



Investigating the Sharing Practices of Family & Friends to Inform Communication Technology Innovations

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Study Design:

Introduction to the Study

- **Purpose**

To understand patterns of sharing for social network maintenance, in order to develop communications applications for the U.S. market.

- **Research Questions**

- When people in an already established social group socialize, what kinds of information and content do they share?
- Why?
- What are the processes of sharing?
- How do different contexts affect sharing?

Study Design: Methods

- **Ethnographic-Style Inquiry**

- 5 social groups with 4 people in each (20 participants)
- Geographic, age, and some ethnic diversity
- 2-3 weeks of data collection with each group
 - Observation
 - Photo diaries
 - Video diaries
 - Recorded cell phone calls
 - In-depth semi-structured interviews

- **Analysis**

- Grounded theory affinity



Fieldwork:

Social Networks in IA and GA

- **Iowa**

- 3 participants in IA, one in MI
- 1 environmental education specialist, 1 farmer, 1 forest ranger, 1 Ph.D. student
- Limited connectivity, main reliance on mail, phone and meeting up
- Focus on local family, distant friends from college



- **Georgia**

- 3 participants in GA, one in SC
- 3 retired professionals, 1 young professional
- Regular use of texting, e-mail; emphasis on large-scale social events with various common interest groups
- Focus on family and friends in Philippines and U.S., Barkada group in local area, senior center, church



Fieldwork:

Social Networks in MI and NJ

- **Michigan**

- 4 participants in MI
- 2 information technology specialists, 1 program manager, 1 stay-at-home mom
- Regular use of e-mail and Instant Messaging (IM); calendar of annual/seasonal events
- Focus on local family and friends, neighbors, common interest groups



- **New Jersey**

- 4 participants in NJ
- 1 toy maker, 1 production specialist, 1 executive assistant, 1 manager
- Regular use of websites and e-mail by all; some use of social networking sites and texting; party with friends
- Focus on local friends, distant family



Fieldwork:

Social Network in CA

- **California**

- 4 participants in CA
- 2 stay-at-home moms, 1 retired professional, 1 local government employee
- Frequent use of phone and e-mail by all; gatherings revolve mostly around children and childhood friends
- Focus on local family and friends, neighbors, common interest groups



Step Back

A Different Lens

A New Focus

Communications Applications Today

What we want to do: Help people maintain and enhance social bonds through sharing experiences, information and content

Where communication companies often focus:

- On the initiator of communication tasks
- On the mechanics of communications
- On sending facts
- On conversation and consumption

What We Found in the Field

What our participants want to do: Maintain and enhance connections with others

Where our participants focused:

- On the receiver of communications (the other)
- On the message being sent
- On telling a story
- On “doing” a shared experience (together)

Back to the Fieldwork

Findings

Where the New Focus Comes From

Fieldwork Observations:

Focusing on the Receiver

- **“It’s really more about you than it is about me”**
- **When building relationships, our participants:**
 - Care enough to use the communication mode that is best for their communication partner, even when it isn’t easy
 - Maintain communications even when it is hard or not reciprocated
 - “If you want to stay connected I think that you have to make an effort. You cannot always depend on other people.” (GA1)
 - Spend time and energy putting together personalized communications



Special bread from Grandma H. for IA1:

“...she drives to get the ingredients, and she’s 87 years old...”

Fieldwork Observations:

Focusing on the Receiver

- **The goal: to make the other person feel good**

“People, when they love you, there is a reason. Because you give so much that they love you. You have to earn your thing.” (GA3)



- **Self-professed poor communicators worry about the time and energy they spend on communications**

“He e-mails to my hotmail account but I don’t have the time to go look at them.” (IA3)

“I’m kind of bad, anyone I haven’t seen in a while, they contact me...right now I’m really busy...” (NJ1)

Design Opportunity:

What we do now: Design for the sender

**Delight the Receiver,
not just the Sender**



Fieldwork Observations: Focusing on the Message

- **Signaling “I know you”**
 - Using knowledge of other people to share things that will make the others happy

From our shared history

From things you have told me

“I remember in high school, she [CA3] wrote a song...I played a tape of it for her recently...” (CA1)



“She took the logos from Iowa State and made this for him. He graduated from Iowa State.” (IA3)

Fieldwork Observations:

Focusing on the Message

- **Signaling “I care about you”**

- Using lightweight communications



“He taped a bunch of messages for me so I can listen to them whenever I want.” (NJ1)

- Asking about things that are important to the other person

People the other person cares about

“It’s almost like we’re OK with just a couple times a year, but still like really going back to how’s your family, how’s your sister, how’s your mom...” (CA1)

Activities/events that are important to the other person

“He always asks about how things are going on the farm...” (IA3)

Design Opportunity:

What we do now: Design for the mechanics

**Design to Enhance the Message,
not simply the Mechanics**



Fieldwork Observations:

Focusing on Telling Stories

- “In order to express myself the way I want you to see me, I need to contextualize the facts”

- **Our participants:**

- Present the facts but explain them

“I go to K’s school early and I sit outside and I spy on him...” (CA4) who goes on to explain she’s not really “spying” but learning how he plays with other children.



- Use particular facts to go along with the desired story

“I didn’t even know it was from him, it was really loud music...I just erased it...a few days later he e-mailed me ‘Greetings from Lollapalooza...’ and described the band and being in Chicago for the festival. (IA2)

“I’m still driving...I’m starving and I need a margarita.” (NJ1 – phone call)

Fieldwork Observations:

Focusing on Telling Stories

- **Crafting a Story**
- **When a Story has “Staying Power,” our participants:**
 - Spend time getting “the facts” right



“These are important because for holiday letters I go back through them and look for what was important over the past year. That all gets into the letters ... I’m our collective memory”. (IA1)

- Spend time arranging “the facts” and the explanations in order to tell a precise story

CA1 is an avid scrap-booker. Here, she has organized her junior year study abroad trip to Spain in preparation for a reunion with four other women who were in Spain with her.



Design Opportunity:

What we do now: Send facts

**Design to Share the Story,
not Just the Facts**



Fieldwork Observations:

Focusing on Doing Things Together

- “Doing things together and developing a history of shared experiences is extremely important”
- Our participants:
 - Socialize around an activity such as cards, dinner, or TV
 - Get together to foster fellowship in communities of like minds, to experience something new, to learn things together, and to create things together



Fieldwork Observations:

Focusing on Doing Things Together

- **There is so much emphasis on doing things together that our participants try to recreate being together, even when they are not**
- **Our participants:**
 - Provide such detailed descriptions of their current activities that the other person feels like they are there

“...did some yard work and now my hands hurt. And I either have a bug bite or a pimple inside my ear...” (CA4 – phone call)

- Provide enough context for past activities that the other person does not feel like they missed anything

CA3’s sister’s dog “caught a rat...so I sent that [photo] to them...”



- Communicate often enough so that they feel like they are not really apart

Design Opportunity:

What we do now: Concentrate on conversation

**Design for Doing Experiences,
not just Talking about Experiences**



But Wait...

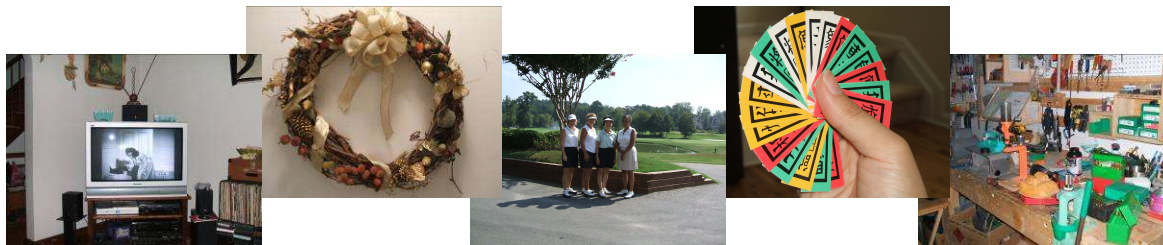
So You Say:
Design With a New Focus in Mind

How?

Replicate The Structure of Social Activities

- **We find natural attention shifts from the activity to the conversation partner**

Playing cards, tasting wine, watching TV, playing golf, creating wreathes, watching softball, decorating for the holiday, eating dinner...



GA3 on mahjong: “It’s a very good social game, I think because you talk...”

- **So:**
 - Insert (or take advantage of) “natural breaks” in application interaction for promotion of conversation
 - Lessen need for concentration on device during the breaks

We have the opportunity to shift our thinking:

From:

- Focus on the sender
- Support the task mechanics
- Send more/all of the facts
- Conversation and consumption

To:

- Recognize the receiver
- Support the intent of the message
- Provide the capability for storytelling
- Design for creating shared activities/experiences

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