Chapter 1
Discursive Practices and Creation of Identity Using the Mobile Phone

Clare Lloyd
The University of Newcastle, Australia

Patricia Gillard
The University of Newcastle, Australia

ABSTRACT
This chapter investigates the use of mobile phones in Australia by 18 to 35 year olds in the Hunter region; more particularly how the social construction of mobile phone use is revealed in discourse and related to identity formation. Interviews, collected cultural artifacts and a Research Journal provided the primary material, and the method of Discourse Analysis was used to consider each source of information and to compare them. Choices of phone, wallpaper and ringtone are consciously used to express aspects of individual identity, adapting functions of the mobile phone and engaging with broader discourses such as fashion and sound. Many of these discursive practices with the mobile phone are adopted for pleasure as well as utility.

INTRODUCTION
The first mobile call was made in Australia over twenty years ago (AAP, 2007, para. 4). Now the majority of Australians own mobile phones and it is the most widely used personal communication technology in this country (ABS, 2007). This chapter describes some of the first results from research that proposed to focus on the cultural meanings and practices of mobile phone use in Australia. The research was interested in Communication as socially constructed and culturally produced in interaction. For this reason, study of mobile phone ‘use’ as measured or observed using predetermined concepts was not adequate to the ambitious task. Instead, Discourse Analysis was chosen as a guiding methodology in order to focus on ‘texts’ that revealed emerging patterns of meaning and use related to mobile phones. The age of participants, 18 to 35, and their location in eastern Australia delineated a specific group of young adults who were likely to be very sociable as well as creative in their patterns of mobile phone use. This chapter examines how the mobile phone is used as a tool for identity formation.
Discursive Practices and Creation of Identity Using the Mobile Phone

It explores how the mobile phone is linked to an individual’s identity, their sense of agency in the world and their sense of self. Examples illustrate the diverse ways that mobile phone functions are adapted and used to communicate ideas about who individuals are. Individuals communicate by creatively navigating the discourses emerging as mobile phones are used and negotiating the links with existing discourses. The choices individuals make vary considerably but, as this chapter will show; individual choices that may seem eccentric are explicable as identity practices within the discourse of mobile phone use.

PURPOSE AND METHODS

The purpose of the larger project this chapter draws from was to analyze emerging discourses of new communication practices using mobile phones. This would answer the question of how existing discourses were negotiated and new ones created as people 18 to 35 in Australia’s Hunter region used mobile phones. Knowledge of both intrapersonal and interpersonal uses was needed, to explore this purpose fully. The research design adopted three different methods to reveal the complexities of emerging discourses and afford multiple comparisons and opportunities for validation of evidence. The methods were used concurrently: the collection of cultural artifacts referencing mobile phones (advertisements, newspaper articles, radio broadcasts, Podcasts, official statistics, laws, online forums etc.), a Research Journal kept for two years and four months, and semi-structured interviews with 18 adults.

This chapter draws mainly on Discourse Analysis of the 18 interviews. Within the methodological writing about Discourse Analysis, interviews are not always classified as ‘good’ or ‘naturally occurring data but, rather, as researcher-instigated discourse’ (Philips & Hardy, 2002, p. 72). However interviews are considered a practical and valuable tool for Discourse Analysis if the study is about the individual (and their phone uses, in this case). This is because ‘the way in which individuals construct themselves in an interview with a researcher may be similar to how they construct themselves in other arenas of talk’ (Philips & Hardy, 2002, p. 72). In the interviews for this study there was a special interest in how discourses of the self and the mobile phone were related, and in physical and social actions using the mobile phone. Interviews were analyzed for this constructed talk as well as the description of social interaction. Interviews lasted from 78 to 108 minutes and were sound recorded using a digital mini-disk and then later transcribed. Participants were asked questions about their uses of the mobile phone, its features, their personalization of it and their communication with others. Participants were selected using convenience or purposive sampling to gain a diverse group of 18 to 35 year old people living in the Hunter Region (an area 2 hours drive north and north west of Sydney that includes coastal and regional, inland towns). As can be seen from the table below, a wide variety of people in the chosen age group were recruited, with a balance with regard to men (10) and women (8), a range of occupations including tertiary students, professionals, skilled workers, full time carers and those without work. Some had few resources; others were wealthy. One third were well educated for their age group.

SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANTS

Key terms, descriptions and social practices were observed and analyzed to identify emergent themes about mobile phone communication and to gauge their importance. Specifically, the data - the field notes, the documents collected and the interview transcripts - were schematically organized into themes that structured the complex, discursively constructed framework of mobile phone use. In executing the thematic analysis the researcher did not ‘have pre-defined categories to which certain