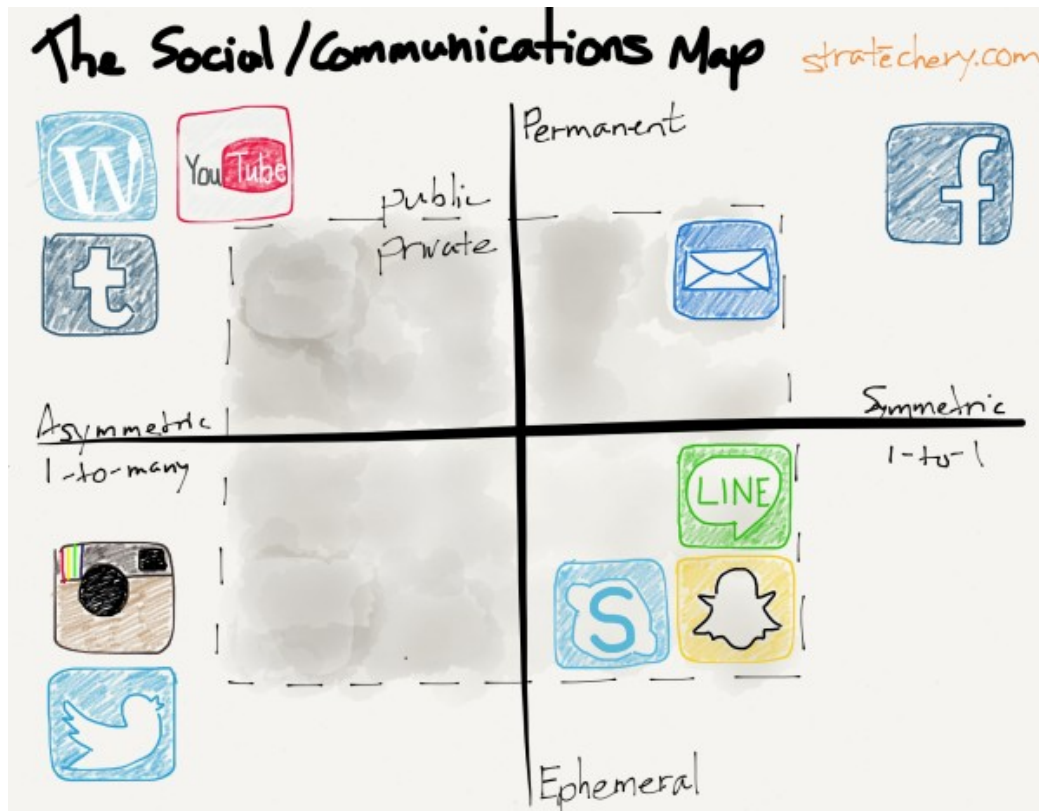


The Social/Communications Map

5-6 minutes

I took another turn at my map of the social networking space I made for yesterday's post [The Multitudes of Social](#):



The Social/Communication Map

I made a few changes:

- The primary change is relabeling the horizontal axis. Originally I had “Interest/Topic-Based” on the left, and “Real-life Relationship-Based” on the right, but as Victor Pope pointed out [on Twitter](#), the real difference is really about the symmetry of relationships.
- Relabeling this axis necessitated moving email and Skype to the right, which I think makes sense and is an indication that this is a good change.
- I added Tumblr and YouTube, and removed Photostream and Facetime. The original was based on networks I personally use; this new drawing is more representative of usage worldwide. I did leave LINE, but consider that representative of WhatsApp, Kik, Kakao Talk, WeChat, etc.

Finally, I’ve changed the title to make the broader point: social is about communication, and communication is, and always has been, conducted through multiple mediums.

Some additional observations, beyond Facebook and Snapchat (which were the focus of the [original post](#)):

- There are three primary means of communication: text, photo, and video/voice. Usually a particular service, beyond competing in a specific quadrant, will also specialize in one of these mediums, and then grow into an adjacent medium over time (e.g. Instagram video).¹
- It is not an accident that most of the companies towards the top of the graph – the more permanent type of content – were founded in the PC era. The PC itself has always been a destination-type device; normal people weren't using a PC most of the time, but rather made a point to use it.

It's the exact same with the type of content created for these PC-originated services: more permanent, thoughtful content is intentional; ephemeral content is much more whimsical and meaningful only at a specific moment in time. It follows that this type of content is really only possible in mobile on a device that is always with us.

- The exception to the last point is Skype; in retrospect, it's rather remarkable Skype was able to create such a foothold on the ephemeral side of the map despite its PC origins. It goes to show what value the original product had. Unfortunately, that value is fast disappearing as more and more apps like LINE incorporate VOIP, and Skype's former strength – its network of users based on nicknames – is a liability relative to services like LINE or WhatsApp that ride along on phone numbers as unique identifiers.
- The placement on these axis is not a technical description, but rather how users experience the particular services. For example, while tweets and Instagram photos have easily-accessible URLs, while Facebook posts don't, the experience of Twitter and Instagram is more ephemeral from a user perspective relative to Facebook, which itself presents posts and videos as one specific moment in your lifelong timeline.
- While I created this map in order to talk about Facebook, it turns out it is among the most difficult to categorize correctly. Facebook is, well, a book of faces; your permanent place on the network, centered on your identity and seen by those you connect with one-to-one. And yet, the primary mechanic on Facebook – the wall post – is a one-to-many medium. There is no question Facebook is good enough for a certain segment of the population that may have once upon a time started a blog or Tumblr.

Yet, the nature of Facebook, and its drive to capture everything, ultimately devalues everything as well, making your content ever more ephemeral and just more digital flotsam. Facebook is pulling itself in two different directions – to the left, and downwards – and it's not good for the product long term. Being everything to everyone is, as they say, the best way to be nothing to no one.

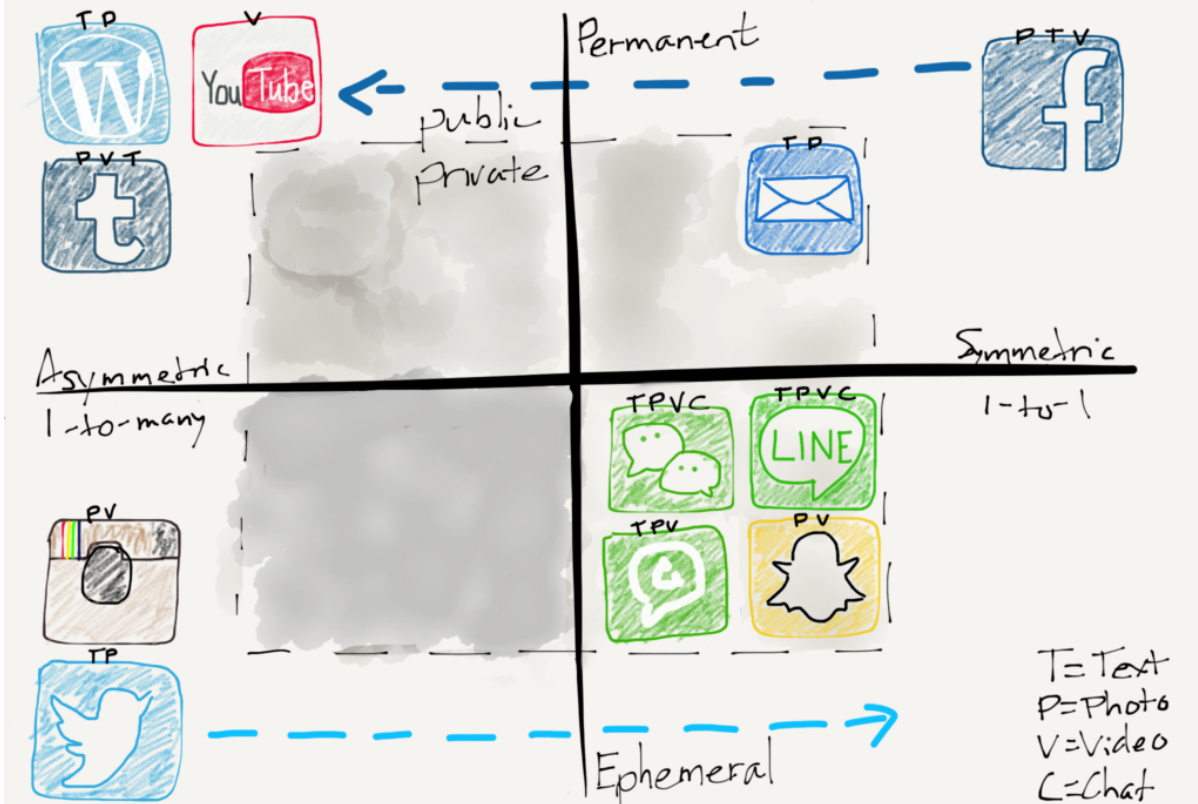
Make no mistake: Facebook is a triumph. It completely dominates text, photo, and video sharing for the majority of the population, and it remains the most likely connection point for anyone I know in real life. What Facebook clearly is not, though, is something private or well-suited to conversations you may one day hope to forget. In other words, they're not Snapchat, and wanting to be is to forget what makes it great.

One more point worth noting: Facebook remains the most valuable property on this chart, especially if they successfully crack [effective brand advertising](#).²

The Social/Communications Map has been updated over time. This is the [most recent version](#):

The Social/Communications Map

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1. Vine is clearly aspiring to be in the bottom left corner, but I haven't seen any indication it's really gotten much traction [↩]
2. YouTube is a clear second, with Twitter a very distant third [↩]