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More than a Phone:
Emerging Practices in Mobile Phone Use amongst Children

The first wave of mobile phone studies amongst youth focused mainly on communications, especially texting, and the implications of a personal phone both for parent-children relationships and peer awareness and negotiations. There were, in addition, other studies that framed the mobile as a symbolic object (e.g. in discussions of fashionability, of customisation) and in relation to the role it could play in gift-relationships. Studies with a slightly different emphasis followed once the mobile acquired more functionality, principally in the sub-literature on the reception to and subsequent use of the cameraphone.

Since its introduction the mobile has continued to acquire more accessories (e.g. the phone charms, the straps, the coverings) and functionality (e.g. the mobile as a video recorder, as MP3 player, as Internet platform and more recently as a device for accessing TV). Developments in relation to the Internet have also had implications for how the mobile phone is 'used' by youth. Perhaps some of the most striking are social networking sites like *My Space* (or national sites such as *Cyworld* in Korea) channels for video distribution like *YouTube* and sites for downloading music such as *iTunes* (as well as illegal alternatives). Meanwhile, there are social changes in mobile phone use amongst children as it is adopted at ever earlier ages and reaches a cohort of children younger than the original pioneers.

This paper, based on recent British empirical research using focus groups, interviews and dairies, examines the consequences of these developments for the way in which mobiles are used by children currently aged 11–16, reflecting upon changing practices, new dimensions of fashion, and, especially, on how the mobile phone is used in conjunction with the Internet.

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