My final project for this class will involve designing a cell phone user interface with social networking capabilities for developing nations. Currently, I’m doing undergraduate research work under a PHD student. Our research topic is deploying social networking on a mobile solution for developing regions. From this research, I hope to look at ways of utilizing social networking to enhance the lives of people in developing regions. We’re looking into economic, social and technological justifications and ramifications for why and how social networking can be effectively used. The purpose is to interconnect people living in rural areas who may not know others in the same region or similar situations. Through mobile social networking, I hope to increase intercultural exchanges as well as to develop their economy.

From CS 465 class, I hope to learn to correctly identify the correct user interface for interaction among people who are unfamiliar with technology. I’m still unsure of what technologies and what currently exist as far as infrastructure. From there, I will list out what I think will be beneficial technologies and apply those to my software development. From the user interface side, I hope to use my final design project from CS 465 as the front end for this new social networking software.

My initial thoughts revolve around a simplified version of facebook, myspace, and twitter that will enable trade, bartering, and communication. I understand that my audience will be unfamiliar with technology and will have used cell phones only to place phone calls. Therefore, a very simplified interfaced with images instead of text based will be key. One of the challenges that I face is that execution of this on cheaper cell phones that will not have the same capabilities as say a smart phone or iphone. However, I think there exist a market for a 30-50 dollar cell phone that can encompass mobile social networking through intermittent web connectivity that will be java based.

* This is what is new:

After discussing technologies with my research team, we’re looking more at inter-village connectivity as opposed to personal connectivity. One of the ideas is a bartering system for rural Bangladesh that will supplement their “Haet” day. During Haet day each week, villagers from a locale of within 20 miles will travel to a given location looking for goods that they need, but cannot be found within their respected villages. If we could enable a social networking system that could interconnect remote villages, then haet day can become much more efficient. Not only are goods traded, but also labor forces and other essential needs can be traded on this bartering system. I will be working on a well designed interface that is intuitive for rural villagers to understand and use with ease.

I hope to use my design and research to enhance the lives of billions of people worldwide and to allow for greater collaboration in developing regions.