

Supporting Community Awareness with Public Photo Displays

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ABSTRACT

We present the Wray Photo Display, a public photo sharing application supporting shared history and identity in a rural community. This system can help to improve awareness for those absent from key community events, or who have become temporarily or permanently separated from the geographic community.

1. INTRODUCTION

Studies into network technologies and communities [2] have shown great potential for supporting community life and sustaining ties. It is our belief that situated displays [1] also show potential in this regard by acting as public displays of community-related material, such as photos.

Our presentation will describe the Wray Photo Display [3], a simple photo sharing application designed as a technology probe to investigate how a community display is used, explore the deployment environment and generate ideas and feedback from residents. This system consists of a touch-screen display showing categorised thumbnails of photographs which can be touched to open up a larger view, add comments via an on-screen keyboard and read comments left by others. An associated website allows residents to upload their photos and create categories, in addition to browsing and commenting.

Since August 2006, the display has been deployed in Wray, a rural village in Lancashire with a population under 500, initially located in the village hall and later in the village's only post office and shop. It has been well embraced by the community, becoming a popular addition to village life, particularly in the second location, where it is frequently seen by shoppers.

2. PHOTO DISPLAYS AND INTERSPACES

Photos uploaded to the system by residents have largely been either historical photos, or photos of recent community events, such as the annual Scarecrow Festival. From our observations and from feedback received, we have found that both these types of photos tie in to the idea of interspaces.

For example, one user commented that he had missed that year's village fair but was able to see photos on the display, allowing a certain level of 'participation' in the event. We have also seen cases where people who have previously lived in the village or visited in the past have been directed to the display website and found images which remind them of their past, or have themselves

been able to contribute content. In these examples, the photo display has enabled interaction across both distance and time.

3. DISCUSSION POINTS

These uses of the display raise questions regarding boundaries and control. While it is certainly desirable for certain people outside the village community to access the photos—past residents in particular—how can these people be granted access without opening the system to the wider world? Although word of mouth provides a simple solution for those who still have ties to the community, what about those whose ties have been severed?

The public nature of the display also raises questions about how user generated content should be displayed, what efforts should be made to protect it, and how the content should be controlled and moderated. Issues have been raised surrounding images of children and legislation regarding such images, as well as concerns from residents about who can see their images. This was particularly strong in relation to the display website, rather than the public display. Our own concerns have often related to the type of content uploaded, the impact that inappropriate content might have on the adoption of the system, and the approaches we can take to avoid this.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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5. REFERENCES

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