Using Mobile Phone Video Function as Expression Tool

Design of Keitai Trail! Workshop

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Abstract. In this paper, we introduce a design and a support system of a workshop for collecting and connecting people's expressions using mobile phones. In our proposed workshop, facilitators shoot and collect videos from participants. Applying a talking format, each video has connections to other videos. Our system shows these connections on a large screen. Participants can see a whole network of stories and add their own ones on it.

1 Introduction

Mobile phones are now quite common devices for us. Usually we use them only for one-to-one communication and one-way information transfer. Basically they are tools for talking, and are also used as information accessing tools with e-mail function and Web browsing function.

Recently, especially in Japan, mobile phones are usually equipped with cameras. People can take photos and videos and can send them to their friends with their mobile phones. Moreover, some people upload their photos to their blogs or photo sharing sites from their phones. Now, with our mobile phones, we can exchange our experience everywhere in real time — ideally. Actually some people do. There are still, however, people who feel difficulty to express their stories. They don't know how to and what to express. Of course there are no rules or no standard ways to express. But they need a switch which turns their minds to "expressing modes."

Storytelling or narrative approaches are getting widely accepted in several fields such as psychology, folklore, education, and therapeutics. It is said that people articulate their temporal experience by telling stories[1]. Storytelling helps people to understand and manage their experiences. Recently, activities called *digital storytelling*[2] arose from grassroots movements in the US and the UK. Digital stories are typically produced in workshop style. In a workshop, participants combine their narrated words and photos to short films. To enhance

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ordinary people to tell their stories, the workshop style — specially managed place for practice where people gather and act collaboratively — is a key. Bruner asserted that a story is a product from a joint act of a storyteller and hearers[3]. In a digital storytelling workshop, there are hearers (facilitators and other participants), a standard format of expression (a short film), and tools to realize it (PCs).

Despite foregoing advantages, there are several shortages on expandability. First, some sort of resolution is required for participation. We want people to join and express more casually. Second, produced films are separately concluded. As we mentioned above, stories are made in joint acts of storytellers and hearers; a story continuously changes according to a situation where people hear (see) it. But a single film cannot be changed. Connecting expressions is one solution for this problem. Showing connections among stories helps to understand their relation and to understand stories themselves. Connecting a new story to an existing network of stories can change a relation among them. A set of connected stories can be regarded as a larger story.

Our purpose on this research is to make expressing activities casual and to present a way to connect expressions each other. We designed a workshop and developed a support system for it. We show the design of our workshop in section 2 and the system in section 3. After describing our practice in section 4, we conclude the paper.

2 Design of Workshop

We designed a workshop program called "*Keitai Trail!*". A word *Keitai* is a mobile phone in Japanese. In this research, we employ a mobile phone as a clue for people's expressions.

Our workshop is designed to be held not only at a single place but also outside space around a main venue. A main venue is a kind of base where facilitators present a progress and participants' expressions of a workshop. Facilitators go outside and ask people there to join a workshop. If one accepts, facilitators shoot a video of her/his talking with a mobile phone.

Why a mobile phone? — The reasons are as follows. First, by using a common device in an unusual way, we aimed to turn participants to unusual expressing mode. Figure 1 shows a tripod equipped mobile phone, which we used in a practice of our workshop. A tripod changes a mobile phone to something different. A mobile phone originally has a video function, but we expect that a tripod makes people to focus on this function. Second, with a usual video camera, a participant will take a more formal way of expression. Even if with a tripod, a mobile phone is still a mobile phone. It is more casual than a video camera is.

Participants' talks are based on a "talking format." A format requests talks to be connected by a simple rule. A format consists of four parts: (1) An answer to a question from a former participant, (2) a short free talk, (3) a connecting phrase to the next part, and (4) a question to a next participant. The question in the fourth part will be answered in a next video's first part. This is like a

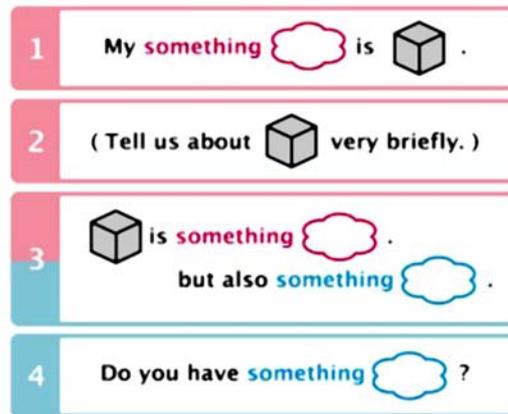**Fig. 1.** Tripod equipped mobile phone

Fig. 2. Talking format we used in our practice

question and answer game. A question from a former participant is a cue to a free talk. Figure 2 shows an example of a format. This is the format we used in our practice we describe later. A story is connected to other stories. Connected stories make a large story. This format derives people's stories and connects them.

In a main venue, connected videos are shown on a large screen by an installed support system which we describe in the following section.

3   System

Figure 3 illustrates a usage scenario of the installed system which consists of two phases.
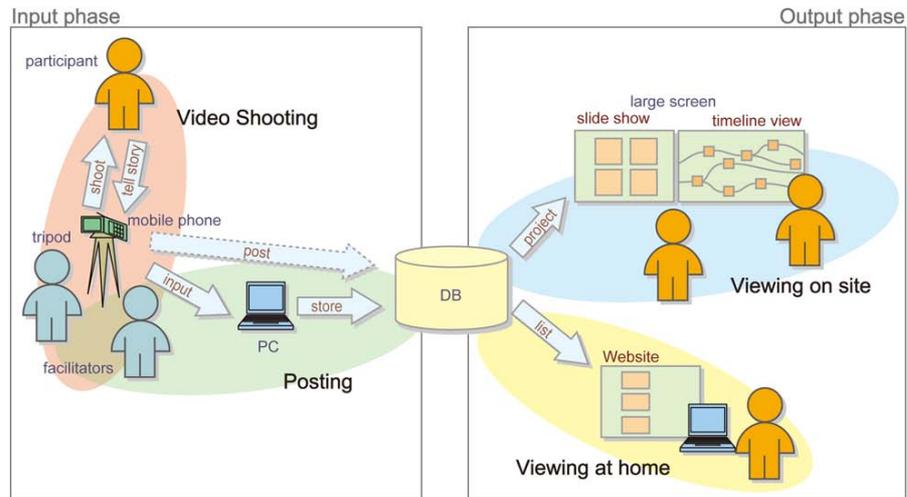
Fig. 3. Usage scenario and architecture of the system

In input phase, facilitators shoot a video of a participant telling story with a tripod equipped mobile phone. Facilitators store video files to a database. It is theoretically possible to post videos directly from mobile phones. But in this case, we needed to develop an input interface for PCs due to temporal technological limitations such as maximum size of uploading files and covered service in roaming are of mobile phones we used.

In output phase, we prepared two ways of viewing. At a main venue, two types of interfaces are projected on large screens. Slide show view plays recently posted two and randomly selected two videos at a same time. Timeline view is designed to show whole connections of videos (Figure 4). In the view, nodes represent videos and arcs represent connections. The x-axis direction stands for time and the view can be scrolled in this direction. A participant can trace whole stories and can add her story. Participants who joined outside the venue have two options to their own videos. They can visit the venue of course. In addition, we provide a Website which lists videos. They can browse stories at home.

4 Practice

We held the proposed workshop in conjunction with Ars Electronica festival[1] during 4th to 9th September 2008 in Linz, Austria.

In this practice, we set the theme as "mobile items." Facilitators asked for telling stories about mobile items — things they had with. Asking questions from former participants as triggers, facilitators collected stories. Our aim here

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[1] Ars Electronica festival is one of the most popular media art festival held in Linz annually. See http://www.aec.at/.
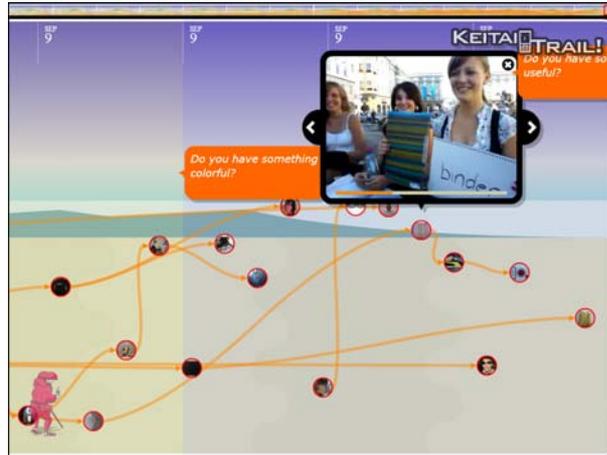
Fig. 4. Screenshot of timeline view

Fig. 5. Shooting a video outside the venue

was to let people know that they can express everything they experienced by letting them focus on mobile, i.e., common and usual things. This is also one of the reasons why we used mobile phones.

To emphasize the theme, we coordinated the workshop with a motif of traditional Japanese travelers. When we travel, we bring a lot of things with us. In a past age like Edo era, traveling was much larger event for people. Ordinary travelers needed to bring everything without any conveyances on their journeys, so their items had to be light and compact. We regarded traditional Japanese travelers as mobile specialists. Facilitators wore costumes of travelers (Figure 5). With the costumes we aimed to attract people to our workshop. We decorated the venue like a traditional teahouse; we served tea to participants so that they could visit and join freely and casually. Figure 6 shows the venue. The systems were projected on screens on the walls.

Fig. 6. Scene from the workshop venue

The workshop was a participatory activity in the festival. Visitors could come in to and go out from the venue freely. We presented and explained our practice their and asked visitors to join. We also collected stories from ordinary people outside the venue; they were not included in the festival. Our practice was also a trial to connect citizens and the festival.

In these this workshop, we collected 218 videos. We are now analyzing the activities, the contents and the stories in the workshop and examining the efficiency of it. We will be able to describe thorough analysis in the next paper.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, we described the design of our proposed workshop for collecting and connecting people's expressions. In the workshop, we collected stories with mobile phones and connected them based on the talking format. We also introduced the support system for the workshop. Our future work includes thorough analysis of the workshop.

Acknowledgements

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