This paper proposes a technology classification model for Mobile Content and Service Delivery Platforms. The proposed model is grounded on existing literature and empirical research consisting of 40 in-depth case studies with MMTPs and 102 semi-structured interviews with top management from firms operating in the Mobile Content environment that already own or are interested in purchasing a MCSDP. The Quality Function Deployment (QFD) technique was used to create the final Technology Classification Schema.

The MCSDP technology classification model has three components:

(i) A MCSDP Functional Architecture, which describes platform structure in terms of its endowment of functionalities and capabilities

(ii) A MCSD classification schema, which allows the identification of a set of Platform Categories classified according to the range of functionalities usually possessed

(iii) A Technology Classification Schema consisting of a set of technology dimensions that directly influence platform efficiency and effectiveness.

The proposed model can be used for mapping existing and future MCSDP offer in terms of technological strengths and weaknesses and thus support decision-making by platform vendors and buyers. The main contribution is the creation of a reference framework capable of rigorously modelling the emergent phenomenon related to the rise of middleware platform providers within the Mobile Content environment. The paper also contributes to extending the existing QFD literature, since it demonstrates the House of Quality tool’s usefulness in a new context of application.

The research provided an original reference model for supporting a technology classification of Mobile Content & Service Delivery Platforms. The framework was built on two pillars: a
literature analysis well grounded on the existing body of knowledge concerning middleware platforms and IT systems, and an empirical analysis based on case studies on 40 MMTPs. The House of Quality tool was employed for translating platform customers’ expected benefits in ECs. Integrating QFD methodology has a number of positive effects on the model developed. Concerning model properties, internal validity is ensured for the platform positioning (dependent variable) through the identified classification dimensions (independent variables). Similarly, in terms of external validity, the model can be generalized to different populations, thanks to the width and significance of the sample under scrutiny. The rigorous qualitative research methodology employed means that the model should be reliable and replicable. Future research will need to apply the model to a different sample of MMTPs, to test its validity outside the first sample and to gather further insights related to external market conditions and fast-changing technological contingencies. The main contribution that this paper brings to researchers is the creation of a reference framework capable of rigorously modelling the emergent phenomenon related to the rise of middleware platform providers within the Mobile Content environment. The paper also contributes to extending the existing QFD literature, since it demonstrates the House of Quality tool’s usefulness in a new context of application. The value for practitioners lies in the provisioning of a tool with powerful descriptive and normative value. On the descriptive side, the model can be used for mapping existing and future MCSDP offer, in terms of technological strengths and weaknesses. On the normative side, it supports the decision making process of a wide set of stakeholders. Customer firms attempting to find out what they should look for in middleware solutions and what they should implement according to their needs can employ it to set guidelines for platform adoption. Platform vendors can use the model to guide their offer positioning at a functionalities-endowment level. Also, thanks to the creation of strong ties between platform capabilities and associated benefits, vendors can use the model to drive the choices made at a technological design dimensions level, which heavily affects the MCSDP market attractiveness. Although it represents a significant step toward the study of MMTPs through the evaluation of the core element of their value proposition, this research does not specifically assess the strategic and competitive implications of choosing a given MCSDP technology positioning. The proposed model essentially provides technology based support for internal strategic analysis and decision-making. Future research will need to focus on integrating the model with external strategy analysis frameworks for mobile middleware platform providers. Moreover, future research should apply the proposed model to map and evaluate specific Mobile Content and Service markets to further refine the model’s descriptive usefulness.