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## Camera phones changing the definition of picture-worthy

Unlike the traditional camera, the camera phone is an intimate and ubiquitous presence that invites a new kind of personal awareness, a persistent alertness to the visually newsworthy that makes amateur photojournalists out of its users.

Okabe Daisuke Posted: 2003-08-29  
Mizuko Ito 

A friend you have not seen for a while or a pet's endearing gaze. **Tokyo Tower** or a funny-looking stuffed panda. A gorgeous parfait at a new café, a classmate who has just fallen into a puddle, a child opening wide for a spooned-in mouthful, a miniature milk package on an airline tray -- the camera phone makes it possible to take and share pictures of the stream of people, places, pets and objects in the flow of everyday life.

Unlike the traditional camera, the camera phone is an intimate and **ubiquitous** presence that invites a new kind of personal awareness, a persistent alertness to the visually newsworthy that makes amateur photojournalists out of its users.

**Blogs** and now **moblogs** have provided new fodder for the claim that the Internet challenges traditional structures of journalistic authority. In addition, reporting is being transformed by quiet yet equally important practices below the radar of published news of both the micro and macro variety.

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*"In comparison to the traditional camera, which gets trotted out for special excursions and events ... camera phones capture the more fleeting and unexpected moments."*

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The camera phone is a player in not only published news (as described in the stories "**Moblogs Seen as a Crystal Ball for a New Era in Online Journalism**" and "**Conference Panelists See Bright Future for Mobile Publishing**"), but also personal news and sharing that never make it into a blog or moblog, much less the mainstream mass media.

In October 2000, **J-Phone** launched its first camera-phone handset, the J-SH04, to a skeptical population. Now, less than three years later, it is clear that camera phones are here to stay and they are being integrated into the everyday lives of Japanese users. **Current projections** suggest that 90 percent of handsets shipped to Japan this year will have cameras.

**NTT DoCoMo** says current camera phone subscribers make up 25.4 percent of their subscriber base. For J-Phone this number is 68.6 percent. Image quality has skyrocketed from the original 110K pixels of the J-SH04 to the 1.3 megapixels of DoCoMo's S0505i, released this summer.

In a survey by **IPSe Marketing** conducted in December last year, 42.4 percent of camera phone users reported that they took photos of "things that they happened upon that were interesting." This was followed by family members (39.5 percent), friends (36.6 percent), self (26.4 percent), pets (23.7 percent) and travel photos (21.5 percent). The contrast between the serendipitous and everyday categories leading the pack and the trailing "travel photo" category is a striking testament to the everyday and ubiquitous uses of the camera phone.



## Related Links

[Blogging 101](#)

[IPSe Marketing \(Japanese\)](#)

[J-Phone Co., Ltd.](#)

[Keio University](#)

[Keio University's DoCoMo House research lab](#)

[Mainichi projections of camera-phone density \(Japanese\)](#)

[Moblogging](#)

[NTT DoCoMo](#)

[OJR: Conference Panelists See Bright Future for Mobile Publishing](#)

[OJR: Moblogs Seen as a Crystal Ball for a New Era in Online Journalism](#)

[TheFeature: The Onset of Connected Cameras](#)

[Tokyo Tower](#)

The Personally Noteworthy:



A student snaps a photo of a pretty cake she wants, but can't buy



The photo is proof of what a huge shell the photographer found

The Intimately Share-Worthy:



Her boyfriend gets a photo



A dog-loving high school student frequently snaps photos of her pup. She sends the best of these to her mother and they both use the pictures as their mobile phone wallpaper.

Within the broader ecology of personal record-keeping, archiving and communication technologies, camera phones occupy a unique niche. In comparison to the traditional camera, which gets trotted out for special excursions and events -- noteworthy moments bracketed off from the mundane -- camera phones capture the more fleeting and unexpected moments of surprise, beauty and adoration in the everyday. They also invite sharing that is more immediate, ad hoc and ongoing, such as a dad e-mailing a baby photo to a mom or a teenager showing a picture of her current crush to a friend in a fast food restaurant. Most photos are not e-mailed to others, much less moblogged to the Net, but are shared in more lightweight and opportunistic ways.

In our own research at [Keio University's DoCoMo House research lab](#), we have been conducting detailed case studies of camera phone users. Our goal has been to capture the actual photos and contexts in which the photos were taken to understand how camera phones are being used in everyday life in Tokyo.

*"The mundane is elevated to a photographic object."*

For example, one 20-year-old college student snaps several pictures a day with her camera phone: a picture of her new haircut to send to a boyfriend; a really large shell that she found on a beach; her pet in a cute pose; or a photo of an interesting view from an escalator at a station that she frequents. These are photos of everyday moments and events that are newsworthy only to an individual and her intimates.

In Japanese, "material" for news and stories is called "neta." The term has strong journalistic associations, but also gets used to describe material that can become the topic of conversation among friends or family: a new store seen on the way to work; a cousin who just dropped out of high school; a funny story heard on the radio. Camera phones provide a new tool for making these everyday neta not just verbally but also visually shareable.

As the mundane is elevated to a photographic object, the everyday is now the site of potential news and visual archiving. Sending camera-phone photos to major news outlets and moblogging are one end of a broad spectrum of everyday and mass photojournalism using camera phones. What counts as newsworthy, noteworthy and photo-worthy spans a broad spectrum from personally noteworthy moments that are never shared (a scene from an escalator) to intimately newsworthy moments to be shared with a spouse or lover (a new haircut, a child riding a bike). It also includes neta to be shared among family or peers (a friend captured in an embarrassing moment, a cute pet shot) and microcontent uploaded to blogs and online journals. The transformation of journalism through camera phones is as much about these everyday exchanges as it is about the latest headline.

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of her new haircut: "How does this look?"



A college girl shows off homemade sweet bean dumplings

Everyday News:



This odd statue becomes "neta" in a chat with friends



A student shows friends at home that it really can snow in Tokyo



An embarrassing moment caught on film: He just fell into a puddle