Chapter IV
User Experience of Camera Phones in Social Contexts

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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
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 et al. (2005). They discovered five distinct social
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