

From Third to Surveilled Place: The Mobile in Irish Pubs

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ABSTRACT

A home away from home, the pub is synonymous with good conversation. Yet, the art of conversation in pubs is changing with the ubiquity of mobile phones. We present a qualitative study spanning over three years describing experiences and rhetoric surrounding the relationship that mobiles have and should have with our conversation in the pub. We found that mobile phones are able to enhance conversation but can also cause a disruption to the informal and adhoc nature of pubs. The use of Facebook on mobile phones has also changed pubs from what Oldenburg terms a third space to a space that is potentially being surveilled. We suggest future designs should not necessarily discourage or encourage mobile use in pubs, but rather provoke us into reflecting on how intertwined modern conversation is with mobile technology in the context of the pub space.

Author Keywords

Mobile phone; cell phone; pub; bar; third place; conversation

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.m. Information Interfaces and Presentation (e.g. HCI): Miscellaneous

INTRODUCTION

Oldenburg, in his landmark work, *The Great Good Place*, describes the English pub as an exemplar of a *third place* [27][p.123–144]—a home away from home, a site for jest, a business devoid of architectural extravagance, a spot where “regulars” visit, and a “local” that accommodates people from all walks of life. Most importantly, pubs are where the art of conversation is actively practiced and preserved. In a third place, “conversation is not just the main attraction but the sine qua non of the third place” [27][p.28]. These attributes set pubs apart from other social settings like family gatherings that are private and exclusive in character.

In this paper, we describe an analysis of pub goers’ experiences with conversation in Irish pubs. Globally, Ireland’s identity is closely associated with the public house; *The*

Lonely Planet Ireland simply lists “The Pub” as one of Ireland’s top destinations and “still the best place to discover what makes the country tick” [13][p.12]. Stereotypically known for their gift of the gab [25][p.97], the Irish have their own terms for describing good conversation—something that involves fun, having the “crack” [17], and “slagging” [34], having good-natured banter. In Ireland, conventions of good conversation such as egalitarianism, inclusiveness, and playfulness are vigorously enforced [34].

Smoking bans, drunk-driving laws, and increasing costs of alcoholic beverages have all threatened to topple the institution of pubs in Ireland [11]. The number of pubs has declined dramatically since 1908 when there was nearly one pub for every 35 people in some regions of Ireland [17]. Yet, despite these threats, the pub remains an integral part of Irish culture and society. For example, rural pubs are so important for isolated locals to remain engaged with their communities that so-called “booze buses” [5] and publican-owned taxi services [11][p.113,139] are available to transport individuals from their homes to their neighboring water hole.

By altering the prime activity of a third place, modern technology presents another challenge for the livelihood of pubs. From the 1940s, jukeboxes were decried for destroying conversation [27][p.141]. Beer gardens, large screen televisions, built-in restaurants, dance spaces, and blaring music may all signify the inevitable technologization of pubs, but perhaps no artifact has so insidiously technologized pubs as the *mobile phone* (we use the term “mobile” and “cell” phone interchangeably in this paper). Much research has examined the transformative nature of mobiles phones on our society. Infamously, mobiles are known to force people to isolate themselves rather than engage with their immediate surroundings (“present but absent”) [15, 18].

Drawing from three years worth of fieldwork in Ireland, we argue that the intersection of mobile phones and conversation has shifted third places into what we call *surveilled places*. Despite the negative connotation of surveillance, this is not meant to be an entirely negative assessment of the relation of mobiles to conversation. Rather, the notion of surveilled places help examine what people value in their conversations and situate the changing and sometimes reflective practices that meld technology with group interactions.

We will make three key contributions that examine at a macro and micro-level how mobiles are having a transformative effect on conversation in pubs.

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1. We detail how and to what degree conversation in Irish pubs has been colored by mobile phones. In doing so, we also describe how patrons construct notions of “proper” talk in pubs. Our findings reveal that the art of conversation has become one of balancing the degree to which digital truth from mobile phones play a role in banter.
2. We note how mobiles have visibly become part of the pub landscape. The mobile itself and its apps (the technology) become a topic of conversation in pubs, yet also serves to deflect the adhoc nature of conversations usually afforded by pubs.
3. Finally, we describe how Facebook specifically has transformed pubs from a third place—a home away from home—into a space that, while providing rich content for illustrative purposes in conversation, is potentially surveilled by friends and others.

DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

Fieldwork of Irish pubs and mobile phones was conducted over a three year period in Ireland (2011-2013). As part of their degree requirement, students in a masters of information and library science program at a university in Dublin were supervised by the first author to carry out semi-structured interviews and observations on the relationship of technology with Irish pubs. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Interviews were 45 minutes to an hour long, and observations were an hour long. The study was approved by the university’s ethical review board. Consent forms clearly specified that interviews were part of a research study.

Data collection was iteratively supervised over three phases:

Phase I 2011–2012 (144 interviews): Interviews with pub goers (those who visit a pub at least once a week) focused broadly on technology’s place in Irish pubs. Observations and interviews examined at least two pubs—one where informants recently went to and a different pub with a contrasting environment (e.g., urban vs rural).

Phase II 2012 (15 interviews): A select team of master students were supervised to conduct grounded theory analysis of the Phase I interviews. The topic of conversation and mobile phones in Irish pubs was found to be a prevalent theme in the data. A new interview protocol focused on conversation and mobile phones in pubs was created. Using this new protocol, 15 new interviews were conducted.

Phase III 2013 (64 interviews): Students utilized the new interview protocol from Phase II to conduct 64 new interviews. As in Phase I, observations were conducted in pubs, and interviews were done with pub goers in Ireland.

Our total dataset had 54% (121) males and 46% (102) females. All interviewees were at least 18 years old, but we were unfortunately unable to collect detailed age information on our informants. Based on our interview content and the typical age range of the master students, we can surmise that most of our informants would be classified as young professionals. Informants from Phase I discussed pubs both in and away from Dublin (e.g., informants often discussed pubs in

their hometown). Latter interviews were biased towards pubs in Dublin. Overall, a wide variety of pubs were discussed (e.g., traditional, sport, dance, trendy, etc.), irrespective of location. In Dublin, for example, it is easy to find an assortment of dissimilar pubs within walking distance of each other.

Guided by a grounded theory approach, a team of researchers carried out open coding on the student collected data to identify and iterate general themes of cell phones and conversation in pubs. Generated codes were then refined through axial coding and written into the findings of this paper. Interviews from each year and phase were analyzed until knowledge saturation was reached. Findings were also triangulated with the first author’s extensive fieldwork in Irish pubs from a separate ethnographic study focusing on the use of technology by traditional musicians [38]. Our analysis drew from a discourse analysis viewpoint [31] where we take the informants’ interviews not simply as empirical reports of activities and thoughts but as texts whose rhetoric construct what makes proper conversation in the space of pubs. 129 interviews (41 from Phase I 2011, 45 from Phase I 2012, 15 from Phase II 2012, and 28 from Phase III 2013) in total were analyzed by the researchers.

RELATED WORK

The public use of mobiles subjects them to scrutiny from others and exerts influence on others. There is a large body of work centering on the consensus that mobiles are a double-edged sword: they engender newly efficient forms of coordination and social contact while creating new challenges for users who must cope with this pervasive overlap between public and private spheres of life.

In urban landscapes, mobile phones have been noted to encourage a new frenetic and adhoc style of coordination and communication. A study of mobile users in Norway found that cell phones provide a bridge between transportation and coordination in the everyday life of cities. Called “micro-coordination,” this behavior allows meeting times and places to be continuously negotiated amongst local and remote actors [24]. Going beyond micro-coordination, a study [33] of Tokyo youths observed what they call “hyper-connectivity”: the continual real-time cultivation of virtual companionship via text messages and emails. Another study [41], this time with Taiwanese college students, found that this cultivation strengthens and creates new bonds with professional contacts, friends, and family. Mobile phones have served to create a “personal community society” [7] where person-to-person contact is now independent of place, and, in fact, the public space is appropriated for private use.

With near instantaneous access to “different social relationships, groupings, organizations or institutions” [16] the management of boundaries between these actors becomes difficult. For example, mobiles were found to create distressing spillovers between boundaries of work and family [8, 36] and an expectation of constant availability [16] in our social worlds. This collision of spaces [30] is especially problematic when trying to discern proper behavior in interacting simultaneously with one’s virtual participants and those locally around in public places.

Indeed, the freedom gained through unprecedented connectivity comes at the cost of unwanted encroachment of personal interactions into public spaces. As Dasgaard and Hansen [12] might frame it, mobiles are a public performance of a visibly private interaction. Simply put, mobile users steal away public space and force bystanders to become eavesdroppers: “the mobile telephone disturbs...a whole complex of interactions used to manage our navigation through a conversation and more generally through everyday situations such as bus rides and the like” [23]. In public spaces such as restaurants, cafes, theatres, and public transport, proximate spectators feel that etiquette has been irritatingly breeched by mobile users [40, 3]. Yet, researchers have noted that the ephemeral nature of mobile conversations combined with a growing acclimation to mobiles in everyday public spaces has led to constant redefinition of mobile phone etiquette [14].

There are a number of works noting the phenomena of “absent presence” [15], “telecocooning” [18], “fragmentation of attention in mobile interaction” [29], and being “oblivious to their surroundings” [2]. All these concepts touch upon the observation that one’s mobile interactions can often conflict with our proximate interactions. As a result, the quality of real interactions suffer when one is forced to overhear strangers’ mobile conversations [39, 26], friends interrupt their companions with their mobiles [22], and spontaneous encounters with strangers are rebuffed with publicly visible mobile use [14]. The level of disruption is dependent on the implicit rules imbued with a particular public place [14].

Another related topic studied has been on mobile search behavior in social settings. The current location, time, activity, and people involved have been found to be valuable contexts in shaping a mobile search query [35]. A series of excellent studies by Church et al. [10, 9] utilizing diary study and experience sampling methods over a 2-week period examined the information seeking behaviors of cell phone and smartphone users. A large percentage of mobile searches were found to be fact-checking/trivia and general informational type searches [10]; moreover, nearly 65% of searches take place in the presence of other people. Perhaps most relevant to this paper is a later study scrutinizing mobile search in social settings [9]. Church et al. showed that location and a need to assist an activity was a important factor for initiating a social mobile search; the leading—over a third of diary study entries—information need was trivia and pop culture. Like our own study, they note that mobile search can enhance conversation but also artificially remove users from a conversation, end conversations prematurely, and can label the searcher as a “know-it-all.” Without minimizing Church et al.’s contributions, our own work employs a broader ethnographic angle (not just mobile search) that seeks to go beyond categorizing mobile use and its motivations by unpacking the coupling of technology and people with place.

Some studies have focused on specific loci. Ling [22] notes that restaurants have both public and private spaces as well as a strong set of norms and rituals. Cafeterias on the other hand are noisy environments where the invasion of personal space with mobiles is more lax. Campbell [6] carried out a cross-

cultural comparison of perceptions of mobile phones in public settings such as movie theaters, restaurants, buses, grocery stores, classrooms, and sidewalks. Participants reported less tolerance for mobile phone use in settings involving collective action—settings like classrooms and restaurants where participants are engaged in activities. Ames’s [2] enlightening study of iPhones amongst “digital-natives” focuses on a locale, Stanford University, whose members represent the extreme side of technological savviness and privilege. Such users embraced email rather than texting and found voice to require undue attention and intimacy. Some of the results confirm other studies such as the increased pressure to be constantly contactable, behaviors reflecting differences in the “proper” etiquette to balance virtual networks with immediate surroundings, and complaints about telecocooning. Perhaps most relevant to our study are her findings that iPhones can contribute to conversation or the creation of new collaborative activities through the showing off of novel apps, music, videos, or information found online. Lastly, Benford et al. [4] reflect upon the use of technology in the context of Irish traditional music. Benford et al. examined the accomplishment of sequencing tunes in folk music sessions and suggests designing for “situated discretion.” Since cell phones are a common, accepted sight in pubs, they are ideal platforms for designing technologies that facilitate traditional music making.

Our research builds upon past work by providing a holistic perspective into the socio-technical practices in a third place. That is, we describe how the third “place” [20], as we recognizably understand it, is a constant blend of both long-held and evolving practices of conversation. In this paper, mobiles as a technological foci allow us to extrapolate what people *value* in their pub conversations, how technology itself becomes a subject of conversation, how new innovations reconfigure what it means to be a third place, and how patrons endeavor to make sense of this reconfiguration. Our novelty perhaps does not lie on any single piece of our findings, but rather in attempting to bring these pieces together in a rich narrative about the mobile’s ubiquity in the third place.

MOBILE AS TRUTH: CONVERSING WITH MOBILES

What makes a great conversation? Our pub goers thought good conversation entailed a variety of topics, had good flow, and was inclusive. Good conversation is emotive and evokes banter. However, as Oldenburg and Brissett [28] note, “even exceptionally witty persons, and even when they are in ‘rare form,’ will not dominate conversation for long, for people are there...not to enjoy monologues.” Mobile phones serve to both enhance and stunt back-and-forth conversation by providing instant, truthful statements. All quotes below are labeled with a unique identifier representing the informant.

Winning the Debate

Heated debates are a key form of play in a pub. As a place for friendly banter and slagging, pub goers enjoyed being able to show each other up. Echoing work by Church et al. [9], nearly all of the informants remarked on how phones allow them to find information to settle debates. Google, Wikipedia, Facebook, IMDB (a movie database app), Shazam (an app

to recognize music), sports apps (e.g., Sky Sports), dictionary/thesaurus apps, and news apps (e.g., thejournal.ie) were commonly mentioned as information sources during debates. These data sources transform the mobile into a definitive symbol for truth against which no one can argue. Common topics of debate were current events, historical facts (e.g., has anyone died from a hockey injury?), scientific trivia (e.g., does this drug contain caffeine?), pop culture—movie and TV trivia was especially prominent, and sports (e.g., how many goals did a soccer player score?).

Satisfaction was gained when something unknown or unclear was resolved: “You’re thinking ‘Aw I know that’ and it’s on the tip of your tongue, but then with the phone in your hand it’s, you have all the information there and you can look it up and [laughs], you can make yourself feel better when you find out the answer (P303).” Conversations that struggle from “group amnesia (P308)” need to be cured. P301 describes the frustration of stagnant, struggling conversations: “You can be milling about the same thing in circles, going round...and round it, and I suppose that [mobile] pulls you out of that...little circle, and moves you on to something fresh...So it can move the conversation along that bit quicker, and get you on to a new topic.” One informant particularly relishes being the “first” to find a fact (P239): “I would probably go to the phone first of all because I always like to be first with the answer on things or kind of know all the facts to have the right answer. So I would tend to be a bit impetuous and kind of go straight away.”

Not only can it end topics quicker, mobiles help transition topics. Here, a pub goer remembers a conversation about the movie *Jaws* and how looking up facts on the movie eventually led to a new topic about an actor in the movie:

We talked about the end scene in *Jaws* and talking about how shit a movie it is, and how amazing it is at the same time, and one of our other friends looked it up, and said “Aw, it’s Quint,” and then he said, “I can’t remember even who the actor is now” But, then we started talking about one of the actors and he said “Aw he was in this movie as well,” and then we completely turned the conversation away from *Jaws*. Just, it about-turned straight away just from somebody looking up one piece of information on the Internet.

In this case, information seeking on the mobile kept the flow of conversation going in a positive manner.

Facebook also featured prominently in debates. Because it serves as a historical backdrop to past events, patrons were able to bolster their arguments by providing *evidence*—citing past posts, comments, or photos. One informant related a debate between two of her girlfriends:

One of the other girls was saying, “Oh, you know, I’m stronger than you,”...as a joke, but Lara was like “What are you talking about? Like, I’m stronger than you” or...I play sports I’m stronger, and Alice was saying “No, I’m pretty sure that you told me, one day when you were drunk or not, that *I* am strong,” and then this went back and forth... and then they were convinced that

it had been put online, on Facebook somewhere, one day after a night out, so they then went and...basically searched through comments...trying to find the one time that someone might have said something, about being stronger than the other.

Debates have a competitive spirit to them that might threaten a third space’s democratic spirit. One informant mentioned how the routine use of phones for information seeking has made debates more fair and less susceptible to bullying: “I think people are less likely to...jam an opinion in a factual manner—in a pseudo-factual manner—down someone’s throat just because they can be more aggressive or more domineering in the conversation, and that’s how they win it (P246).” Another informant called this “bullshit detection” (P308). More commonly, pub patrons told us that phones were able to help point out statements that they *knew* were true or false. For example, during a discussion regarding the 2013 meat adulteration scandal (Irish ground beef was found to contain horse meat), an informant was able to support what he knew to be patently false—that horse-meat is more expensive than beef. Here, social mobile search not only enabled “personal empowerment” [9], but a form of *evidentiary empowerment* that prevented them from being marginalized in the pub’s competitive environment.

With the mobile playing a key role in conversational debate, the definition of being skilled in the art of conversation shifts. Now, the “authoritative person,” rather than being knowledgeable, is someone skilled at looking for information on mobile phones. Such a person has an upper-hand in settling debates, winning bets, and gaining access to the truth.

Losing Authentic Banter

While mobiles allow a satisfactory conclusion to a debate or struggling conversation, they also threaten to remove the characteristic back-and-forth banter that debates encourage. Church et al. [9] noted that mobile search can end an interesting discussion. More specifically, our informants believed talk *about* facts (rather than talk containing real facts) was important. P252 noted in a debate discussing actor Daniel Day-Lewis’s Oscar winnings that before mobiles there would be a spirited discussion of truth: “you’d generate this...healthy debate about who knew more or what was right and...it was...using this skill of debating things out that would go on for a while, and might cause some tension or some heat or might just be friendly banter.”

Mobiles aid in finding the truth but at the loss of “authentic fact finding,” or using your “own brain to think” (P304). P401 describes the eureka moment achieved as a group as immensely satisfying but lost now: “you can’t have the sort of discussion where somebody can’t remember a fact anymore, and it kind of eats away at everyone for the evening until someone finally remembers what they were trying to remember.” P303 called the experience of remembering “it for yourself instead of...looking it up online...really, really satisfying.” In contrast, by immediately settling a debate, the conversation is “diluted” (P252). It may be “better not knowing...being uncertain (P242)”. One group of friends had an “informal ban on using the smart phone” (P354) to ensure that

conversations remain authentic—that they kept going before reaching a foregone conclusion with smartphone usage. This authentic way towards fact finding is a form of challenge [9].

The awkward pause instigated by looking up facts affects the rhythm of conversation. P308 eloquently describes an ideal conversation as one that has a particular *rhythm* to it:

A conversation will ebb and flow, and especially with people that know each other really well and can unconsciously get into this kind of rhythm where just the conversation kind of passes around, and if you're talking about pure trivia, about what actor appeared in what film back in the 70's or something, and you say "Well we could look it up?" I'd say, "Well don't bother, I don't want to break the rhythm of the conversation, the conversation's flowing quite nicely. I'm enjoying it, and if we stop and everyone goes and checks...what some unimportant fact is, it might come back and the conversation, the rhythm is broken."

When people bring out mobiles to look up information, it creates an unnatural chasm in the conversation. Conversation doesn't "flow...when you have a phone there to access information: you...have to pause, check it up, and then give the answer. (P308)" A fragmented conversation [29, 22] does not possess the seamless flow desired in the pub. Spotty wifi or mobile network access serve to exacerbate the situation. In a group, the mobile phone also demarcates the haves and have-nots, creating a different kind of marginalization: "I'm especially conscious when...say if there's six of us out and three of us have phones where you can look stuff up and the other three don't, because I think that's really boring for the other three. (P408)"

By poisoning the third place's conversation with instant truth, participants become reluctant to debate on shaky grounds: "So the debate doesn't continue onto, em, 'I bet you 7 pints, that I'm right' ...[B]ecause nobody is going to risk it anymore with that. (P395)" The need for banter untouched by hard facts reflects the belief of the pub as an informal space. Conversations situated in informal spaces need not be factual. Some informants questioned whether knowing the truth mattered in a pub: "[Someone saying,] 'No, you're wrong, look at this on Wikipedia. You're wrong.' ...would...kill the conversation and at the end of the day what difference does it really make? I mean, if it's only a conversation—a light hearted conversation in the pub? (P314)"

As a result, some informants choose to either not search (and let the other party think he or she is right) or to defer searching for the sake of conversation. Others worried about being perceived as a "know-it-all" [9] or "bully." By always being the devil's advocate, one pub patron opined, "I'd go so far as to say it can damage a friendship, or can ruin your evening (P241)." One person (P260) described how she looked up data "diplomatically": "I might subtly check it...when the person isn't looking and...I may even keep the information to myself if I was right and they were wrong."

Last, our informants mentioned that effect that mobiles had on table quizzes. Obviously, informants are able to cheat

by looking up answers on their phone. Quizzes sometimes have policies to reduce cheating like requiring everyone to place their phone face down in the front of them or put all the phones in a bucket. Perhaps more surprising, however, is that cheating is generally tolerated—turning the table quiz into a test of one's information seeking skills. Here P401 notes that cheating and accusations of cheating are par for the course: "There were definitely allegations going around of people cheating as far as phones go but...it was the sort of thing that people, in the usual banter of a table quiz, [do]." While a minority of our informants who took table quizzes seriously admonished the rampant cheating going on, many of our table quiz participants readily confessed to being the "worst cheaters (P431)." Thus, even table quizzes are not to be taken too seriously, and the banter gained from cheating with mobiles may make it worthwhile.

Having discussed how mobiles augment conversation, we now turn to how mobiles themselves become the topic or focus of conversation.

THE VISIBLE MOBILE: MOBILES WITH CONVERSING

Without doubt, the mobile phone is ubiquitous in pubs. Informants assumed their friends had mobile phones with them. They overwhelmingly acknowledged that mobiles, used tactfully, was not a breach of etiquette [14]: "in reality you just...get used to people texting and...people checking their Internet and...as long as it's not for the whole night you don't mind. (P422)" Many pubs now have free wifi—"it's like they expect their patrons to have...their phones" (P428). In congruence with past works [2], nearly all our informants acknowledged being attached to their phone. Informants remarked that their phone was "glued" to their hand (P238) and that whenever they forgot to bring their phone at the pub, they felt "half naked" (329).

In some cases, mobile attachment itself became a topic of conversation in pubs. P252 gave a synopsis of the "iPhone tower" game she played with her friends:

There was a game called the iPhone tower when you go to the pub everyone has to put their smart phones in a tower in the middle of the table, upside down and...the first person to pick up their phone...[you'd]...make them buy a round of drinks just to give out to them for not being able to sit down with their phone for ten minutes.

P252 played this game to hold her friends accountable, shaming those that become a "present but absent" [15] friend into buying drinks. Informants acknowledged that though they understood the detrimental effect of prolonged phone usage on conversation, their own behaviors labeled them as hypocrites. This observed attachment of mobiles by others became a source of light hearted slugging: "if ever any of our friends have their phone out for ages so that they haven't been contributing much to the conversation, we'll kinda jokingly say to them... 'Put your phone away there! (P303)' "

Many informants *did* feel that a particular behavior of phone *non-usage* was disrespectful and encouraged people to become removed from conversation: putting the phone visibly on the table in a pub. On the surface this may seem like a

way to balance being alert of people trying to contact you and participating in conversation. However, informants like P401 despair of this practice: “Everyone...puts their phone on the table in a little pool in the middle. And I think that’s a kind of strange thing to do because it’s almost as if people are not happy with the company they’re in—that they’re waiting to see...is somebody else going to contact them or is something exciting going to [happen]?”

By making a concerted *effort* to meet together in the pub, informants expected their colleagues to engage in the third place’s primary activity: face-to-face conversation: “I don’t really like when we’re in...conversation and suddenly it’s like you have to stop talking because they’re texting somebody ten miles away...I feel that I’ve made the effort to come out so...I want some attention...I feel unloved [laughter] (P300).” One respondent told us that these heavy users of the phone at the pub might as well be talking to them online because they aren’t contributing. Anything that detracts from “the whole point of going to the pub, to talk and to catch up” is unauthentic.

Pub patrons acknowledged that the degree of technologization of a pub influences the acceptability of phones. In so-called “old man pubs,” informants were less likely to bring out their phones. One patron described how the ambience of the pub shapes the visibility of her phone (P252): “So there’s O’Neills on Suffolk Street where you go in and get a good dinner but it’s still a kind of old fashioned pub, they don’t have TVs everywhere, they have kind of snug booths where you’re forced to converse with each other and I find you’re looking at kind of older men at the bar reading papers and doing crosswords....You’re a lot less likely to take your phone out for something because you’re kind of in that environment.” Just as tolerance with mobiles in spaces like restaurants may be limited [22, 6], certain types of pub seem to implicitly prioritize conversation over technology.

Social Camouflage and Meeting Strangers

Pubs not only offer the chance to converse with friends but to converse with strangers. In a pub, chatting with unfamiliar people is not unusual. P395 makes a distinction between the public nature of a pub and a street: “If you were in the pub and you seen somebody sitting there, you can walk up to somebody randomly, and it [the pub] kinda removes all of the...faux-pas. You can go and talk to somebody that you wouldn’t if you seen somebody standing on the side of the road.” Our informant further remarks that the nature of pubs to encourage such interactions is *weakened* once people use phones in dead time: “If you’re looking at a screen...you’re not going to be able to initiate any interaction because somebody looking at the side of your head means nothing [unless] you make eye contact with somebody.”

As *social camouflage*, mobile phones allows patrons to perform an act (e.g., texting) that is perceived as being socially engaged, thus signaling that he or she is busy or “unapproachable” (P323). Remarkably, informants described this act guiltily, as a sort of nervous twitch they have acquired. Whether arriving early to a pub or waiting for friends in the bathroom, the phone was a comforting things to turn to. The

phone becomes a “security blanket”; one informant described how his “busy work” was not even real:

You take it [mobile] out just to kinda remove yourself from being...exposed to everybody else...[chuckle]. You’re pretending to text even if you’re not doing so. Or you’re reading old texts, text messages or maybe cleaning up your phone. Carrying out a ridiculous task that you wouldn’t do in any other occasion. So I suppose we use technology to shield ourselves from possible interaction with other people.

Another informant called her phone her “new cigarette”: “You’re trying to avoid looking like a loner, and the kind of sympathetic glances that you might get because you’re sitting on your own, and how do you...pass the time? But it’s like the new cigarette for me, because...when you used to be able to smoke, it was kind of a comfort thing, to kind of have something to do (P239).” This security blanket has similarities to telecocooning [18] but, when situated in pubs, has the added effect of limiting spontaneous conversations with strangers, a key characteristic of third places.

The Phone as Entertainment

P321 succinctly told us that “since the smartphone came in...your phone is now a source of entertainment rather than just a contact tool.” In some sense, the phone can now serve as a replacement for traditional pub games (e.g., drinking games, darts, pinball machines, and slot machines).

Novel, weird, and quirky apps can catalyze new conversations. In this excerpt, a pub goer talks of using an app to check your eyesight for entertainment, passing the phone around:

There’s an App to check your eyesight, it’s a Vision Express App...but clearly it’s just to make you go to Vision Express to buy a pair of glasses, but, we were all passing it around, there was a good maybe, 10 or 15 of us. The phone actually tells you that you’ve [got] astigmatism, which is a bit bizarre that a phone can tell you that...we just ended up talking around that kind of thing.

Other unusual cases involve setting the language on a phone to Chinese, texting a friend in the pub in Chinese, and translating Chinese text to English. Several users had “weird fact” apps that generate random trivia they would read out loud to friends—essentially, a conversation generator.

With video and music, the smartphone becomes a literal entertainment system. Several informants described using their phones in this manner: “I mean even when you’re predrinking with a friend...a random song comes into your head, you...whip out your iPhone. Somehow, you can go onto YouTube...and you can just type in that song and all of a sudden you’re like [informant dances]. (P317)”

As a device capable of video, the mobile has the ability to create a more impactful, funny story than words alone could accomplish. Here, an informant describes showing his friends in a pub a clip of President Obama singing (P318): “I showed clips of President Obama singing...friends of mine said no way, ya didn’t see it, there he is lots of oohing and aahing,

that's really cool, it was cool to have the ability to show it on the Internet, rather than just describe it."

The use of apps to, as P317 put it, "spark" a conversation is good, but not when it *leads* the conversation. The use of apps can inadvertently lead to a "domino effect." Just as people can get distracted by multitasking applications on a desktop, pub goers's conversations can get sidetracked by their apps/websites. This can give the conversation a desired flow but can dominate the direction of the conversation, wresting control away from the participants:

Cause if you look one thing up, and then go "Oh what's this?", and then you're there reading your phone at the table with your friends all around you. There's not much point in going out and being in a pub and being social if you're gonna have your head stuck in a phone the whole time, you know.

Another informant thought this back-and-forth with videos on the phone essentially "dries up a conversation (P240)."

We next discuss the ubiquity of Facebook in Irish pubs and how it functions to illustrate and enhance conversations with factual statements about events and people but possibly at the cost of privacy.

FACEBOOK: SURVEILLED CONVERSATION

Facebook is immensely popular in Ireland; in 2013 there were 2.2 million Facebook users in Ireland and 57% of users over 15 years old have a Facebook page [1]. Dublin has the highest penetration of Facebook users of any county in Ireland: 3 out of every 4 Dubliners has a Facebook profile [1]. As a result, the Facebook app occupied such a significant portion of our informants' experiences in the pub that we believe it merits dedicated discussion. Church et al. [9] briefly mention that photo mobile search results are often shared in a group. We will go into detail how Facebook creates a new role for the phone as an *illustrator* of events and the implications of capturing and publicly displaying such events.

The Phone as an Illustrator

Pub regulars used their phones as an illustrative tool to enhance their conversations. Facebook photos were an extremely popular way to illustrate new (e.g., a new bandanna for a dog), funny/racy (e.g., someone they had "scored" last weekend), or significant events in a person's life. For example, P240 talks about a conversation in the pub with her coworkers: "Someone had just got engaged, so she was showing us pictures of her fiancé and of their engagement party."

Interestingly, phones were used to illustrate events or facts that pertained to *absent* members of the conversation such as mutual friends abroad: "You know how Kate is getting on? Oh well, she was over in Newcastle there and...these are the photos from the weekend (P245)." One informant (P239) joked, "It's talking about them behind their back and you literally have access to all their information instantly in your hand." Facebook expands one's proximate circle of friends to include absent peers.

Phones were also used in pubs to illustrate with the group about shared past experiences such as vacations or past recordings in the pub. An informant (P302) talks about his trip to Spain with his friends: "We were bullfighting in Bilbao and somebody got video footage of it so it'd be a funny thing to show around...you know [laughs] a bunch of Irish boys bull fighting in Spain!"

Interestingly, the pub itself was seen as a place to immediately illustrate events to several co-located groups around them in a pub. P238 here talks of a Christmas dinner party held at a pub:

So there's 10 tables of 10 people...and if you [do] something silly at one table, well 9 other people have cameras-phones and smartphones. So 9 other people will probably take it out of their pocket and video it and at least 2 of them, if not more, I would say guaranteed two or more, will post it up on Facebook. Pretty much straight away. So that the people on the other side of the room, if they're friends, have now just seen [it].

Lastly, the phone's capacity to illustrate allows it to explain connections better than words could. Here, P305 jogs another's memory: "I was telling the girls that I'm in college with that my sister was starting college next year and one of them she tried to think if she knew who my sister was, and I just showed her on Facebook and she was able to then say, 'Oh yeah, I've seen her before.'" In effect, the mobile serves to richly include one's network of friends and acquaintances into the conversation.

Surveilling the Third Place

With all the advantages afforded by phones and their apps, a constant fear permeated most of the interviews: the apparent paradox of the pub being a place to relax and the increasing rate at which activities in a pub are captured and publicly displayed. For the illustrative functionality in the previous section to be possible, activities in pubs must be captured by someone. What the mobile captures is seen as a true representation of transpired events. P413 puts it well: "In terms of social media sites, it's there in black and white. It's recorded digitally. So it means that there's a history that these will be accessible to a lot of people." Thus, photos and videos are "evidence" (P413) on Facebook for others to peruse.

As pubs are locales for drinking and entertainment, the most obvious concern for informants was that phones would capture them in embarrassing situations. With the younger crowd, "coming towards like the middle of the night or the end of the night people are not so much aware and it's not until the next day that you see photos that...I can't remember...being taken (P420)." As people get drunk one will inevitably "take some stupid photographs of myself with my friends, and I'll send it to everyone together (P241)."

Most informants agreed that the phone was valuable in capturing special events in a pub such as a going-away or birthday party. In that sense, it was *expected* that there would be active recording of activities in the pub. Naturally, pub participants would want to reminisce about these significant events (as mentioned in the previous section).

However, one informant disclosed a story regarding his coworker at a work event in a pub. His coworker was caught singing; however, the singing, while embarrassing, was not the main issue:

There was an email sent around work the following day and I know everyone had a bit of a chuckle with it. One of the fellas I worked with made an interesting point to me...[H]e wasn't best pleased he was videoed singing and didn't want everyone to know. He made a point if he was standing beside the person who was videotaping not realizing he was being videotaped he could have been talking about anybody from work. He could have been saying something about the boss or a co-worker...that would have been caught on tape and if that was sent around...that could cause all sorts of ructions.

The coworker realized his own conversations were being (probably innocuously) monitored. Though a pub is seen as a place where you can let your guard down and relax, the possibility of capture completely changes the nature of pubs.

One informant (P317) vehemently felt that Facebook was destroying his freedom in pubs:

I feel sorry for people. I'd know some younger people—I'd be friends with them on Facebook, and they'd go out on a night out, just on an innocuous night to the pub, and it would be documented with about sixty photos taken on a phone, put on Facebook, checked in, all commenting on it, checked out, 3 o'clock—is now in bed...I don't think...they realise...how much they're putting their civil liberties in jeopardy by just giving this information away so freely...I don't partake in this stuff because I want to...try keep whatever freedoms I can.

For this patron, pubs should be a place where you can just slip off the map and enjoy a pint with your closest friends. Facebook friends would not necessarily be his closest friends and most informants agreed that many of their Facebook “friends” would not be people they would feel comfortable sharing any sort of photo with.

MAKING/LIMITING THE SURVEILLED SPACE

Some pub owners have taken radical approaches to keep “modernisation” out of their premises by banning all “disruptive electrical contraptions on their premises.” One such publican is Eugene Kavanagh of the Gravedigger pub: “We’ve no TV, no noise box, no phone, and people really talk to one another.” Similarly, publican Tommy Smith kept his pub, Grogan’s, free from all radio and television devices, which is why, Kearns [21] believes, it is “Dublin’s last genuine literary pub.” Previously, it was largely agreed that a non-technological artifact has had the most effect on conversation in pubs—the 2009 smoking ban in Ireland [11]. The smoking ban created a proliferation of beer gardens and other areas where smokers could smoke and converse in peace. In fact, it is not uncommon to find many non-smokers in the smoking area conversing with their fellow smoking friends. Pubs, while sharing the goal of fostering conversation, are nonetheless a contested place where everyone’s own conception of conversation (and technology’s role in it) must deal with each other’s.

We do not suggest that phone bans are a “solution” for preserving pub conversation. Indeed, our main contribution is to unpack the interplay between mobiles and, ostensibly, the pub’s main activity—conversation. However, we believe there is utility in provoking users to confront what effects their mobile uses may have on the pub space as well as others. In other words, by surveilling our own surveillance, we can better reflect and judge what sort of conversation we may be missing or want to happen. Robles et al. [32] suggest that systems that transparently reveal who is being monitored are more accepted by users. Thus, instead of creating technologies that fit the mold of situated discretion [4], we can develop technologies that are conspicuous—announcing one’s practices. We outline two possible venues for reflecting on mobile use in pubs through design ideations.

Making Mobile Use Conspicuous: Our findings show that people are often unaware of the effects their mobile have in pubs. Yet, many acknowledge that use can transform the nature of conversations. The below exploratory designs make mobile use obvious to allow participants to reexamine the space and group dynamics in pubs:

The Fact Finder Jukebox: When pub goers wish to look up facts on the smartphone, they must now physically go to a visible machine, “a jukebox of facts,” to find and retrieve them. The jukebox forces one to physically get up and remove themselves from the conversation. This act mimics the act of being present but absent due to mobile use.

The Phone Timer/Tower app: Pub goers use this app to keep track amongst their friends how long/often they have been on their phones. This allows users to be accountable for being part of the conversation; users will avoid being “that person” who is always on the phone. The tower app is similar to the phone timer but forces the first person to use their phone to buy everyone a drink.

The Fake Post Projector: This is a projector in the pub that pretends to post, in real-time, the Facebook posts or SMS texts happening within the pub. This may be provocative but will allow pub goers to consider how capture and display of events in the pub may violate the privacy of those around them.

Reconfiguring the Pub Space: The pub itself is a socially constructed place. Our study has emphasized how actors seek to maintain the pub as a third place—a place whose primary activity is conversation. We suggest ways in which apps may empower patrons to more easily reconfigure the pub space to reflect their own balance between the phone’s intrusion and benefits.

Making Facts Ambiguous: Pub goers may look up trivia for conversation, but the answers are deliberately ambiguous to foster further discussion. Thus, the phone can continue to encourage new topics for conversation.

Mobile Areas: Just like smoking areas, pubs can adopt areas that allow mobiles or are free of mobiles. Just as traditional pubs often have private and public areas, a mobile area gives users the freedom to choose to what degree conversation should include mobiles.

Smartphone Limiter: The pub as a whole has a limit on mo-

bile usage. Users become aware (e.g., no more drinks served) if that limit is collectively reached. Users then must consider how much disruption phones can have on the entire pub.

App Limiter: People use an app beforehand to enforce what apps are allowed during conversation. This again forces people to reflect upon their reliance on apps when conversing.

Making Capture Ambiguous: Here, social media apps reduce, or make more hazy, the factual, evidence-based capture of photos and videos. For example, photos may automatically redact who you are with or a Facebook check-in into a pub will only vaguely state “some pub in Dublin.” Redacted data may be uncensored when used for brief, face-to-face illustrative purposes. This will protect the privacy of pub goers while allowing the use of the phone to improve conversation.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

Surveilled places can simultaneously reinforce and threaten the ideals of third places. In such a place, technologies provide quick, instant access to the truth. For pubs, this allows one to settle debates, win competitions, richly illustrate stories, end struggling conversations, and transition to new uncharted topics of conversation. Mobiles provide new and fluid forms of entertainment to the group as well as the opportunity to incorporate other networks of acquaintances into the conversation. In a surveilled place, however, technologies threaten conversation by creating the present-but-absent, anti-social, and app-addicted patron. Facebook and similar apps may transform the third space into a policed space ripe for recording and broadcasting in the pub.

Our informants are fully aware of the rhetoric to maintain the authenticity of the pub as a space for banter, slugging, and good conversation while leveraging the benefits afforded by mobile phones. This dual-edged sword of mobile phones has been remarked upon by other researchers. Harmon & Mazmanian [19] describe an ongoing discourse between the benefits and detriments in choosing to increase technological integration or “dis-integrate” the smart phone from daily life. Ames [2] observed that college students had to reconcile their own definition of what an authentic, natural relationship to others was with the authenticity forced upon them by the technological behaviors afforded by the mobile phone (e.g., constant connectivity and non face-to-face interactions). Each mobile user has his or her own conception of an “authentic” conversation (which may change depending on the context).

For patrons, there is no single notion of proper conversation in a third place. For example, some are more willing to jump to the mobile for fact finding than others, whereas others use the phone as a last resort in a struggling debate. Similarly, each pub space has its own conception of authentic conversation. For example, some pubs may offer or refuse access to free wifi. Our work dealt in broad strokes of modern and old man pubs. Future work may focus on the edges cases—pubs that have taken deliberate attempts (e.g., phone bans) to prevent any move to a surveilled place.

The scope of our paper does not allow us to address other important aspects of Irish pubs. Our study did not touch on pubs

as gendered spaces. For instance, our informants sometimes had stereotyped notions of how men and women use mobiles with conversation (e.g., females prefer to post photos on Facebook, while males prefer to use sport apps). There is also a need to systematically understand shifting viewpoints on conversation in pubs. Different generations or life phases (e.g., birth of first child), may influence one’s practices and rhetoric regarding third places. Lastly, future work may contrast third places, which are characteristically *public* locales, with the particular practices and rhetoric regarding mobile use elicited in *private* social settings such as family gatherings and private parties [37].

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