Chapter 13
Improving the User Experience of a Mobile Photo Gallery by Supporting Social Interaction

Elina Vartiainen
Nokia Research Center, Finland

ABSTRACT

Today, photo gallery applications on mobile devices tend to be stand-alone and offline. For people who want to share photos with others, many add-on tools have been developed to connect the gallery applications to Internet services to enable photo sharing. The author argues that photo-centric social interaction is best supported when the gallery application is fully integrated with an Internet service. In this case, no additional tools are needed and the user’s image content is fully synchronized with the service. To research the topic, Image Exchange, a service-integrated mobile gallery application with a corresponding Internet service, was designed and implemented. Moreover, a field study was conducted with 10 participants to compare Image Exchange with a state-of-the-art gallery application combined with an add-on photo sharing tool. Image Exchange was preferred by most participants and it was especially appreciated because of the user experience. Above all, the results show that social activity increased amongst the participants while using Image Exchange.

INTRODUCTION

People are starting to use their mobile devices as their primary cameras because the quality of mobile cameras is improving (Nokia, 2008). As most mobile devices are also capable of connecting to the Internet, they can be used to publish photos to photo sharing Internet services and also browse and comment the photos hosted by those services. However, photo sharing on mobile devices still tends to be a laborious task and on that account users might not be able to share their mobile photos at all.
Improving the User Experience of a Mobile Photo Gallery by Supporting Social Interaction

Nowadays, users are able to share their photos on their mobile devices by using applications that are essentially upload tools for certain Internet services (Facebook, 2010; Share Online, 2010; ShoZu, 2010). The upload tool applications are usually add-ons to existing gallery applications offering functionalities for separately uploading and downloading images and their data. However, the gallery application and the user’s photo collection are not fully integrated and synchronized with the service. Also, the upload tool applications require account creation and configuration of settings before they can be used. In the mobile context, users who might be on the move and have only a limited and possibly fragmented time to spend on a task is unable to use a mobile application that is hard and slow to use and configure. Furthermore, the upload tools might be developed by a different party than the developers of the gallery application or the corresponding Internet service. This might result in a mismatch between the available functions and features on the mobile gallery application and the Internet service. Thus, the upload tool applications cannot guarantee a deep integration of the gallery application and the service.

Mobile photo gallery applications continue to be stand-alone and offline, even though many mobile devices today are connected to the Internet with a flat-fee, always-on network connection. The gallery applications have not yet utilized the opportunity of integrating directly with a corresponding Internet service and having user’s images in sync with the service. If the gallery application was deeply integrated to the service, it would enable users to share images in real-time on the go in an easy and fun way. Users would not need to configure or separately synchronize their image collection when they want to communicate using images. Hence, we argue that as the overall user experience improves via the deep integration of a mobile gallery application and a corresponding Internet service, it also facilitates the social interaction among the users of the Internet service.

In this paper, we introduce Image Exchange, a mobile gallery application that aims at offering great user experience by being fully integrated to a corresponding Internet service. The application provides an easy and fun way for users to share and interact with photos in real-time. We tested Image Exchange in a field study of 1+1 weeks (a test period of 1 week for each application) by comparing it to a state-of-the-art mobile image gallery application combined with an Internet service upload tool. The goal was to investigate whether the social interaction is best encouraged when users are using a mobile service-integrated gallery application compared to state-of-the-art applications and tools existing on the market today.

RELATED RESEARCH

Mobile photo sharing has been an important topic in the research literature. Many photo applications have been developed around the topic of mobile photo management and sharing process, but we are not aware of any research on seamlessly integrating personal photo management and photo sharing between a mobile device and a corresponding Internet service and how that would affect the user experience and social interaction. Instead, the previous research on mobile photo applications can be divided into two groups: studies on the usage and management of personal photos and studies on sharing images.

The studies on personal photo collections have revealed many ways to help users to organize and locate their photos (Ames & Naaman, 2007; Bentley et. al., 2006; Frohlich et. al., 2002; Gurrin et. al., 2005; Jacucci et. al., 2006; Naaman et. al., 2004; Wilhelm et. al., 2004). However, the research has not focused on improving the photo back-up, which is an important part of the management process. Users would value a seamless process where all the steps in mobile photo management as designed to be as fluent and easy to use as possible (Ames et. al, 2010). Photo browsing (Harada