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Mobile Media

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A Social Interaction Frozen in Time

When new media technology enters society, it does not just stay stagnant. There is a domino effect that follows the ways humans receive this technology and conjure up ways to proceed with it. Humans advance with new tools and additionally, learn to cope with them. This process repeats itself over and over and has been doing so since the invention of tools. Postcards used to be the greatest solution to a need we hardly feel we have anymore. Now, mobile text and image's next goal is to deepen the social interaction between the media and consumers. The new frontier for mobile text and image is augmented reality (AR). My final project demonstrates AR's potential for casual, social use in a way that combines nostalgic media technology with modern methods.

The first thing that comes to mind about postcards is that they are a way to commemorate memories of your travels and share them with others. Before widespread mobile personal cameras and instant messaging, this was a way you could send a picture of the place you're visiting while still traveling. You would buy the postcard, write your note, fetch the sending address from your physical address book, and mail it through a mailbox or post office. Of course, this was at a time when personal, mobile cameras were not nearly as widespread. Now, people would rather take a photo

themselves with their personal mobile media devices. Further, we would simply send the photo instantly using the Internet or text rather than waiting for the mail. However, this does not need to be a negative thing. With every technological advancement comes the opportunity for further advancement. New ideas spark newer ideas, eventually leaving the old ones behind. The social epistemology surrounding technology moves on with it. Social epistemology, described by Deibert as,

“...The web-of-beliefs into which a people are acculturated and through which they perceive the world around them. It encompasses all of the socially constructed ideas, symbolic forms, and cognitive biases that frame meaning and behavior for a population in a particular historical context.” (Deibert, pg. 94, 1997).

Social epistemology can be used to describe the way humans respond to new media technologies. A person sending a postcard in the 1960s may wonder to themselves, “*What if one day, a postcard is something more, like a hologram?*” There have been images of a future with technology and organic life enmeshed in harmony for decades now, with origins in the Space Age era and industrial revolution. Every new technology paves the way for newer discoveries, and there is no sign of slowing down. There is only adapting.

There are initial understandings of media forms that evolve and expand with time and tech advancements. What does receiving a traditional postcard say about your relationship with the sender? What does a traditional postcard aim to convey and what does it lack? When introducing augmented reality (AR) to mobile text, it seems to answer a vision of the future once dreamed of. Modern minds may take it for granted,

but an AR postcard and a hologram are rather close. AR combines computer-generated content with the real world. This constitutes greater interaction between the user and the media, inducing greater intimacy and personal connection to the content being delivered.

“...The subjective experience of AR reveals a cognitive and conscious shift from authenticity to validation in what is seen and known, whereby new meanings are formed through the establishment of a dialectic between seeing and knowing. Subsequently, an intimacy is created by this dialectic, as the viewer is provided with the opportunity to interpret the image through his or her values and experiences.” (Jackson, pg. 166-167, 2017).

Because AR makes a direct connection between your real-life surroundings/experiences and digital augmented content, the users' real-life experience is inseparably impacted by the content. This differs from being a third-party observer of media. The AR postcard appears in your home, rather than being confined to a 2-dimensional phone screen. There is a reciprocity between the augmented reality and the recipient's reality that blends the lines between “real” and “fake.”

My first reaction to the AR postcard was that it was cool but a bit much, as people can just send texts and images through a messenger platform. This reaction came from a discomfort with the different levels of intimacy the AR postcard produced. This begs us to investigate how social interaction and intimacy are defined by the confines of mobile media. Why *can't* the potential for deeper social interaction be investigated using new mobile media? The cultural construction of communication has been adjusted many times over and there is no sign of it stopping.

Just as AR postcards can feel uncomfortable, invasive, or just generally too much of a change; postcards were received that way, as well.

“...The shock of postcards, the reason why they represent a new age of discourse, is that suddenly we have a communications system in which intimacy becomes public, the product of now openly displayed technologies, practices, and protocols. The postcard, therefore, reveals that intimacy is a culturally constructed system of signification rather than an empirically verifiable, naturally occurring state.” (Milne, pg. 133, 2010).

To Milne’s point, our ideas about what is or is not intimate are highly subjective. The social epistemology of different media technologies seems to be fluid yet impactful enough to influence people’s use of them. If the same person sending a postcard in the 1960s saw how much information average people share publicly on social media today, they would likely be shocked and confused. There is bound to be a learning curve, but eventually, society embraces change in its own ways.

Project Goals & Revisions

I decided to use the Mobile Text Project as a way to commemorate some memories I made recently in life. It seemed a great opportunity to combine pictures and videos I had tucked away into one. Putting together different moments from the same trip or season of my life helped me give a better-rounded image of my experiences. The majority of my content came from my phone’s camera and the mobile app Snapchat, which became a prime example and inspiration for the conceptual foundation of the project of social epistemology, social interaction, and mobile media.

Snapchat became prevalent when I was beginning middle school and the majority of my peers and I have kept Snapchat in some capacity ever since then. Its common uses and connotations have fluctuated over time. Snapchat has been perceived as a way to be secretive, due to the fact that it automatically deletes your message histories within 24 hours (unless otherwise specified), and the pictures or videos you send have timers. It is designed to be interacted with quickly and briefly, even going so far as to notify you if anybody screenshots content you sent. The secretive aspect of the app certainly contributed to its popularity among youths, who present a great demand for privacy, particularly in the digital age. Among Gen Z, Snapchat is perceived as a more *intimate* or *personal* social media app, likely due to its private nature. Our usage of Snapchat evolved into being used to share photos and videos with our inner circles, using private stories, and using Snapchat's "Memories" feature to store private content in the app itself rather than directly on our phone's photo libraries (which could be more easily accessed/accidentally viewed by outside parties). As such, many of us capture candid everyday moments using Snapchat because it's so personal and casual, compared to other apps which have more public and intimidating expectations for content production. Usually, our Snapchat Memories are kept tucked away, only to be shared privately. They feel too informal to be used in projects. Through the process of making digital AR postcards for two trips I took this year, I realized all the natural, spontaneous memories I had documented were to be found in my Snapchat Memories, taken to show my close friends at the moment. Additionally, the class discussions of intimacy and social interaction with mobile text, mobile video, and AR, these Memories seemed most fitting to include in my final project. The social

epistemology of Snapchat is what ultimately led me to capture these moments, which I otherwise would not have, as they might've been deemed uninteresting or random.

Snapchat embraces moments like that for Gen Z and I feel it serves as our vehicle for “home video” content. Home videos conjure similar nostalgia as postcards, which create a palpable juxtaposition between the digital AR aspects of my project.

Originally, I created my project using only Artivive for the AR content and Adobe Express for the visual design. Once expanded upon, I improved the video aspect of the AR content, so I used Adobe Premiere to edit together Snapchat Memories clips from the trip instead of just one video clip playing. I also went on another trip between the Mobile Text Project assignment and the Final Project, so I had more content to create a new secondary postcard that was better suited for the project. I also worked more on the aesthetic quality of the original Wildwood postcard, by adding more content and being more creative about my incorporation of content. For example, instead of just placing a photo of hermit crab shells on the postcard, I used Photoshop to cut out the shells from the photo and add it to the card as accents. I wanted my postcards to feel like you were opening up a storybook of my memories from this summer. I layered the distressed paper images provided by Adobe Express to evoke the texture of turning pages. I attempted the Artivite 3D text feature again for my New Orleans postcard. I wanted my personal messages to stay private from the recipient to keep with the theme of intimacy.

My project shows how AR can give greater dynamics to your experience of using mobile text, images, and video to share intimate social interactions with others. Creating the postcards make my emotions about the experiences clear and communicable to

others. They added context to my content. The AR format challenges the recipient to interact with the content more than if I were to simply send them the pictures.

References

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