A. K. Dey, G. D. Abowd & D. Salbe, "A Conceptual Framework and a Toolkit for Supporting the Rapid Prototyping of Context-Aware Applications" Human-Computer Interaction, Vol. 16, No. 2, 3 & 4, pp. 97-166, 2001. ("Dey") Dey provides a conceptual framework for building generic context aware applications. Dey introduces a context toolkit and discusses how such a toolkit can be customized for different scenarios from an intelligent tour guide to a conference assistant. By detaching the sensory networks from the applications semantics, interfaces and information aggregators are created as a middleware.

(4) Also the type of location sensors can be changed to various technologies without changing the applications logic. This provides programmers the ability to build context aware applications and customize them with relatively few modifications. However, in Dey, location is the salient context and the ability of the system to deal with more complex contexts and its scalability is not currently proven.

(5) US Patent Publication US 2007/0008905A1 to Berger et al ("Berger") discloses a method that clusters a plurality of users in a mobile network according to a specific profile. Data regarding the user is allocated to each user. Data is exchanged between at least two users as soon as said users are located in a predefined communication range in order to spot users with profiles having a given content. Berger does not meaningfully address how prioritization of matches is performed. Berger also does not meaningfully address the handshaking process between the nodes. While Berger suggests that the proposed clustering model is possible through both Wi-Fi and Bluetooth, these protocols have different schemes in peer-pairing (handshaking) and usually pairing happens through sharing a key. If the pairing is overridden or disabled there are security concerns. Berger also does not meaningfully describe how users access to the same search templates, suggesting that perhaps Berger intends that the solution in Berger is hardcoded to devices and does not have the customization capability. Berger also does not discuss how data is exchanged and propagated between the nodes. Propagation of messages in an ad hoc network must follow certain principles and protocols, but Berger does not refer to any standard of how such interaction may happen. Also it should be noted that in Bluetooth communications, each Master Device can only be connected to up to a limited number of devices at the same time. Berger does not discuss how scheduling is

performed when the number of nodes increase. Berger furthermore does not discuss scheduling models in building and connecting the mesh networks. This means that if the offered data is not in the range of protocol's discovery range, matchmaking would not happen.

(6) U.S. Pat. No. 6,542,749 to Tanaka et al ("Tanaka") provides a method and system for connecting proximately located telecommunications units. The method and system may be used in a location aware telecommunications system that can determine the location of a telecommunications unit (TU) being used within the system. A user may be connected to one or more other users when they have compatible attributes and when they are located within a predetermined distance of each other. The connection may be established between TUs of two or more users, based on attribute and distance information maintained by a server computer, upon the request of an initiating user's TU.

(7) Tanaka can be used for processing of passive information but Tanaka does not meaningfully disclose real time information processing. Tanaka, unlike Berger, also relies on a centralized framework, and relies on a preexisting communications infrastructure such as a core mobile network like a Global System for Mobile communications (GSM) network, or a Code Division Multiple Access (CDMA) network, or Universal Mobile Telecommunications Service (UMTS). Other types of core mobile network indication infrastructures will occur to those of skill in the art. Tanaka may potentially suffer from a high network latency since any point of failure in the core mobile network can impact communication throughput. Another aspect of Tanaka is that the location of mobile are determined by the telecom base stations, which can impact granularity of locations. Column 9, lines 45 through 65 of Tanaka provides general description of match-making algorithm which is used in any networking system but such an algorithm can be further expanded. Tanaka also focuses on a scoring model that is based on degrees of separations but the inventors believe there is a need for different scoring models.

(8) U.S. Pat. No. 5,086,394 to Shapira (Shapira) provides an introduction system for participating users, includes for each user a personal device that is subject to activation by remote paging. Each user, also has a memory device that contains personal data defining the user by personal characteristics such as traits and interests, A local control unit receives the personal data from a plurality of user memory devices and using computer means compares the personal data of each user with the personal data of other users who have within the same time frame entered their personal, data into the local control unit via their respective memory devices. Pairs who are matched to standards by the computer comparison are automatically paged via their personal devices and an introduction is facilitated.

(9) Like much of the prior art, Shapira is based on a centralized infrastructure model which means it can suffer from the same points-of-failure issues as in Tanaka. Tanaka can have somewhat limited flexibility as Shapira focuses more on a hardware/device design rather than an a software solution. Shapira is further focused on a dating scenario impeding customization for other contexts. For Shapira, data and profiles are entered into a central server prior to meeting time (Not ad hoc and spontaneous communications). Attributes are not stored on nodes/devices themselves but retrieved from the server.

(10) Current literature survey indicates that most available ad hoc matching algorithms are primarily designed for infrastructure-based distributed systems and do not necessarily address the volatile and low power characteristics necessary for ad hoc networks. PeopleNet (in peopleNet: wireless virtual social network. In Proceedings of the 11th Annual international Conference on Mobile Computing and Networking (Cologne, Germany, Aug. 28-Sep. 2, 2005) suggests that a potentially successful social network is location, community and time specific. It provides a comparative analysis of candidate algorithms for design parameters and produce valid results. Despite the fact that the network architecture and propagation paradigms are well defined, practical aspects of network/user interactions are overlooked. PeopleNet does not take into account the multi-step authentication of communications protocols such as Bluetooth and its resulting

complications in building efficient spontaneous social networks. The framework proposed in PeopleNet, also ignores the nodes' limited battery capacity by introducing an always-on power management policy.

(11) The inventors responsible for the present specification would like to mitigate or obviate at least one of the disadvantages of the prior art.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

(12) The present specification provides a method, system and apparatus for social networking. The method system and apparatus can be invoked in real time and can be spontaneous.

(13) In an aspect, this present specification provides a method, system and apparatus for social networking that creates awareness in an ad hoc environment without the requirement for location awareness. An architecture is provided which can enable customized search and retrieval in different scenarios and can give the user the ability to switch contexts from one environment to another. The ability to switch contexts can be automatic, whereby the device belonging to the user automatically detects a given service area and invokes the appropriate profile template. This awareness can enhance current location based services, which suffer most from inaccurate localization, not by giving a more accurate location, but by giving supporting context in identifying locus. As an example, the locus can be a fuzzy radius with additional information such as color, shape and other attributes related to that radius. Proximity information can, in certain circumstances, be as valuable as the information retrieved from a centralized system such as search engines. The method, system and apparatus for social networking can provide ability to generate real-time and useful semantics in the proximity of users.

(14) In the proposed architecture, providers, such as conference organizers, social clubs or academic institutions are able to create scenario-based profiles using the provided web service. These profile templates can then be made available to mobile users either from websites or by using available wireless data networks. As indicated above, the profile template for a particular service area can be automatically loaded onto the relevant device. The matching engine on the hand-held device can be configured in a generic manner and can customize itself to any scenario being sent to it. Also, the user is capable of switching between scenarios depending on the context. For instance the user can activate the social profile in a social gathering and later activate a particular conference profile to find a person with a particular research interest in a conference setting.

(15) The provided system can be switched from various social scenarios to other potential scenarios such as non-centralized autonomous land mine detection operations in military and homeland security environments.

(16) In other aspects, a framework and an algorithm is provided for generation and interpretation of contexts in dynamic ad hoc networks. Multi-criteria and priority matching schemes are provided. A visualization engine attached to the framework for enhanced representation of semantics in ad hoc networks is also provided. The provided system can enable social context awareness in ad hoc networks and facilitate additional communications to the end-user, ultimately reducing reliance of the user on restrictive networks (e.g. operator's data networks).

Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

(1) FIG. 1 shows a system for social networking.

(2) FIG. 2 shows a schematic representation of one of the mobile devices of the system of FIG. 1.

(3) FIG. 3 shows an architectural framework for the system of FIG. 1.

(4) FIG. 4 shows a flow-chart depicting a method for social network that can be implemented using the system of FIG. 1.

- (5) FIG. 5 shows an example of a profile schema generator.
- (6) FIG. 6 shows an example of a visualization graph that can be generated on the display of a mobile device of the system of FIG. 1.
- (7) FIG. 7 shows a further example of a visualization graph.
- (8) FIG. 8 shows a further example of a visualization graph and additional data that can be displayed on the mobile device of the system of FIG. 1.
- (9) FIG. 9 shows a graph representing a score vs compared people for one person according to a case study.
- (10) FIG. 10 shows a graph representing a score vs compared people for another person according to the case study.
- (11) FIG. 11 shows a graph representing a score vs compared people for another person according to the case study.
- (12) FIG. 12 shows a flow-chart depicting another method for social network that can be implemented using the system of FIG. 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

- (13) Referring now to FIG. 1, a system for social network is indicated generally at 50. System 50 comprises a network 54 at its core that interconnects a plurality of base stations 58-1, 58-2 and an administrative server 62. (Base stations 58-1, 58-2 are collectively referred to as base stations 58, and generically as base station 58. This nomenclature is used elsewhere herein.) Each base station 58 has a respective service area 66, and each service area 66 includes a plurality of mobile devices 70, each device operated by a respective user U. Each mobile device 70 can connect to its respective base station 58 via a respective first wireless link 74. Each mobile device 70 can also connect on a peer-to-peer basis with each other mobile device 70 via a second wireless link 78.
- (14) As will be explained further below, each service area 66 can represent any area where a plurality of users U with devices 70 may wish to socially network. Thus, within service area 66-1, it is contemplated that users U-1, U-2, U-3 respective to devices 70-1, 70-2 and 70-3 may wish to socially network. Likewise, within service area 66-2, it is contemplated that users U-4, U-5, U-6 respective to devices 70-4, 70-5 and 70-6 may wish to socially network.
- (15) What defines a given service area 66 is not particularly limited. For example, service area 66-1 may comprise the floor space of a conference of academic context where users U-1, U-2 and U-3 may wish to locate other academics of like mind and interests. This means that the templates generated by server 62 for service area 66-1 are based on attributes such as research area and affiliations whereas in another example, service area 66-2 may comprise the floor space of a night club where users U-4, U-5 and U-6 may be singles wishing to meet potential partners of like mind and interests and the templates generated by server 62 are based on attributes such as gender, age and relationship type. Network 54 can be based on the Internet, an internet, the public switched telephone network, a packet switched network or combinations of any of the foregoing. Network 54 links to base stations 58 and server 62 via any appropriate backhauled, whether wired or wireless.
- (16) Server 62 can be based on any desired computing environment consisting of any combination of hardware, firmware, operating systems and software. Exemplary servers include any of the servers offered under the Sun Fire™ product line from Sun Microsystems, Inc., 4150 Network Circle, Santa Clara, CA 95054 USA, or any other computing environment comprising one or more central processing units interconnecting random access memory (or other volatile storage), read only memory (or other non-volatile storage), hard discs (or other persistent storage), network interfaces, input device and output devices via a bus. The network interface permits server 62 to connect to network 54.
- (17) Server 62 is configured to maintain at least one instance of a template application 64, which is configured to interact with devices 70 in order to assist in the provision of social networking functionality amongst devices 70 within a given service area 66. In a present embodiment, server 62 maintains a first template application 64-1 respective to service area 66-1 and a second template

application **64-2** respective to service area **66-2**. Template application(s) **64** will be discussed further below.

(18) Each device **70** is based on the functionality of an enhanced mobile electronic device that includes at least data capabilities and typically would also include voice capabilities. Many well known cellular telephone models, or variants thereof, are suitable for the present embodiment. Referring now to FIG. 2, a schematic block diagram of each device **70** is shown. It should be emphasized that the structure in FIG. 2 is purely exemplary, and contemplates a device that be used for both wireless voice (e.g. telephony) and wireless data (e.g. email, web browsing, text) communications. Device **70** includes a plurality of input devices, which in a present embodiment includes a keyboard **100** and a microphone **104**. Other input devices, such as a touch screen are also contemplated. Input from keyboard **100** and microphone **104** is received at a processor **108**, which in turn communicates with a non-volatile storage unit **112** (e.g. read only memory (“ROM”), Erase Electronic Programmable Read Only Memory (“EEPROM”), Flash Memory) and a volatile storage unit **116** (e.g. random access memory (“RAM”). Programming instructions that implement the functional teachings of device **70** as described herein are typically maintained, persistently, in non-volatile storage unit **112** and used by processor **108** which makes appropriate utilization of volatile storage **116** during the execution of such programming instructions. Variants on device **70** can include a laptop computer equipped with wireless capabilities.

(19) Processor **108** in turn is also configured to send output to a speaker **124** and a display **120**. Processor **108** also contains a first radio **128** and a second radio **132**. Conceptually, first radio **128** and second radio **132** can be thought of as network interfaces. First radio **128** is configured for communication via link **74**, while second radio **132** is configured for communication via link **78**. Thus, in a present embodiment each device **70** is a hybrid device that can communicate over link **74** and/or over link **78**. However, in other embodiments, it is contemplated that first radio **128** can be omitted from device **54** so that device **54** can only communicate via link **78**. It should be understood that in general a wide variety of configurations for device **70** are contemplated.

(20) In a present embodiment, first radio **128** and link **74** are based on an area network topology, such as Institute of Electronic Engineers Standard (IEEE) 802.11 or its variants; or Bluetooth™, or based on a core mobile telephone network topology such as GSM, General Packet Radio Service (GPRS), Code Division Multiple Access (CDMA) or the like. It is contemplated that link **74** can carry data packets between device **70** and server **62**. It will thus be appreciated that if link **74** is based on IEEE 802.11, then each base station **58** will also be an IEEE 802.11 base station. Likewise if link **74** is based on core mobile telephone network infrastructure, then base stations **58** will so correspond.

(21) In a present embodiment second radio **132** and link **78** are based on a peer-to-peer network topology, such as Bluetooth™, but other peer-to-peer topologies are contemplated, including the peer-to-peer variants of IEEE 802.11.

(22) Also in a present embodiment, devices **70** each maintain a copy of a peer-to-peer matchmaker application **136** in non-volatile storage **112**. Peer-to-peer matchmaker application **136** can be loaded into volatile storage **116** and executed on processor **108**. Peer-to-peer matchmaker application **136** on one device **70** is configured to interact with other peer-to-peer matchmaker applications **136** on other devices **70** that are in range over link **78**. Peer-to-peer matchmaker application **136** is also configured to access templates generated by template application **64**. Such templates can be accessed by each device **70** from server **62**, whereby device **70** accesses server **62** via base station **58**. Peer-to-peer matchmaker application **136** will be discussed further below.

(23) Also in a present embodiment, devices **70** each maintain a visualization engine **138** that is also maintained in nonvolatile storage **112** which can take the results of social matching and generate a visual representation of the those results on display **120**. Visualization engine **138** will be discussed further below.

(24) Referring now to FIG. 3, a conceptual architecture for implementation on each device **70** in

system **50** as indicated at **150**. Architecture **150** includes four layers including: 1) a communications framework layer **154**; 2) a matching engine layer **158**; 3) a profile processing layer **162** and 4) a profile schema layer **166**.

(25) Architecture **150**: a) is based on a free and peer-to-peer communications protocol; 2) has the ability to create a customizable matching engine that can parse standard templates for adaptation; 3) has the ability to model a service-based algorithm that allows search and retrieval without excessive user involvement and 4) utilizes local storage to reduce or obviate the need for a centralized arbiter.

(26) In general, each layer will be discussed in further detail below. However, at this point it can be noted that while FIG. **3** labels framework layer **154** as Bluetooth framework layer, other communication protocols are contemplated including ZigBee, IEEE 802.11, and the like. It can be also noted that profile processing layer **162** can be based on a variety of different models including linear or fuzzy scoring or other scoring methodologies.

(27) In a present embodiment, the free and peer-to-peer communications utilize Bluetooth and include a seamless real-time searching scheme to increase the usability of such Bluetooth devices in dynamic environments. In order to achieve usability, a present embodiment utilizes a matching process with minimal user intervention. Since Bluetooth normally has a pairing process that requires the user to continually approve connections, the present embodiment therefore implements a modified Bluetooth pairing process to make pairing process substantially seamless and the communication substantially secure. In a present exemplary embodiment, searching, (so that, for example device **70-1** can search for and locate device **70-2** or device **70-3**) involves using L2CAP (as discussed in C. J. Hsu, Y. J. Joung, "An ns-based Bluetooth Topology Construction Simulation Environment, Proceedings of the 36th annual symposium on Simulation ANSS '03" pp. 145, 2003 ("L2CAP")) as the physical layer. Furthermore, a combination of SDP (as defined in R. Bruno, M. Conti, E. Gregori, "Wireless access to internet via Bluetooth: performance evaluation of the EDC scheduling algorithm", Proceedings of the first workshop on Wireless mobile Internet WMI '01 pp. 43-49, 2001) is used in combination with the transport control protocol over internet protocol (TCP/IP) for upper layers. A conceptual mechanism of seamless pairing is discussed in general, non-specific terms, in H. Rahnama, A. Sadeghian, and A. Madni, "Social Context Awareness in Ad Hoc System of Systems", Proceedings of the 2007 IEEE International Conference on System of Systems, Apr. 18-20, 2007.

(28) FIG. **4** shows a method of social networking represented in the form of a flow-chart and indicated at reference **180**. Method **180** generally reflects the functionality of matchmaker application **136**. Method **180** can be implemented by enhancing the existing Bluetooth Service Discovery Layer or Service Discovery Protocol (SDP) working in conjunction with the Logical Link Control and Adaptation Protocol (L2CAP) layer as defined in the Bluetooth Technical Specification, which can be obtained from

<http://www.bluetooth.com/Bluetooth/Technology/Building/Specifications>. Note, however, that method **180** need not be implemented in this way.

(29) Method **180** is a peer-to-peer method whereby one device acts as a conceptual "client" while one or more other devices act as a conceptual "server". The blocks on the left side of FIG. **4** thus reflect functionality within matchmaker application **136**, which cause a particular device to act as the conceptual "client", while the blocks on the right side of FIG. **4** thus reflect functionality within peer-to-peer matchmaker application **136** in a second device to act as a conceptual "server". In FIG. **4**, as specific nonlimiting example, device **70-1** is the conceptual client while device **70-2** is the conceptual server. FIG. **4** presumes that a template has been obtained from template application **64-1** by first device **70-1** and second device **70-2**.

(30) The search request is initialized by a first device (the example given in FIG. **4** being device **70-1**) using a flow-based technique indicated generally as method **180** in FIG. **4**. The communication interactions can be divided into interactions between the first device **70-1** and a

second device **70-2**. Method **180** commences at block **184** at which point device initiates a search. The search initiated at block **184** can be effected by configuring device to call a method that is incorporated into the functionality associated with radio **132** of each device which searches for other devices that can be reached.

(31) At block **188**, a determination is made as to whether a profile associated with the user U of the device has been completed by user U. Such a profile generally relate to any criteria or other information that identify user U and are usable in matching that particular user U with other users U within the same service area. Such a profile will have been previously entered by the user U into device and stored within volatile storage **116** and/or non-volatile storage **112** of device. In a present embodiment the profile will correspond to a template obtained from template application **64-1**. Profiles will be discussed in greater detail below. If the profile has not been completed then method **180** can be configured to “wait” at block **188** until such options are completed.

(32) At block **192**, a list of available device is received. Block **192** can be effected, by for example, device **70-1** engaging in a typical Bluetooth discovery process and discovering device **70-2**. (It will now be appreciated that all devices **70** in system **50** can likewise discover each other where those other devices **70** are in range.)

(33) At block **196**, a shared key is sent to the other devices **70**. The shared key is maintained within peer-to-peer matchmaker application **136** and is therefore known to all devices **70** that have matchmaker application **136** loaded thereon. In this manner, each device **70** can verify that all other devices within a given service area **66** also maintain the peer-to-peer matchmaker application **136** and therefore wish to participate in a social networking function.

(34) Also as part of block **196**, the shared key is sent to device **70-2**.

(35) At block **200**, the shared key as sent at block **216** is parsed by device **70-2** for the purpose of verifying that the key matches the copy of the key as maintained at device **70-2**.

(36) At block **204** a determination is made as to whether the profile is completed. Block **204** is analogous to block **188** in that if the device **70-2** has an incomplete profile then the result of the determination at block **204** can be, for example, an exception where an error message is returned to device **70-2** (and/or device **70-1**) and method **180** terminated.

(37) If the determination at block **204** is yes then method **180** advances to block **208** and a response key is sent back to device **70-1**. The response key, once received by device **70-1** permits devices **70-1** and **70-2** to actually pair with each other for the purposes of fulfilling the social networking functions described herein. At block **212**, device **70-1** waits to receive the response key from device **70-2**. If the response key is not received then a pairing to device **70-2** is considered to have failed and then, at block **216**, the connection therewith is closed. (As a specific example of performance of block **212**, assume that device **70-1** is performing block **212** and waiting to receive a response key relative to device **70-2**. If no response key is received thus at block **216** device **70-1** will close the connection with device **70-2** by terminating link **78-2**).

(38) However, assume at block **212** the determination is “yes” because a response key was received from device **70-2**, then method **180** advances from block **212** to block **220**. At block **220**, device **70-1** will look for requests from device **70-2** (or other relevant device **70**). (As a specific example of performance of block **220**, assume that device **70-1** has received the response key from device **70-2** confirming connectability with device **70-2**. In this case, at block **220** links **78-2** will be active and device **70-1** will be listening for requests from device **70-2**.)

(39) At block **224**, when a request is received, device **70-1** receiving the request will read its own profile and send that profile to device **70-2**. (The profile referenced at block **224** is the same profile referenced at block **188**). Thus, at block **224**, the profile entered by the user U and stored within volatile storage **116** and/or non-volatile storage **112** of device **70-1** will be read by processor **108** of device **70-1** and sent to device **70-2**.

(40) At block **228**, device **70-2** will make a call in order to obtain the profile stored in device **70-2**.

(41) At block **232**, device **70-2** will implement a matching operation. A presently preferred

matching operation will be discussed further below and involves determining a conceptual distance between each user U within a particular service area **66** based on the profile for each user U. In the specific example in FIG. 4, the conceptual distance will be made based on the completed profile as obtained from device **70-1** in relation to the stored profile within device **70-2**.

(42) At block **236**, a determination is made if there has been a match as a result of the performance of block **232**. If the determination at block **236** is no then at block **240** the connection with the relevant device **70-1** can, as desired, be closed. However, assume that at block **236** a “yes” determination is made, then at block **244** an accepting key is sent back to device **70-1**. The accepting key represents that device **70-2** has made the match and ultimately signals to device **70-1** that device **70-2** is open to accepting the conducting of a chat dialogue (or other communication) between their respective devices **70**.

(43) At block **248**, (which presumes a match has been made with device **70-2**) a user U of device **70-1** can invoke a chatting or other communicating function with device **70-2**.

(44) It should now be apparent that method **180** is presented in a simplified form. Of note is that in a typical implementation device **70-1** would also perform its own version of blocks **232**, **236** and **244** in order to develop conceptual distances between device **70-1** and device **70-2** from the perspective of the user of device **70-1**. It should now also be understood that the interactions in method **180** can be extrapolated to reflect interactions between multiple devices **70** within the same service area **66**. In such cases of multiple interactions, there can be a single device (e.g. device **70-2**) that is designated to act as the conceptual “server”, while the remaining devices act as the conceptual “clients”. Any suitable selection process can be invoked to select which of the devices **70** will be the conceptual “server”.

(45) It will now be apparent that method **180** can be varied and likewise that many specific design choices can be made relative to how to implement various blocks in method **180**. For example, as previously discussed block **232** relates to the performance of a matching operation. Block **232** also corresponds to the matching engine layer **158** of architecture **150**. An off-the-shelf matching operation that can be used for block **232** includes an appropriate modified version of the matching operations discussed in M. Paolucci, T. Kawmura, T. Payne and K. Sycara, “Semantic Matching of Web Services Capabilities”, First Int. Semantic Web Conference, pp. 333-347, 2002. However, a more presently preferred matching operation is a novel matching protocol described below.

(46) A presently preferred matching operation is performed by processing profiles with weighted attributes. These profiles include attributes which are predefined by the web service and are stored on the devices as eXtended Markup Language (XML) schemas. The selection or rejection of profiles is performed using a linear scoring model between the assigned attributes. Table I depicts an example of a simple profile created for a social interaction scenario. The user creates a search criteria and a scoring model is introduced to rank the selections.

(47) TABLE-US-00001
TABLE I SOCIAL MATCHING SCENARIO
User's Profile
Name Gender Age Group Hobbies Image
John M 18-24 A, B, C John's Image
Search Criteria
Gender Age Group Hobbies
Female 18-24 A, B, C, D

(48) A profile allows each communicating node to calculate a numeric measure called the conceptual distance (CD). This is a score relating to common elements in users profiles, the higher the conceptual distance the more those nodes have in common. The conceptual distance calculation is the result of the multiplication of the Weight matrix (W) and the Profile Matrix (P). The weight Matrix is the importance of each attribute in that particular analysis, for example considering a dating profile comparison, finding a person of the opposite gender is more significant than finding someone of a similar age bracket therefore the weight matrix will reflect that with a higher weight connected to gender than age. This is demonstrated in Equation 1 which will resolve a conceptual distance for any profile matrix combination whether the elements of P or W are static or varying.

$$(49) \begin{bmatrix} CD_1 \\ CD_2 \\ \vdots \\ CD_n \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} P_{11} & P_{12} & \text{.Math.} & P_{1m} \\ P_{21} & P_{22} & \text{.Math.} & P_{2m} \\ \vdots & \vdots & & \vdots \\ P_{n1} & P_{n2} & \text{.Math.} & P_{nm} \end{bmatrix} \text{.Math.} \begin{bmatrix} W_1 \\ W_2 \\ \vdots \\ W_n \end{bmatrix} \quad (1) \quad CD(t) = P_{n \times m}(t) \text{.Math.} W(t)$$

(50) The matching is performed by processing profiles with weighted attributes. These profiles include attributes which are predefined by the web service and are stored on the devices as extended Markup Language (XML) schemas. The selection or rejection of profiles is performed using the relevant attributes of those profiles. These can be of many forms including numeric, descriptive or abstract. Each attribute is fitted into a number of categories defined during the profile generation. This is shown in Table II.

(51) TABLE-US-00002 TABLE II NODAL CATEGORIES Category Example Description
 Numeric 1, 2, 3 . . . Etc A numeric manipulation based off a single value is performed Numeric
 Range 1-20 21-23 etc A numeric manipulation based off a range of values is performed List
 Dancing, A flexible list of traits is compared Climbing etc for similarities Exclusive List Male to
 Female A predefined list of traits is compared for converse similarities

(52) Profile selection is an important part of the process as it involves explicitly defining the importance of each context to the overall system and defining the weights for the W matrix (see equation 1). Each context that affects the systems decision is considered. If any factors are overlooked or not included, then the system ignores them as being not applicable in making a determination.

(53) The matrix P is resolved by comparing each nodes profile with every other node present in the system using algorithms defined in the profile. These cover a large range of comparisons in order to calculate conceptual distance effectively for use in a generic distributed system. Each attribute that applies to the system has associated with it, a comparison algorithm which is required for generating the systems profile matrix (Table III).

(54) TABLE-US-00003 TABLE III COMPARISON ALGORITHMS Type Comparison Algorithm
 A Numeric $A(t) = 1 - \frac{(a_n(t) - a_m(t))}{fs}$ B Numeric Range $B(t) = 1 - \frac{(b_n - b_m)}{N}$ C Exclusive List $C(t) =$
 $c.\text{sub}.n(t) \pm c.\text{sub}.m(t)$ D List $D(t) = 1 - \frac{\sum_{n=1}^N \text{.Math. } d_n \text{ .Math. } d_m}{N}$

(55) A(t) is the final score of two numeric values, a.sub.n(t) and a.sub.m(t). a.sub.n(t) is the main value, which is used to divide a.sub.n(t)–a.sub.m(t), and obtain the relative difference. The absolute value is then subtracted from one, to obtain a percentage of the similarity, compared to the main value a.sub.n(t). B(t) is the final score of two numeric values, defined by their index in a predetermined range of numeric values. The index of the first value (b.sub.n), is subtracted from the index of the second value (b.sub.m). N is the total number of partitions in the range. Each index (b.sub.i) will be $[0 \leq b.\text{sub}.i \leq N-1]$. The relative difference and percentage is calculated similarly to A(t). C(t) is the score of two boolean values, with a predetermined score of opposite sign. The calculations of C(t) returns the absolute value of the difference between the two values, based on their score representations. In our example below, we chose 0.5 for Male and –0.5 for Female values, resulting in a score of one for opposite values, and a score of zero for matching values. D(t) is a direct comparison of string elements. The score is a result of counting how many of the primary list's elements (d.sub.n) exist in the secondary list (d.sub.m). The relative difference is calculated by dividing the number of matches by the number of elements in the primary list. The final score is produced as shown by Equation (1), by multiplying each individual score by its predetermined weight, and summed together.

(56) Table IV shows the definitions associated with each profile's attribute. The P matrix's column becomes a calculation based off the type defined for it. For example, if first weight W1 was an age comparison, the profile would define it as a type Numeric or Numeric range therefore the results in

the P matrix for column one would be the results of equation A(t) or B(t) where as if W2 was a comparison of gender the P matrix second column would be the results of C(t).

(57) TABLE-US-00004 TABLE IV DEFINITIONS Definitions Example a.sub.n Is the numeric value or e.g. Age = 12 function associated with the attribute b.sub.n Is a numeric value associated with the range set the numeric value fills $\frac{\{0to20\}}{b=0} \vee \frac{\{21to30\}}{b=1} \vee \frac{\{31to40\}}{b=2}$ c.sub.n Is a single value tied to a Male = 0.5 binary comparison Female = -0.5 or Mobile = 0.5 Immobile = -0.5 d.sub.n is a range of skills/likes e.g Hobbies, associated with the node N This is the number of e.g. the Numeric range above has an objects in the data set N = 2 whilst the range of skills for D example N = 3 n Is the node doing the comparing m Is the node being compared with n

(58) Referring again to FIG. 4, recall that prior to performance of method **180** it was presumed that a profile for user U had been created, and that a verification of whether that profile had been completed was effected at block **188**. (Note also that the profile schemas relate conceptually to profile schema layer **166** in architecture **150**.) Profiles scenarios, which can be used to create profiles by individual users U, can be created using any appropriate or desired interface. In a presently preferred embodiment a web interface **300** is shown in FIG. 5 is used by administrator A operating server **62** to create various profile schemas. (Note that the profile schema creation relates conceptually to profile processing layer **162** in architecture **150**.)

(59) Web interface **300** comprises a plurality of fields including attribute **304**, type **308**, category **312**, weight **316** and filter **320**. An add-attribute-button allows administrator A to add additional attributes under attribute **304**. Corresponding to each attribute **304**, a type **308**, category **312**, weight **316** and filter **320** can be associated. An “upload picture” dialog box **324** can also be included so that a user U can provide a picture of themselves. The output of web interface **300** an XML file **328**, which represents the particular profile schema that has been generated using interface **300**.

(60) A different profile schema can be created for service area **66-1** and a second for service area **66-2**. It is the different profile schemas that conceptually separate matching server application **64-1** from matching server application **64-2**. Thus, for example, providers of scenarios such as conference organizers are able to use this web interface **300** to create profile schemas, output in the form of XML file **328**. The XML file **328** can then be sent to each device **70** in order to create a questionnaire which is completed by each user U to ultimately create a profile for that user U which is then stored on the respective device **70**. (Alternatively, the XML file **328** can be sent to another device which is used by user U to generate the profile and then the generated profile can be downloaded to their device **70**.)

(61) Another embodiment provides visualization engine **138** so that results of social matching can be shown and analyzed easier by each user U. Visualization engine **138** is configured to calculate the matching scores of the nodes present in the proximity and create a social map including the conceptual distances between the nodes. Such social maps can be created and dynamically updated, spontaneously and in real-time. Visualization engine **138** can be based on any now known or future contemplated vector graphics engine including Java JSR226, OpenGL, DirectX and other 3D generator graphics engine. A simplified example of possible outputs of visualization engine **138** on display **120** of device **70-1** operated by user U-1 is shown in FIG. 6. In display **120** of FIG. 6, a node representing user U-1 is shown at the center, represent user U-1 himself. A second node representing user U-2 is shown connected to user U-1 and a third node representing user U-3 is shown connected user U-3. Note that in FIG. 6 the third node representing user U-3 is farther from the node representing user U-1 than the second node representing user U-2. This indicates that user U-2 is a closer conceptual match to user U-1 than user U-3. FIG. 7 shows a more complex example than FIG. 6, where there are ten users within the relevant service area **66** instead of just the three in FIG. 6. FIG. 8 shows a more complex example than FIG. 7, where ten users are shown within the relevant service area **66**, and, in addition, the profile of the user U that has the best match to user U-1 of device **70-1** is shown as a twenty-five year old male, complete with a picture and list of

hobbies of that best-matched user U.

(62) Enhancements to the various inputs that can be created using visualization engine **138** are contemplated. For example, the output can be configured to indicate which users U are themselves searching for other users. The output can be configured to indicate that certain users are conceptually matched with each other, while at the same time indicating which of those very same users are willing to be contacted or approached.

(63) Various case studies have been implemented using the teachings herein. The cases involved in the studies were calculated using a platform implementing the matching algorithms described above. The matching profiles utilizing the four key data types and score calculations, were sufficient to satisfy a social matching scenario, and successfully identify compatible profiles. This will provide the user with social context awareness about the surrounding people and indicates how far or close a user is to other nodes in terms of likes and dislikes.

(64) Prototype user interfaces have been developed on Java-Enabled mobile phone and is shown in FIG. **8**. Screen **120** is divided into two dynamic areas. The upper section generates a social map by polling adjacent nodes every five minutes (or other suitable time period) using Scalable Vector Graphics libraries available in the JavaME platform. In the current version of the prototype as shown in FIG. **8**, the highest possible match in the social setting is shown in the lower portion of the screen and the user needs to press a button (“Next”) to see the next highest match. For the study, an environment with ten gender-based profiles preferring heterosexual matches, and focused on two males and one female who are constantly polling other profiles for a match. Current prototype user interfaces are portable across mobile platforms including Symbian, Blackberry™ from Research in Motion Inc., and, as previously mentioned, Java phones, and it should be understood that the teachings herein are not specific to Java Enabled phones. In Java, three major JSRs are used including JSR82 for Bluetooth, JSR226 for Graphics, JSR 177 for security and JSR172 for Web Services

(65) Tables V-VII and Graphs I-III (shown in FIGS. **9**, **10** and **11** respectively) show the three weighted search criteria (Age, Hobbies and Gender) used to calculate the final conceptual distance in a social setting of ten people. (Note that users are referred to as persons or people in Tables V-VII and Graphs I-III). The lowest score of zero indicates the least desirable node. The sum of all weights identifies the top score of one-hundred-and-fifty, which indicates a perfect match. The graphs show high scores between opposite genders and low scores between the same genders. Such scores are the rudiments for generating the social graphs and represent the distances between the nodes.

(66) Although, “Gender” with a high weight of seventy-five was the major criterion in obtaining the conceptual distances in scenarios defined in Tables V-VII, it is not the only matching factor. “Age” with the weight of fifty and “Hobbies” with the weight of twenty-five are subsequent factors in providing a more accurate match in accordance with the searcher's criteria. For instance in Table V, the best match for Person 1 is Person 3 with a high conceptual distance of 144.4 and the least desirable match is Person 9 with the low conceptual distance of 38.9. These conceptual distances are playing the key role in visualizing the social maps shown in FIG. **5**. It is important to note that the default weight for each attribute is defined by the web service shown in FIG. **3**. To be able to customize the search further, the user also has the ability to change the default weight values on the hand-held device to customize the search criteria. For example, in Table VI, the user can decrease the weight assigned to “Gender” and increase the weight assigned to “Hobbies” to prioritize the search to find people with hobby “D”.

(67) TABLE-US-00005 TABLE V Search space and scores for person 1 Age Hobbies Gender
Weights 50 25 75 Score Person 1 25 (desired) A, B (desired) M 2 30 C, D M 44.4 3 33 A, B F
144.4 4 23 D M 50 5 29 B, C F 131.9 6 15 A, D F 126.4 7 40 A, B, C, D M 58.3 8 45 A F
120.8 9 39 C M 38.9 10 21 B F 131.9

(68) TABLE-US-00006 TABLE VI Search space and scores for person 4 Age Hobbies Gender

Weights 50 25 75 Score Person 4 30 (desired) D (desired) M 1 25 A, B M 44.4 2 30 C, D M 75 3 33 A, B F 125 5 29 B, C F 125 6 15 A, D F 133.3 7 40 A, B, C, D M 63.9 8 45 A F 113.9 9 39 C M 44.4 10 21 B F 113.9

(69) TABLE-US-00007 TABLE VII Search space and scores for person 8 Age Hobbies Gender
Weights 50 25 75 Score Person 8 45 (desired) A (desired) F 1 25 A, B M 133.3 2 30 C, D M 113.9 3 33 A, B F 63.9 4 23 D M 108.3 5 29 B, C F 38.9 6 15 A, D F 47.9 7 40 A, B, C, D M 150 9 39 C M 119.4 10 21 B F 27.8

(70) Our prototype's user interface is developed on a Java-Enabled mobile phone and is shown in FIG. 5. The screen is divided into two dynamic areas. The upper section generates a social map by polling adjacent nodes every 5 minutes using Scalable Vector Graphics libraries available in the JavaME platform.

(71) In the current version of the prototype, the highest possible match in the social setting is shown in the lower portion of the screen and the user needs to press a button ("Next") to see the next highest match (FIG. 5). For our study, we setup an environment with 10 gender-based profiles preferring heterosexual matches, and focused on 2 males and 1 female who are constantly polling other profiles for a match.

(72) To provide further perspective and detail, FIG. 12 shows a method of social networking represented in the form of a flow-chart and indicated at reference 400. Method 400 is performed using system 50. The blocks in method 400, except for block 410, are performed by devices 70 utilizing their copies local matchmaker applications 136 and visualization engines 138. Block 410 in method 400 is performed by server 62, which generates a regular expression to generate common keys that are used between devices 70. The keys referenced in block 410 correspond to the keys referenced at blocks 196, 200, 206 and 244 of method 180.

(73) Block 405 represents the activity of searching for all nearby devices 70 by each device 70. Block 405 generally corresponds to blocks 184 and 192 of method 180.

(74) Block 415 represents the activity of shared key exchanges by each discovered device 70 to verify the existence of matchmaker applications 136 on each discovered device 70. It will now be appreciated that in system 50, devices 70-1, 70-2 and 70-3 will discover each other, and that devices 70-4, 70-5 and 70-6 will discover each other. Block 415 generally corresponds to blocks 196, 200, 208 and 212 method 180.

(75) Block 420 represents the formal overriding of the traditional Bluetooth pairing process between devices 70, in favor of allowing the functionality of matchmaker application 136 to utilize the Bluetooth stack for the purpose of fulfilling the social networking functions as described herein. Block 425 is invoked to the extent that each device 70 does not locate the matchmaker application 136 on another device 70. Block 425 enforces the traditional Bluetooth pairing process between devices, in accordance with known Bluetooth pairing procedures according to the prior art.

(76) Block 430 represents the exchanging of profiles between all of the devices 70 which are in communication with each other and which have verified with each other and that they are each executing matchmaker application 136. Block 430 generally corresponds to blocks 220 and 224 of method 180

(77) Block 435 represents the determination of a conceptual distance between devices 70 that have each exchanged profiles with each other. Block 435 can be performed by each individual device 70. Block 435 generally corresponds to blocks 228 and 232 of method 180.

(78) Block 440 represents the indication of visualization engine 138 in order to create a social map of the type shown in FIGS. 6, 7 and 8.

(79) It can be noted that in method of 400, once block 440 is complete, method 400 cycles back to block 405, and in this manner, the social map is continually updated.

(80) While the foregoing describes certain embodiments, it will now be apparent that combinations, subsets, and/or variations of those embodiments are contemplated.

Claims

1. A system comprising: a first electronic device and a second electronic device communicatively coupled over a network, a server configured to maintain at least one instance of a template application for interacting with the first and second electronic devices to assist in the provision of social networking functionality within one or more service areas, wherein the first electronic device generates a first user profile for the first electronic device as a function of attributes of the first electronic device, and wherein the second electronic device generates a second user profile for the second electronic device as a function of attributes of the second electronic device; wherein the first electronic device: determines a conceptual distance between the first and second electronic devices based at least in part on the first and second user profiles when the first and second electronic devices are associated with a specific service area, and provides a service over the network accessible by the second electronic devices when the conceptual distance is within a predetermined threshold and the first and second devices are associated with the specific service area; wherein the first and second electronic devices are further configured to access and utilize templates from the template application, to facilitate social networking functionality within the specific service area; and wherein the template application is configured to generate and provide the templates to the electronic devices, and the templates are used by the electronic devices in their interaction and provision of social networking services within the specific service area.
2. The system of claim 1, wherein the service comprises enabling a communicating function between the first and second electronic devices.
3. The system of claim 2, wherein the service comprises a visual notification function on at least one of the first and second electronic devices.
4. The system of claim 3, wherein a display of the first electronic device provides a visual notification of the service accessed by the second electronic device comprising a digital picture of a user associated with the second electronic device.
5. The system of claim 2, wherein the service comprises enabling a file sharing function between the first and second electronic devices.
6. The system of claim 5, wherein the network comprises a Bluetooth communication protocol.
7. A system comprising: a plurality of electronic devices communicatively coupled over a network, a server configured to maintain at least one instance of a template application for interacting with the plurality of electronic devices to assist in the provision of social networking functionality within one or more service areas, wherein each of the plurality of electronic devices generates a user profile as a function of attributes of each of the plurality of electronic devices; wherein a first of the plurality of the electronic devices: determines a conceptual distance between the first and the others of the plurality of the electronic devices based at least in part on the said user profiles when at least the first and some of the others of the plurality of electronic devices are associated with a specific service area, and provides a service over the peer-to-peer network accessible by the plurality of electronic devices when the conceptual distance is within a predetermined threshold and some of the others of the plurality of electronic devices are associated with the specific service area, wherein the plurality of electronic devices are further configured to access and use templates from the template application, to facilitate social networking functionality within the specific service area; wherein the template application is configured to generate and provide the templates to the electronic devices, and the templates are used by the electronic devices in their interaction and provision of social networking services within the specific service area.
8. The system of claim 7, wherein the network comprises a Bluetooth communication protocol.
9. The system of claim 8, wherein a display of the first of the plurality of electronic devices provides a ranked listing of some of the others of the plurality of electronic devices.

10. The system of claim 9, wherein the ranked listing is ordered according to values associated with the said conceptual distance.
