

Mobile technologies

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We are indeed living in a very fast-paced world. Everything seems to be found on the World Wide Web, communication is instant, and there are countless of technologies developed that would make our lives easier. These technologies, or most of them, aimed to make the world connected, so that communication is possible beyond distance, space, location or time.

The history of communication would show us the developments and significance of communication in our everyday lives. The need for an efficient communication has led to the technologies that make communication faster. From messengers as a way to deliver the message in the old times to telegraphs and to telephones in the present time, communication has gone a long way. But the fact is that it didn't stop there. Today, we can communicate through the vast choices of technologies such as cellular phones, pagers and computers.

Further developments continue until today. These technologies have become mobile, meaning we can communicate with others, conduct business and be entertained on the go without being confined to one place, as is the case with desktops (Farooq & Carroll n. d.). Thus, we call them mobile technologies.

Many studies were conducted about different mobile technologies that can be offered to consumers. One thing those studies have in common is that they showed how important these technologies became, as shown by the demand for them. One significant aspect of mobile technologies is in the area of business. One does not really have to be in his office in front of the

computer when conducting business. Even when he eats lunch, he can tie a deal with just a few clicks on his phone or palmtop.

It is important to note that with the rise of these mobile technologies, certain things have changed. One example is how we conceptualize things, such as place, locality and physical presence. This paper will try to delve into the role and importance of these mobile technologies and how they affect our conceptualization of place, locality and physical presence.

Mobile Technologies on Place and Locality

Mobility is fundamentally associated with location (Farooq & Carroll n. d.). The question that arises in connection with this is, how does location bring possibilities for the mobile user? Farooq and Carroll mentioned that location-based or place-based awareness for the users can be augmented by the use of Global Positioning System (GPS). The use of GPS will surely bring research possibilities and richer user interaction.

According to the article “Locality in the Age of Virtual Transcendence,” the people’s experiences of place, locale in particular, are bound with the idea of distance. It adds that locale is a “human-centric concept” which exhibits a spatial relationship between presence - a mobile, for example - and a “perceivably stationary place.”

Moreover, since humans cannot be at more than one location at a given time, this becomes an existential constraint. Today, however, we all experience transition into the virtual extensions of the physical world.

Due to the technological advances, temporal and spatial distances have been overcome. In fact, two subjects can dwell in the same place in sound and image despite the physical distance. They can share a virtual space through avatars (Internet user's representation of her or him) and can access physical spaces through webcams and satellite broadcasts.

The article concluded that being at more than one location at the same time has risks. It says that man's need to conquer distance and break the boundaries of locality may mean the loss of the possibility for transcendence ("Locality" n. d.).

Meyrowitz (2004) agrees with this. He says that a person cannot occupy two places at the same time regardless of the sophistication the technologies offer. He adds that "the localness of experience is a constant."

The concept of locality persists in our everyday lives. Our basic needs must be "met locally." We are also grateful for the local convenience stores when we need something.

Meyrowitz (2004) mentions that although locality plays a role in the way we sense the world, those entities that we sense are not just local. Why? It's because media have extended our perceptual field. He furthered that with the rise of mobile and immobile technologies, the people near us have less influence as they use technologies to interact with others who are more distant but still are local and accessible.

Media have also influenced us in a way that we perceive our community as not just the community but one of the many communities where we could

live. Our locality, we realize, is not the center of the universe, nor our physical surroundings the foundation of our experiences (Meyrowitz 2004).

With the rise of mobile technologies, or those devices that we can carry around and still be connected to the world, we have conquered the concept of place. We can always communicate with our families or friends no matter where we are (as long as there is a signal).

This is probably one of the advantages of these mobile technologies. Unlike desktop computers, radios or bulky devices, handheld and portable ones such as cellular phones and laptops and iPods can be carried around and some can even do business while riding the train.

The new technologies have enable people to share information with others who are in different localities. Imagine that long ago, we couldn't have reached the people who are in far localities in the same way we now do. Mobile, and immobile, technologies have enabled us to have access on our families and friends no matter where we are or where they are.

In an article of O'Hara, Brown and Perry (2003), they believed that the concept of place in relation to mobility can afford various possibilities for “ongoing configuration of relationships with other people, and even for performing actions and for habitual action.”

However, the configuration of place means more than just location.

Technologies have important roles in making work possible for those mobile workers in different places, and devices such as mobile phone and networked laptop make these possible.

The authors also mentioned that mobile workers can transform any place, be it restaurants, cafes or bars, into places of work. These leisure spaces become invaded by the mobile technologies. In fact, a testimony to this is the ring of the mobile phone in any of these places (O'Hara, Brown & Perry 2003).

Ito (n. d.) mentioned that “ place and locality is a technology-enabled achievement.” This is probably because with technologies in our hands, place and locality is not a hindrance. We can communicate, do business, and be entertained in places that seemed impossible in the first place.

Perlman (2005) added that technologies have made the Internet to be anywhere. In fact, they can even bring the Internet into the streets. When we look around us, we see people holding phones where they can access the Internet, or typing in a laptop. Perlman also said that people used to just view webpage, but now they can also create them.

However, Farooq and Carroll (n. d.) countered by saying that users of mobile technologies have no access to peers or resources compared to desktop users. This is because mobile users are in a different contextual situation since everything within the environment has changed. The authors said that this usually leads to uncertainty, or heterogeneity. Moreover, mobile users of these technologies do not have much control over the configuration of their environment. Thus, they do not have much control on the way they manage work.

People began to subscribe to these mobile technologies for whatever they're worth. Today there are cellular phones that can help in tracking another
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person through location-awareness and presence. There are also phones that can receive information about that house you want to buy through a transmitter. Moreover, some phones today have built-in Global Positioning System (GPS) and outfitted with WiFi (Wireless Fidelity) technology. All of these are created to enhance communication or social networking or business (Smith & Grubb 2004).

Meyrowitz (2004) mentioned that through the electronic media (including the mobile technologies), people have become emotionally attached to certain places. Just think that long ago, when we are moving in another locality, we miss our old place along with its people and places and the experiences we have gathered there. But the media have helped us in a way that “ we can now transport most of our nexus interactions with us wherever we go” (6).

Smith and Grubb (2004) reported that consumers and businesses using location-aware computing will increase from 150, 000 to 42 million in just three years. This was brought about by the 1996 FCC mandate that requires mobile carriers to find any subscriber making an emergency call to within 50 to 100 meters.

They added that through location-awareness and presence, both of which enable a device to be geographically located, the way people use networked services will still change. Moreover, designers of such technologies are finding out ways that location-awareness, mobility and presence can further improve each service and application so that they can offer their users superior experience.

Mobile Technologies on Physical Presence

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Through mobile technologies, one doesn't really have to be with the person he communicates with just to talk with him or send him a message. This is one of the advantages offered by the mobile technologies. Today there are 3G (third generation) phones that enable someone to communicate with another while looking at that person on the phone. Several companies can also do a meeting while on different countries through a screen where they can see each other. It's almost face to face.

Farooq and Carroll (n. d.) believed that a sense of physical presence is associated with a common place wherein people meet and interact. But Harper, Goble and Pettitt (2004) argued that today, the virtual world tends to be more respected than the physical. They have mentioned that people are becoming too reliant on the 'net' because it is their gateway to other worlds or their way of communicating with remote people and a better form of self-expression. Moreover, the focus on the virtual distorts our perception in overestimating the importance of these technologies. As a result, the local environment becomes ignored when it comes to information giving.

Harper, Goble and Pettitt (2004) added that the virtual and the physical must be connected because the latter is important to realize the full potential and importance of the virtual world. They also suggested that the 'net' and the mobile technologies must relate to the users' physical location and real-world artifacts to be able to arrive at choices and decisions about what information will be useful or required.

Smith and Grubb (2004) said that the introduction of the aspect of presence will bring changes in the way we use person-to-person communication media

and will influence network service. For instance, when we know the location of a family member in advance, it eliminates the need to send a voice call when the reason for calling is to find out that information.

Moreover, if we know the mood and activity of that person, we can determine the method of communication that is appropriate. Another example is that, if we want to call a friend just for a friendly chat, it would be better to know first if he is not busy or in a bad mood. In the same way, if I need to contact an associate about an urgent business decision, I would like for him to know this urgency so that he can let me know what he thinks.

Farooq and Carroll (n. d.) commented that handheld devices are now engrained in our everyday lives. But that would mean we should consider the existing application and how the standard will change with the emerging mobile technologies. They added that handheld technologies, which are also mobile in a sense, can create even better interactions and consequences for different users, whether they are in their homes or outside. This just shows that the addition of mobility to the various technological devices will supply more channels of communication that are beyond the exchange of information.

Rheingold (2005), along with some friends, has interviewed several mobile technologies users, preferably those who use telephones. Their survey showed that the people of Shibuya, particularly the teenagers, were very much into sending text messages and ring tones and logos. In fact, they are called “ the thumb tribe” (Rheingold 2005).

The article also showed that the advent of mobile phones in Japan has freed youth in one way or another. It was mentioned that they are no longer constrained by the landline shared by inquisitive family members. Mobile phones have offered youth privacy, something the landline cannot give them. This is just one of the reasons why the mobile phones started an intergenerational power shift in the country (Rheingold 2005).

More and more developments will arise that would further affect how we conceptualize place, locality and physical presence. One thing is for sure: these technological developments are there to help us in making our lives easier and giving us richer experiences. However, as these technological advancements cannot be avoided and must be embraced to realize their full potential, users must bear in mind that they must still appreciate and give importance to the things that would somehow affect them. It is still better to go visit and see our friends and families no matter how far they are and despite that mobile phone in our pockets. And it is still better to treasure the places and the locality that have been a part of our lives.

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