

Chapter 5.24

User Experience of Camera Phones in Social Contexts

Hanna Stelmaszewska
Middlesex University, UK

Bob Fields
Middlesex University, UK

Ann Blandford
University College London, UK

ABSTRACT

This chapter reports on a qualitative study into people's use of camera phones for social interaction in co-present settings. The study examined people's behaviour and positive experiences (e.g., fun, enjoyment, or excitement) when camera phones were used in different spaces (public and private). It was found that camera phones influence social practices. Three distinct practices were observed: sharing a moment now, sharing a moment later, and using photos to initiate social interaction with strangers. The knowledge obtained through the study will offer a conceptual contribution that deepens our understanding of how this emerging and evolving technology is coming to be accommodated into the leisure-related practices of its users.

INTRODUCTION

What do we know about photography? Photography has been a part of our life for a long time. We document family celebrations, important events in our lives and those of our family and friends; we take pictures when visiting museums or if we want to illustrate everyday items and people in a funny way and when we want to create stories (Mäkelä et al., 2000). It seems that photography and photos bring either smiles when reminiscing about something pleasant or tears when emotions take over. They preserve memories, capture feelings, and provide a means to communicate with others. One of the most common and enjoyable experiences is to share photos with others through story telling (Balanovic et al., 2000; Chalfen, 1987). Photos can be shared using technology

and then they can be used as means for interaction with others.

Recent technological developments not only support new ways of working but also provide new mechanisms for social interaction. Mobile phones and camera phones, in particular, are examples of such technology. In the past decade, mobile phones have allowed profound changes to take place in people's behavior and practices in relation to communication (Ling, 2004), from being extensively used as a medium of verbal and text communication to one that uses pictures to facilitate people's social life. Mobile phones with integrated camera and video features have changed forever the way people communicate and interact, and have shaped both their individual and their social lives (Ito, 2005; Kato, 2005; Kindberg et al., 2005a, 2005b; Okabe, 2004; Scifo, 2004).

Although there is a vast body of literature focussing on the use of camera phones (Kindberg, et al., 2005a, 2005b; Okabe, 2004; Scifo, 2004) the issues relating to how camera phones are used to mediate social interaction between co-located users have been neglected. In this chapter, we report on the study of the collaborative use of camera phones by co-located users in various spaces.

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

In recent years, there has been substantial interest in digital photography, with a particular interest on how the digital medium facilitates sharing of images (Balanovic et al., 2000; Frohlich et al., 2002, Van House et al., 2005). Studies of sharing digital photographs include the use of Web-based systems, mobile applications, and multimedia messaging. Most of the studies focus on personal applications for sharing images remotely (Kato, 2005; Kindberg et al., 2005a; Van House et al., 2005) work on sharing images in co-present settings is in its infancy.

The issues of what people capture on mobile phones and what they do with these images

were extensively investigated by Kindberg et al (2005a). They proposed a six-part taxonomy to describe the intentions behind the use of camera phone images. Intentions were grouped along two dimensions. The first intention defines whether people captured the images for affective (e.g., sentimental) or functional reasons. The second one defines social or individual intentions.

Others, such as Licoppe & Heurtin (2001) and Taylor and Harper (2003), focused on teenagers using their phones for social practices. The latter claim teenagers' practices are similar to 'gift-giving' rituals, which shape the way teenagers understand and use their mobile phones. The 'gift-giving' practices included sharing certain text messages, call-credits and even the mobile phones themselves. All these practices establish and cement allegiances and sustain rivalries (Taylor & Harper, 2003).

A field study conducted by Kato (2005) explored how the use of mobile phones/camera phones changes people's daily activities in Japan. He argues that the new ways of pervasive photo taking through camera phones allows people to document their lives on a daily basis, which can be preserved and shared as a life of a local community.

A different approach to studying mobile phone users was taken by Okabe (2004). He studied practices of Japanese camera phone users, which included personal archiving, intimate sharing, and peer-to-peer news sharing. Okabe (ibid) argues that capturing and sharing visual information cannot be understood without also understanding the social relationships and contexts within which those activities take place. Scifo (2004) provides similar views on this matter, arguing that taking photographs on camera phones and using MMS communication allows users (particularly youngsters) to identify themselves within social groups, and will intensify communication within that community.

The relevance of social relations to the uses of photographs was also identified by Van House

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