The Role of SNS for Interest Deepening in Amateur Photography in the Digital Era

Kohei Sugiyama
University of Tokyo
ksugiyama@g.ecc.u-tokyo.ac.jp

Reina Mori
Teikyo University
harinezumi@citrus.ocn.ne.jp

Yuhei Yamauchi
University of Tokyo
yamauchi@iii.u-tokyo.ac.jp

Abstract: Interest and social relationships within hobbies have become an important aspect of out-of-school learning research. The aim of this study is to investigate how social networking sites as networks of practice mediate the deepening of hobbyists' interest. We are conducting interview research with amateur photographers in the digital era who use social networking sites such as Flickr, Instagram, or Facebook, and eight photographers have been interviewed so far. The current progress of the research shows that social networking sites can mediate a deepening of interest through "the delivery of feedback from uncertain audiences" and by "the observing significant photos to identify a goal."

Keywords: hobby, photography, interest deepening, SNS

INTRODUCTION

Hobbies are interest-driven activities (Azevedo, 2017). Youths and adults can pursue their own passions as hobbies outside school and the workplace, and they learn relevant knowledge and skills through this serious play. In other words, hobbyists are self-directed learners, and this learning needs to be fostered in the twenty-first century (Collins, 2006).

Interest and social relationships in hobbies

Over the past decade, researchers have adopted an ecological perspective on out-of-school learning (Barron, 2006), and have begun to explore ecosystems around hobbyists that support and mediate the way their interest deepens in a specific domain of a hobby.

Social relationships within ecosystems generally have an influence on a person's interests (Bergin, 2016). In the context of hobbies, researchers have found that hobby clubs and organizations work as a catalyst for the deepening of interest (Corin et al., 2017). These clubs and organizations are "communities of practice" (Wenger, 1998), which are characterized as encouraging stable, enduring, dense social relationships (Willson, 2010).

SNS as an emerging "network of practice"

In addition to communities of practice, "networks of practice" (Brown & Duguid, 2001) have been emerging. Networks of practice are characterized as fluid, ephemeral, dispersed, social relationships (Willson, 2010). Modern hobbyists use social network sites (SNS) to share their work and interact with each other by chance (Ellison & boyd, 2013). In this way, they form networks of practice. We can hypothesize that SNS play some kind of role in deepening interest, but the detail needs to be explored further.

In this study, we have interviewed amateur photographers to investigate how SNS as networks of practice mediate the deepening hobbyists' interests. The following section presents the progress.

METHODS

Context and participants

We selected amateur photography as a case study of a hobby because of its individualization in the digital era (Hand, 2012). Amateur photographers today use SNS such as Flickr, Instagram, or Facebook to publish their photos and form fluid relationships without the necessity of belonging to camera clubs. This is an appropriate situation for investigating a network of practice.

Amateur photographers in the digital era are operationally defined as individuals who share their photos in SNS taken by single-lens reflex digital cameras or film cameras. This definition distinguishes amateur photographers from smartphone snapshooters. We used a snowball sampling method to access the photographers for this study.

Data collection and analyses

We have been interviewing amateur photographers about their experiences of their interest deepening and intermediates that have derived from it. The transcript has been coded to determine what roles SNS played as networks of practice in deepening interest. The analytical procedure is based on grounded theory methodology.

RESULTS

We have interviewed eight amateur photographers beginning from June 2018. Five of the photographers experienced a deepening of interest. SNS mediated the deepening interest of four photographers (table 1). We have identified two specific roles that SNS played.

Table 1. Participants

ID	Duration (year)	Intermediary of interest deepening	
		Community	Network
1	8	Yes	Yes (delivery)
2	5	N/A	N/A
3	6	Yes	No
4	5	N/A	N/A
5	4	No	Yes (delivery, observing)
6	6	N/A	N/A
7	6	Yes	Yes (delivery)
8	9	No	Yes (observing)

Delivery of feedback from uncertain audiences

On SNS, photos that have been uploaded by amateur photographers can be seen by followers and users who search for hashtags. These uncertain audiences including international audiences, send "likes" or comment on the photos. For participants 5 and 6, the feedback brought a sense of accomplishment, and acquiring feedback became an object of their deepening interest. On the other hand, participant 1 received feedback from her friends which conveyed empathy with her impressions on the subjects expressed in the photos. The quality of feedback seems to be different for participants 5 and 6 and participant 1.

Observing significant photos to indentify a goal

On SNS, amateur photographers can see many photos taken by strangers and acquaintances in their news feed (Facebook) or groups (Flickr). Some of these photos inspire the amateurs to set a goal without having direct interaction with the creators of the goal. For example, participant 5, who had not focused on a theme of expression, found an inspiring photo of night views produced by high-dynamic-range imaging in a Flickr group. He hoped to take such a photo and learned editing skills through books, i.e., he deepened his interest.

In comparison to apprenticeships in a community of practice, SNS as networks of practice do not provide the necessary scaffolding to reach a goal. Both participants 5 and 8, who found goals on SNS, needed to learn knowledge and skills by themselves through books. Conversely, SNS can provide opportunities for people to encounter novelty beyond their close social relationships.

DISCUSSION

Although all photographers in this study have uploaded their photos on SNS accounts, why did some photographers deepen their interest through "the delivery of feedback from uncertain audiences", but not others? (Question 1). Similarly, why did "observing significant photos to identify a goal" mediate the deepening of interest for some, but not others? (Question 2). These questions need to be examined in the continuing investigation.

A working hypothesis for these questions is that belonging to a community of practice affects the role of the network of practice. Participant 3 said that he did not need feedback from strangers and his interest focused on appreciation by members of his community.

As for Question 2, participants 1, 3, and 7 use SNS, but they did not use them to identify goals. Rather, they belong (belonged) to communities of practice and observed "masters" in communities who taught them how to photograph and find goals themselves. They were able to identify goals in communities, so observing significant photos within wider networks of practice did not play a significant role for them.

REFERENCES

Azevedo, F. S. (2017). Hobbies. In K. A. Peppler (Ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Out-of-School Learning* (pp. 345-348). Los Angeles: SAGE Publishing.

Barron, B. (2006). Interest and self-sustained learning as catalysis of development: A learning ecology perspective. *Human Development, 49,* 193-224.

Bergin, D. A. (2016). Social influences on interest. *Educational Psychologist, 51*(1), 7-22.

Brown, J. S., & Duguid, P. (2001). Knowledge and organization: A social-practice perspective. *Organization Science*, *12*(2), 198-213.

Collins, A. (2006). How society can foster self-directed learning. *Human Development, 49*, 225-228

Corin, E. N., Jones, M. G., Andre, T., Childers, G. M., & Stevens, V. (2017). Science hobbyists: Active users of the science-learning ecosystem. *International Journal of Science Education, Part B, 7*(2), 161-180.

Ellison, N. B., & boyd, d. (2013). Sociality through social network sites. In W. H. Dutton (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Internet Studies* (pp. 151-172). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hand, M. (2012). *Ubiquitous Photography.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Willson, M. (2010). Technology, networks and communities: An exploration of network and community theory and technosocial forms. *Information, Communication, & Society, 13*(5), 747-765