

The SAGE Encyclopedia of  
**OUT-OF-SCHOOL  
LEARNING**

Kylie Peppler  
Editor



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Out-of-School Learning

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FOR INFORMATION:

SAGE Publications, Inc.  
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Thousand Oaks, California 91320  
E-mail: [order@sagepub.com](mailto:order@sagepub.com)

SAGE Publications Ltd.  
1 Oliver's Yard  
55 City Road  
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Printed in the United States of America.

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

TK

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Acquisitions Editor: Andrew Boney  
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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

17 18 19 20 21 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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## PHOTOSHARING

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Photosharing is the practice of publishing and distributing digital photographs online using information communication technologies such as smartphones, networked computers, and Web applications. In the digital age, photosharing is a popular sociocultural practice for communicating and socializing, and it plays a major role in the networked production of culture and information. It matters for out-of-school learning because it opens opportunities for creative media production, research, self-expression, and collaboration. Through photosharing, users of all ages produce and circulate visual information about diverse topics, construct identities, and participate in online communities.

This entry provides information about the sociocultural and technological context in which photosharing has been developed, explains the basic features of photosharing websites and the legal licenses that they support, and summarizes the research on this practice across multiple disciplines. Finally, it looks at opportunities for out-of-school learning through photosharing.

## Context

Photosharing has emerged in the 21st century in a context of rapid technological change where the production of culture and information is distributed among many individuals. New media technologies allow users of different ages to not only access information and communication networks but also create information and distribute it. Kazys Varnelis has described this phenomenon as one characterized by a “network culture,” in which distribution and production of content occur using both peer-to-peer and many-to-many forms of communication, as well as the older, one-to-many communication model utilized during the broadcast era. Media scholar Henry Jenkins explains that in such contexts old and new forms of communication coexist, and often collide, as the content created by top-down corporations and media professionals circulates alongside that of amateur and grassroots media creators.

The rise of photosharing was precipitated by the convergence of three important developments. First, ordinary consumers began having access to digital cameras. Although affordable consumer digital cameras first became available in the late 1990s, they long remained technologies for aficionados and professional photographers. It was not until digital cameras became available in mobile phones in the first decade of the 21st century that they became ubiquitous and accessible to a wide population.

Second, photosharing was furthered through the evolution of the World Wide Web into a multimedia social platform with easy-to-use publishing applications. The advancements included graphical Web browsers and the rise of social software applications such as blogs and social network sites. With the new layouts and tools, the publication and circulation of content online became easier for the ordinary user.

Third, photosharing has been furthered through the increasing ubiquity of smartphones. Through smartphones, users running Web applications on their devices can create digital photographs anytime and anywhere and share them over social networks with a global audience. Instead of users having to use a stationary desktop computer, write computer code, or update a personal website, smartphones promoted quick and easy publishing.



## Photosharing Websites

Websites that offer photosharing services allow users to upload, archive, manage, and share digital images online. These websites first appeared in the early 2000s and rapidly attracted millions of users who were eager to publish their digital photographs online. By using these services, people are able to interact with a broad audience composed of amateur and professional photographers, friends, and strangers.

Photosharing websites not only support sociality and communication among users but also promote the circulation of photographs across multiple Web platforms. Although users can choose to keep their digital photographs private and share them with a small group of friends, the default feature is to display them publicly. Once they are uploaded and visible to the global public of the Web, images can be recirculated, shared again, embedded in websites, downloaded, and found by search engines.

Web entrepreneurs build and manage photosharing platforms through the development of social software that supports user participation, peer production, and collaboration. Users are generally not charged for using the photosharing services, but in exchange, they provide the platforms with control over the uploaded images and usage data, both of which can be monetized by the owners of the Web applications. Some scholars, such as José van Dijck, have pointed out that this kind of business model (also known as Web 2.0) sustains a social media ecosystem in which the owners of the Web platforms can leverage the content and data created by users for economic purposes.

Flickr, Instagram, Photobucket, and Imgur are examples of some of the most popular websites offering photosharing services. These services include the automatic creation of a user profile page, where people can display, either publicly or semipublicly, all the photographs they have uploaded to the online platform. Likewise, social network sites such as Facebook and MySpace also offer photosharing, among a wider portfolio of services, and include the default creation of a profile page per user. All these platforms are owned by private companies who offer services for free to millions of users around the world.

## Copyright Licenses

Digital photographs, like other kinds of creative works, are protected by copyright. They are the intellectual property of their creator. As soon as an image is captured, it becomes copyrighted. According to copyright law, the creator has the right to reproduce the image, display it publicly, prepare derivative works, and distribute copies to the public.

In the contemporary context of network culture, however, copies of digital photographs can easily be redistributed and displayed publicly without the explicit consent of the copyright owner. Photosharing websites have terms of service that users accept once they create their accounts and profiles. By accepting those terms of service, users give away some of the control over their images and allow the platforms to recirculate and display their copyrighted works once they have been uploaded to their servers. Despite users retaining copyright over their photos, the terms of service agreements often limit users' control over how their digital images will be recirculated on the online platforms and on the World Wide Web at large.

Although photosharing services usually just offer the standard copyright license, some online platforms, such as Flickr, allow their users to choose among different kinds of licenses. For instance, they allow users to select a range of Creative Commons licenses that have been designed to facilitate circulation and reappropriation of copyrighted works in the digital age. Under these licenses, users retain some rights over their creations but also allow other users to share, remix, and create derivative works of the creator's original work.

## Research

Researchers across multiple disciplines have studied photosharing. These inquiries tend to fall into the following three broad areas: (1) how this practice transforms the meaning of photography, (2) how it is used in the processes of identity formation and self-representation, and (3) how it supports interest-driven learning.

Communication and visual studies scholars have studied how photosharing transforms the meaning of photography and its aesthetics. Alexandra Moschovi, Carol McKay, and Arabella

Plouviez, for instance, argue that photosharing has made photography more social and networked, as images are captured and distributed by individuals across multiple platforms, audiences, and networks. Other scholars, such as Sarah Murray, have pointed out that due to photosharing, photography aesthetics have become more oriented toward the present, the individual, and the immediacy of everyday life, instead of the past, the family, and the extraordinary.

Social scientists and human-computer interaction researchers have studied photosharing in relation to identity formation and self-representation. According to this area of research, individuals construct identities as they publish photographs online and share them with other people on social network and photosharing websites. As individuals circulate snapshots of everyday moments and objects, they elaborate a personal narrative and perform an identity online. The increasing popularity of self-portraits in Flickr, Instagram, and Facebook, particularly those taken with mobile phones, commonly known as “selfies,” has attracted the attention of a number of researchers. Amparo Lasen and Edgar Gómez-Cruz, for instance, found that, by creating and circulating self-portraits, individuals are able to express themselves and shape their identities in relation to the body and the places they inhabit. Taking and sharing selfies, according to these researchers, allows individuals to construct an identity that blurs the line between the public and private realms.

Scholars from the fields of media and New Literacy Studies have investigated the relationship between photosharing and interest-driven learning. Researching the Flickr platform, Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel, as well as Julia Davies, demonstrated that photosharing is a new literacy, that is, an activity in which individuals create and read meaningful media texts while participating in social and cultural exchanges. According to these researchers, the practice of photosharing involves both visual and textual modes of communication and a curatorial process. When users share photographs on Flickr, for instance, they usually add titles, comments, and labels to the images. Furthermore, people can also publish their photos on thematic groups formed by individuals who share a common interest. These Flickr groups, such as the one about toys that Lankshear and Knobel

discuss in their study, are spaces where people exchange ideas and create knowledge about specific domains.

### Opportunities for Out-of-School Learning

It is precisely because photosharing is a new literacy that it is so relevant for out-of-school and informal learning. Youth and adults can leverage this practice to learn visual storytelling, study real-world problems, and pursue their hobbies. For instance, leveraging the affordances of the user profile pages of photosharing platforms, or the ability to create photo albums or collections, people can experiment with the creation of photo stories about any topic.

Learners can also leverage this practice for investigating problems in their communities. They can, for example, use photosharing for doing research on their cities and thus learn about the environmental conditions of their neighborhoods. Depending on which photosharing service they use, they can publish their photographs on thematic groups and connect with experts interested in their local environment.

People of all ages can also use photosharing for learning about diverse hobbies. Photosharing allows hobbyists to keep records of their learning and to tell stories about the different projects they are pursuing. Visual documentation of cooking, knitting, dancing, or 3D printing, for instance, can turn into a learning resource once it is published online, shared on photosharing groups, and labeled with the appropriate key terms.

Because photosharing is also developed by a range of cultural, scientific, and political institutions, individuals can connect with these institutions on different online platforms and find learning opportunities. Some museums, for instance, encourage visitors to take photographs at particular exhibitions and to share them on Instagram with a specific label so that they can later be aggregated and displayed on a Web page.

*Andres Lombana-Bermudez*

*See also* Convergence Culture; Copyright; Digital Literacies; Digital Storytelling; Everyday Creativity; Mobile Devices; Multimodality; Participatory Culture; Visual Culture



### Further Readings

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## PLACE-MAKING

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Place-making is a way of conceptualizing and describing how people make meaningful spaces for learning and action in relation to their bodies, minds, and interactions with others, and the natural and designed environment. Place-making highlights both agency and mobility in learning out of school in that people do not passively experience the spaces through which they travel, work, and live but actively learn and co-construct meaning in and through these spaces, changing and (re)producing them as places of personal importance and learning. Places are not intrinsically meaningful but are made meaningful through people's engagement with them.

One way theorists have described this phenomenon is to consider the inside of a house, which can feel secure, intimate, haunted, prison-like, or

magical depending on one's interactions in the house. Therefore, place-making acknowledges the dynamism of producing places: Places are both individually relevant and identifiable to a group, and places change as these qualities are articulated in ongoing interactions. Because of these ongoing interactions, which occur within and across the borders that are sites of struggle among individuals and communities, people may make radically different meanings of the same location. Observing and representing the place-making of learners challenge researchers' current methods to become more attuned to the contested, mobile, multisensory, and iterative nature of learning out of school. This entry first defines places and the process of place-making. It then discusses place-making as a theory of learning, the research methods used to explore the role of place in learning, and the emergent technologies that are used both for place-making and to study place-making.

### What Are Places, and How Do We Make Them?

Places are distinct from spaces in that space provides the possibility for the intersection of minds, bodies, and environments but places are the points at which these intersections are realized. Places bring together people who engage in a common activity, may share a particular history, or identify with a locality in a particular way. Therefore, places do not exist apart from people; they are the relational location of mind, body, and environment. Places are “doubly constructed,” meaning that they are first designed and then experienced and interpreted by those who use them. The process of place-making activates our cognition as well as our emotions and encapsulates the time and energy we use in engaging with and in places.

Place-making constitutes one of at least three lines of educational research that highlight the importance of place. One area of research focuses on the *situatedness* of learning in that all learning occurs in some place and that place supports and constrains the learning experience in various ways. A second area of research focuses on place as the *content* of learning and has been described as a “pedagogy of place” or a “critical pedagogy of place.” This area of research views teaching and learning about place as central to efforts to