Conversations In, Through, and Around Media Objects

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Abstract

Instagram, Flickr, and Facebook have demonstrated the need for conversational annotations on social-media shared photographs. While we are able to easily study these online conversations on photo-based posts themselves (in), it is often hard to reify cross posted media (through). Beyond this, there is an invisible and under explored component in the oral conversations we have offline when we show photos to friends in person (around). To explore the socializing in, around, and through the photos, we collected screen video recordings of smartphone use with accompanying background microphone audio. We will present some early findings and considerations for the new role of mobile photography both online and offline. We highlight new implications for the current practice of mobile-phone photography through instantaneous online interactions, complemented with rich, in person discussions of captured images, and personal archiving for quick social play and talk with online and offline relationships.

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H.5.m [Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI)]: Miscellaneous.

Conversations and Annotations

Our digital technology has transformed photography practice. Research has documented innovative designs [4], changing user practices [3], and its own research method [1]. The photo and its practice is under constant change and new applications in the past decade, from Flickr to Snapchat, have changed photo sharing practices. But herein lies a problem. It is all too easy to ignore the value and impact of offline sharing in the wake of an abundance of data in a single ecosystem/application. Research has shown us that photograph physicality provides a "resource for individual identity construction. . . viscerally remind[ing] people of who they once were in a way" [5] especially in social, close relationships [2]. In other words, there's more to photo sharing than online comment threads, and much of this interaction still occurs offline.

To find both the online and offline interactions around photo use, we make use of a corpus of iPhone screen video recordings with accompanying ambient audio captured during the duration of application interaction sessions. Of the 15 participants from the United Kingdom, Sweden, and USA, six were female and nine male. Participants fell within an age range of 22 to 50 years old. The data was collected via a local recording application installed on participants iPhones, and a website that allowed participants to review and annotate their audio-visual recordings. The recording application ran in the background on the phone and captured the screen of the device, its location, the apps used during that session, and the surrounding background audio from the microphone for the time that the screen was lit. Participants could review and delete any of their recordings before the researchers received access. Interviews with all participants were conducted at end of each week either face to face or over Skype, to discuss interesting behavior or ambiguities captured in their video data, and extracts included in this report were all discussed in these interviews in order to gain a deeper understanding of the context and purpose of use. For this paper, we will focus on the Instagram and photo app clips, and we watched all of the clips individually and in groups. For each clip, we listed themes and particular critical incidents and in joint data analysis sessions we analyzed instance of photo interaction and photo use. In this paper, we overview some of the early findings of this work.

In-the-Media and Through-the-Media
Much research has been done looking at conversations and annotations in media objects; for this report, we focus on what was revealed in our study instead of a longer view of what is already known from the proceedings of ACM MM, ACM HT, ICWSM, and the like. One particular finding of interest was observing practices around media friendships and like-baiting.

One participant spent very little time looking at photos of particular tags on Instagram—on average she spent less than 2 seconds loading around 20 photos and liking them all. She would visit pages and pages of photos liking them all, showing little interest in the actual photos. In some cases, she pressed a button to like all of the photos on the screen before they even loaded (using a special application who's whole utility is to *like* Instagram images based on hashtags). As she did so she received notifications of likes on her own photographs, seemingly generated from this mass-liking behavior. As she liked the photos with a specific hashtag, #snapback, these users would be notified that their photograph had been liked. This seemed to prompt some of these users to then go and look at her photographs, and like some of those photographs back. In turn, she would then go and view those

users photographs and in turn also like some of their own photographs. We called this behavior *like-baiting*. The action is a probe to solicit responses to build social capital within an ecosystem, in this case Instagram.

Other participants exhibited a second behavior, where social gains were to be had from cross-posting Instagram to Facebook. Here, we saw less like baiting and the procedure was that of monitoring. One participant took and uploaded a photo to Instagram while choosing to cross-post it to Facebook. Immediately she switched to the Facebook app's notification screen and refreshed it manually (via pulling down) until a like appeared (which was often in under 30 seconds).

Around-the-Media
In several instances, we observed how a photo could be brought in to enhance an in-person conversation. In these instances, a conversation was already on going and the participants brought up the camera roll to find a particular picture that could visually convey something that would add to the conversation. Below, a participant tries to describe an unusual piece of furniture that her husband built on their back deck.

Figure 1: An unusual piece of furniture that her husband built on their back deck

Figure 2: A sequence of photographs tells a story of a summer trip, including berry hunting, and then making pancakes with the berries.

P: [goes into gallery] Where is it? And it's not in the picture.
O: Ok.
P: Here, I'll do it, ugh, y'all see how like [zooming into image] there's like this big piece right here. This is supposed to be the front of it [panning around] and he put this little box, he made like a little custom box to put wine in right there. And I was under the impression that you can like move it or like, no, it is like solidly stuck on there, like this awkward thing on there and there's like on the other side too.

O: *[laughing]*
P: And he's like, well, do you like it?

In this case, there is not much back and forth to the conversation, but the main participant was able to use the photo to illustrate a hard to describe object that is now on her patio to her friend. The photo here (Figure 1) illustrates parts of the story that would have been difficult to describe.

More complex cases involved in-situ storytelling typically from a series of related event with a narration given to the listener. In this example, translated from Swedish, a participant discusses a trip to Northern Sweden. Several photos were shown in succession that described the trip, picking various types of berries, and finally making pancakes with those berries, see Figure 2.

A: Yes, that is true. This is not a good photo. Ok. [Album view, selects single picture of self] This one is better.
B: [laughing]
A: My hair was very long. Oh my god.
B: Here! Picked blueberries.
A: What did you do with them?
B: I usually freeze them. Mostly. Is this ((Västa))
A: Yes.
B: And raspberries?
A: Oh, those I have never found.
B: There are really many of them. This is only 5 minutes from my parents house.
A: Yes, but. . . precise. . . but this here is harder to find. Oh, oh, what is that?[*]— This picture [opens picture of pancakes]
B: Pancakes

A: Yummy. Now I was thinking about, the other day I bought vanilla ice cream and I have berries home and Nutella. That's gonna be. . .

B: [laughing]

Figure 3: A screenshot that was recalled in person to show a family member to share a laugh together.

The photos are used to drive the story itself, with the participant talking about the content or answering questions about whatever photo happens to appear next in the stream. We present two cases of many offline photo-sharing conversations from bookmarking, to storytelling, to shared experiences from online (via screenshots, see Figure 3) that are recalled later when people meet in person to share a laugh.

Future Work

We have discussed how comments and conversations are distinguished in online photo-sharing across ecosystems online and offline and find, obviously, there are conversations on the posts themselves (in-the-media) but often people look for social engagement on another social-network like Facebook (through-the-media). Offline, there are many cases where photos were not only being taken for bookmarks (like remembering where you parked) but also for offline conversational prompts and storytelling (around-the-media) with one's close friends and family. We are currently finalizing the larger analysis of this work to draw implications for the design of photo taking and sharing applications in particular addressing in-person, on-device photographic practice and use.

Acknowledgments

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