Mylife

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1. Introduction

In a period where education is greatly depends on the developments of digital technologies, many details of students' lives are accompanied by virtual tools, which offer functions making communication faster, information more accessible and exchange of ideas easier. In a university context, young academics maintain various accounts granting them access to certain platforms, networks related to their studies/subjects. One could say that they lead an electronic life simultaneously to their research. Students maintain several accounts

that allow them access to different platforms containing respective information or offering a desired function. While some online accounts are only for the distribution of academic learning materials, other sites function as feeds for upcoming events for everything from courses to conferences or public lectures. In addition, to his university email, many universities also offer a separate account for administrative status and grades. The library ID exemplifies as a further form of an education-related account of students. Next to his to his academic life, students consult a wide repertoire of digital functions such as social networks, private mails and video/audio messengers (that may also be used for studying purposes), but are mainly used for the exchange of information concerning local events, upcoming parties or share-worthy multimedia and podcasts.

Mylife tries to incorporate all these functions into *one* software, which is constantly updated via the net. This would greatly facilitate a student's time management, who could see all changes relevant to his life on one screen and consult his events on an automatically synchronised calendar. Traditional universities programmes such as Mypaed try to fulfil this demand for concentration by bundling forums for exchange on the provided learning materials or as is the case with moodle by having a calendar function, where a student can bookmark his events. The following problems remain, however:

- Coordination between the private sphere (social networks, private email) and the university related area needs improvement. Why not combine the profiles on facebook with one's academic friendships on Mypaed?

- Broaden the scope by including further functions relevant to a student's life into Mylife (especially private emails, social networks and feeds concerning local events; but also podcasts, favourite radio streams and video portals), in order to enlarge the time-saving effect and to avoid complications of dealing with different softwares

The unique selling point of Mylife remains its attempt to incorporate the functions mentioned above into one single software. It follows a more complete and all-around model, encompassing a larger selection of programmes used on a daily basis by students. Thereby it is not restricted to the campus life, but open for everyday requirements This means that the interface of the individual programmes will no longer be the governing window (but only visible for identification purposes). In distinction to a browser, Mylife does not just list important sites like a conventional browser with its bookmark function, but it filters the most relevant information/function from each source, bundles into one format and displays it in a user-friendly manner. A student could access this from any computer that has this software.

Mylife is an attempt to offer a structure with which a student can explore the resources on the vast internet and order them in a manner fitting to his needs. Via plugins Mylife is pliant enough to allow for further improvement, in the form of plugins that include further programmes.

2. <u>What is Mylife?</u>

Mylife is an open-source freeware, which can be downloaded and installed on any computer. Once installed onto a computer, it can be accessed with a username and a password. The user's main page would then be displayed regardless of the computer the user is using to log-in, since the data will not be on the computer, but will be streamed as soon as connected. The user therefore will no longer depend on one certain browser (which has all his favourites bookmarked) but could easily access the newest about his life from a university computer.

On the long-term existing accounts of universities would be made compatible with Mylife, greatly facilitating an easy access of students: A student studying at two different faculties, will be interested on the updates of both campuses. Even after a university change or continuation at a different university, the student's main medium (Mylife) remains in place. Solely his feed would have to shifted from Uni Bonn to Uni Cologne and he would have to register once.

The main page consists of the following portals: University, Correspondence, Community, Calender. A portal is a space that unites all the information/resources relevant to the respective portal name. In addition to the Portals (elaborated later on in this paper), a user can add the programmes he likes and for which there is an existing plug in Mylife. Except for private email accounts(yahoo, hotmail, gmail), certain social networks(facebook, myspace) and messengers, these programmes may vary on the user: A media student may have great interest in following certain radio podcasts for analysis purposes over a certain period of time. He may then add these radio streams to a button within the University portal, a space a student finds everything linked to his university and running projects. This student then has the option to consult the radio anytime he wishes under the respective course name and even has the possibility to share this with his fellow course mates in a common forum. A certain emission may also be bookmarked in the calendar and it will be automatically synchronized, if the student wishes so. He may also add them to the constantly opened window designated for running projects: The name of the emission would then be readable on this screen and could be played, when wished, even when the user is browsing his portals. Not only does this example demonstrate the time-saving and coordinating effect of Mylife, but also the high level of customization possible according to the needs of students from different faculties and with different interests.

3. <u>Portals</u>

The University portal is displayed on the main Screen of Mylife and probably the most important for students. It is the second button, next to correspondences, on the Common Interface. This portal unites all already existing accounts, IDs or course streams and embeds them into Mylife under the UP button. The Portal shows the most recent events related to academia on one screen. General announcements from the university for conferences and public lectures (studium universale) are streamed here, next to the updates of a particular faculty or even a student's particular course. Since each university and each faculty in particular consent to the portal and make their feeds compatible with it, students can choose exactly what they want: the faculty they are studying at currently, a faculty of interest and a university they are considering studying at next year. After having selected these settings once, the student no longer needs to bother with registration or time-consuming verification of each account.

The student would have opportunity to consult all his course materials for all courses easily and on demand. It would be easier to search for current or documented lectures. Simultaneously, the streams of professors would be filed under the respective course instead of on their personal website, for example. The UP gives teachers und students the possibility to centralize resources and thereby arrange them in a more manageable and accessible manner. A student's email would be verifiable on the same screen as the status of his administrational status with the respective office or his status of a book borrowed at the library.

The course forums are included in Mylife and offer each student the possibility to interact with others. In order to promote the students input into Mylife he will also be allowed to participate in the forums he is authorized for. Of course he would be eligible to post a

podcast on a department forum or the arrival a renowned speaker coming to town on the course site for which this speech is relevant, but he would not be authorized without permission of a university administrator to comment publicly on the general announcements blackboards. The challenge for Mylife would be to enable the largest possible interaction for each student, while still keeping the university hierarchy intact.

General idea is to embed all email accounts on to one single screen with similar functions as the well-known Outlook Express. The Email Portal would be an equally important button on the main screen as the UP. It would include all email accounts the students may have: private, work and university. Even if the university mail is already displayed within the University Portal, it would still be able to consult these email under the rubric "Email university". If an email has already been opened prior in another Portal, it would be marked as read. Synchronisation, therefore, does take place.

The community portal contains accounts related to the students' private life. From social networks to video portal accounts and forums of interest a particular student has registered for. More importantly, however, this portal also contains the option to take a look at local events immediate or upcoming. Whether there is a party posted on facebook, a play by the local theatre or a restaurant looking for an employee for the upcoming busy period, the neighbourhood and community portal can do the referencing. The portal is synchronised with the calendar, thereby complementing a student's university timetable with his leisure activities.

The calendar is the crossing point for all synchronisation that takes place between the portal. It can be consulted at anytime during the Mylife and be complemented manually if necessary: If an incoming email for example sets a new date for a meeting. For the most part, however, the calendar is entirely independent and even notifies the user if there is a change in his usual weekly rhythm, a cancellation of class or a change of the lecture room, for example.

4. <u>Home/Main Interface</u>

Definition

The Common Interface is the default screen of Mylife-imagine it as a platform where all the information important to your life are visible on one screen and can be consulted with one click. The central controlling unit from where the user can observe several miniature screens, or buttons, simultaneously.

Live Feeds

The Live Feed is like a stock-market bar on the bottom of a television screen. It is always visible to the user no matter on what screen he may be and it in cooperates "live" information from the following sources of information: messages on Facebook, University forums, calendar reminders (of events, sport practice), News from subscribed channels or threads, Missed calls from Skype

Notepad for Running Projects

A screen which allows one to jot down notes. Can be consulted from any window in Mylife and is meant for things/info that are classified as "to be filed" or "in work". Via a simple drag-and-drop system, it can save any sort of bit of information collected on the web or on Mylife

Search bar of Mylife

This function is for the web as well as for Mylife. The user can select the search engines he would like to use, but it is also possible to just look within Mylife. A keyword of today's

lecture for example would show the academic material available online in the University portal. A search for parties will filter the community portal for upcoming events and show all relevant entries.

Chat place

A sub-screen with instant access to all chat contacts from all different communication devices on one single contact list. A user will be able to communicate via instant messaging with any of his contacs similar to the software known as Ubuntu.

5. <u>Conclusion</u>

Compared to prior work related to this concept, Mylife excels with its functions, thereby offering solutions to the following problems, users and students encounter when dealing with their e-life:

- Emergence of an uncountable amount of various programmes (many of which fulfil the same or similar functions). But their individual interface is confusing and time-consuming to understand. Mylife offers one single interface while embedding the functions of all the existing programmes. It does not replace them; but merely consults them constantly in order to provide the user with current information *in one interface*.

- The internet is huge and pertinent sources of information hard to filter and manage in a user-friendly manner. How can I bundle what is important to me *and* ensure that this stream of information is up-to-date? Mylife saves all important accounts for e-mails, communication networks, academic forums and news streams and displays them in a clear and logical manner, categorised by portals for each section of a student's life: E-mail, Communication, Community and a Calendar on the main interface. All aspects of a student's e-life are united in one place.

- Coordination of private events and academic time tables is always a problem for students. This is why Mylife offers a calendar and a live feed function. Events and lectures are automatically placed into the calendar and the user is notified about current changes/updated via the feed. If the students want to add an event into his calendar, this can be done by a simple drop-and-drag principle. For academic life in particular this coordinating function facilitates daily lecture follow-up for students.

Finally, Mylife is open to changes. It can incorporate future programmes via a plug-in, since it is a system above all other one-function devices. Once the plug-in has been installed, its functions can be used on the Mylife Interface.