PURSENALITY: A PHOTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC METHOD FOR SELF-ELICITATION AND CO-CREATION

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ABSTRACT
The current work introduces pursenality, a photo-ethnographic method for self-elicitation and co-creation, which elaborates upon current photography methods used in (design) ethnography. In total 91 bachelor students in the 6th semester participated in a purse diary study and used the pursenality method to gain rich insights informing their human centered design process. Part of a design research elective, students actively took part in both photo collection and analysis. In this, our primary focus is to explore the students’ role as researcher and co-creator. The pursenality method as well the purse diary study are described and reflected upon.

INTRODUCTION
Within design research more and more ethnographic methods are used to identify, discover, and analyse unspeakable or unexpected issues. It is a process of observing, describing, and interpreting human and cultural behaviours (Boradkar 2011). For design, ethnographic images of certain cultural situations and issues can be truly interesting and easily used as raw data into research to support a deeper understanding of design problems (Sanders & Stappers 2011). Photo-ethnography observes through photography; it uses photos to increase data and insights. Researchers aim to view aspects of human culture in local or global surroundings by photographing or asking images of the respondent’s life (e.g., Pink 2006; Prosser & Schwartz 1998; Schwartz 1989). Although photo-ethnography has its origin in anthropology, it is increasingly used in applied science, sociology and other studies (Collier 1979; Collier & Collier 1986). The use of photo-ethnography in social research precedes the sociological analysis of social structure (Barthes 1981) and allows researchers to consider the way in which perceptions, motives, and behaviours relate to each other and to social structures (Hernandez 2009).

PHOTO ELICITATION
Photo Elicitation is a well-known applied research method within anthropology, based on the principle that photos can convey deeper elements of human behaviour and beliefs than words can explain (Harper 2002, Lapenta 2011). Using photos during interviewing, the photo shows a stimulus, enabling the respondent to elicit worthy full information about human values and beliefs. Using Photo Elicitation Interview (PEI) Collier (1979) showed that using photos in interviews gave deeper understanding and insights in specific human cultural values and beliefs. According to Harper (2002) photo elicitation is a research method examining cultural or social identity, focused on how people discern themselves through clothes, brands, hairstyle and objects they carry with them. Harper (2002) divided photo elicitation studies into four study domains: Social
class, Community, Identity, and Culture. Hurworth (2003) distinguished four photo elicitation approaches, which are auto driven, reflexive photography, photo novella, and photo voice. Furthermore, Lapenta (2011) examines the use and role of photo elicitation, how and by whom the photographs are generated, as well as the role of both researcher and respondent. Interestingly, he adds another category to the photo elicitation approaches, namely the collaborative or participatory image production. Petersen and Østergaard (2003) divide the use of photo elicitation in a classic two by two matrix, which they clearly noted as an attempt to categorize how to use photo in organizational research.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: USERS AS RESEARCHERS, USERS AS CO-CREATORS

We used Petersen and Østergaard’s (2003) distinction between the role of the researcher and the status of the photo in framing our conceptual framework (Figure 1). In similar vein, we refer to research generated content when the researcher takes the photos and use these in combination with interviews to get insights into human action and behaviours; when photos are taken by the respondent himself without the intervention of the researcher we refer to user generated content.

Both approaches combine visual observation with interviews to gain insight into the ideas and values of a cultural (sub) group. In the latter situation, the role of the researcher is still dominant; the researcher analyses, discusses, and interpret the user generated content. Hence, in design ethnography the social context of human behaviour co-determines the design context. What does this mean for the role of the researcher, the user, and the designer?

A PURSE DIARY STUDY

Aiming to get insights in the user as researcher approach, the current study describes how you can provide tools allowing the user himself to analyse the data and interpret it as well as how the researcher can use this ‘personal and intimate deeper analysed data’ of the user to uncover and obtain new insights regarding human values, beliefs, and patterns, but also in terms of phenomena.

The goal of the purse diary study and the corresponding collaborative approach was a twofold. Primarily as an education goal, students had to practice photo ethnography and to come up with a design based upon gained findings. The research goal, however, was to gain insight in the users as researchers approach, and on a meta-level, whether the purse diary findings provide insights regarding students’ collective rhythms and could inform the design of new communal practices in the domains of work and citizenship.

METHOD

In the current purse diary study a photo elicitation method is used to gather insights in identity (Harper 2002). The user takes pictures his/herself and interviews another user. There is a constant exchange of roles; the student has the role of the user but also the role as the researcher and designer.

Students of a bachelor design research course (n=91) were instructed to photograph and analyse the contents of each other’s bags and received in a toolset enabling them to conduct data collection and data analysis (see Figure 2). The data collection consisted of photographing the contents of the bag and determining indicators of the present artefacts in the bag. As shown in Figure 3, artefacts were photographed separately. Consequently, students conducted a laddering interview using metaphors, the ZMET® method (Zaltman 1994). Finally, students used these data students to inform design a new product or service for their ‘studied’ peer student (see Figure 5).
RESULTS: USER AS RESEARCHER

A total of 91 students participated in the purse diary study. Using the students’ analysis and final results we could make a meta-level analysis. The results lead to surprising insights. What was striking was that students had a lot of stuff in their bag.

Figure 6 shows the artefacts categorised in: electronics, writing gear, clothing & accessories, drinks & food, money & identification, grooming products, medicine, keys and smoking materials. In general, students had equal amount of electronic and old school writing stuff. Secondly, food and drinks were found, and in the third place, money and grooming products. Interestingly, clothing and accessories were also found across students. Finally, keys, medicine, and in last place, tobacco.

RESULTS: USER AS CO-CREATOR

Looking at the designs students came up with using the gained insights, 27% chose for a physical data organizer, while 45% went with a digital service or product as an RFID solution, gadgets, or apps (Figure 7). Interestingly, these designs seem to be a solution for a better-organized and balanced life. Both interviews and statement cards showed that many students left their artefacts in different places. Some students were used to travel between four different places; their own room, their boy/girlfriend’ place, and their parents’ house, who were living in different locations as well, e.g., due to divorce. The current finding showed how students lived as nomads in the city. Moving between these different locations, it is likely one loses personal belongings or cannot remember where it is. In conclusion, all designs emphasised bringing a balance into their lives.
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