OPEN SOURCE IN MOBILE PLATFORMS AND ECOSYSTEMS: A CASE FROM FINLAND

ECIS Workshop — Extended abstract

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Extended Abstract

The so-called mobile industry, producing ubiquitous devices (such as phones, smart-phones, tablets, and smart-watches) gained notorious attention from scholars across disciplinary boundaries. When examining this competitive industry, we quickly realize that vendors such as Apple, Google, Samsung or Nokia often integrate the same hardware components, often rely on the same manufacturing partners and promote their products using the same communication channels. Moreover, the software user-interfaces provided by the different vendors often resemble each other, and all of the major vendors implemented similar centralized application portals (e.g., AppStore) for capturing value from third-party software developers. However, there is a clear and interesting variance on how such vendors embrace open source software. Google claims to develop the Android platforms in an open source way, Apple integrates a lot of open source software into their proprietary iOS platform, and Nokia abandoned their own open source platforms (e.g., Meego and Meltemi) to fully rely on proprietary software in a strategic partnership with Microsoft.

In this research, we examine such interesting variance, by exploring **why** a major player in the mobile industry adopted an open-source strategy by melding elements of open source and proprietary software within its mobile platform (West, 2003). By directly interviewing different actors from a big Finnish firm in the mobile industry, we addressed **why** such firm, which traditionally relied on proprietary software, embraced an open-source platform strategy. Five semi-structured interviews were conducted within the organization: Two software developers, one software tester (test-driven integrator), a person responsible for marketing, and two line managers were interviewed on open-source and open-innovation topics.

Based on the interview transcripts, and using the grounded theory method, the topic of open source as *facilitating collaboration with different players within the telecommunication ecosystem* emerged. In addition, the more narrow topic of open source as *facilitating collaboration with competitors within the telecommunication ecosystem* also emerged. We integrated our findings both with prior research addressing collaboration in open-source software (Chua and Yeow, 2010; Howison and Crowston, 2014; Koch and Schneider, 2002); and with management literature on coopetition strategy (Bengtsson and Kock, 2000; Gnyawali and Madhavan, 2001; Lado et al., 1997; Nalebuff and Brandenburger, 1996). Besides contributing to a better understanding of open source within a platforms and ecosystems setting, our findings unveiled the role of open-source software as an enabler of inter-firm competitive behaviors. Finally, we contribute to the theorizing of open-coopetition (Teixeira and Lin, 2014), a portmanteau of collaboration with competitors in an open-source way.

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