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***Mobile Phone Use in a Science Museum
Toward a Possibility of Informal Science Learning***

Using participant observation and interview methods examining people's mobile phone usage in a science museum, this research tried to see how people perceive mobile phone usage in general and in a museum context particularly. The finding showed that younger people were less constrained by the social norms of mobile phone usage in public space, thus used their mobile phone more often taking pictures of the exhibition and sometimes talking with their friends on the phone. It indicated that the youth could carry the museum context over their mobile devices by capturing images they found interesting.

However, most adult visitors perceived that mobile phone usage in the museum was inappropriate even with the signs encouraging them to use mobile phones to learn more about the exhibition. Some people did not pay attention to the sign; therefore, they were influenced more by their existing perceptions of mobile phone usage in the museum context. Several cases were observed that people interpreted the sign as a banning message for mobile phone use in the museum.

The science museum used for this study initiated an innovative project which aimed for encouraging visitors to use their own mobile devices and facilitating their engagement in informal science learning both within and outside the museum setting. The data of this study were gathered by Rutgers Center for Mobile Communication Studies. Based on the result of this research, it seemed that younger generations can be a better target for informal science learning because they are growing up with communication technologies integrated into their everyday life and less constrained by the social custom of technology use.

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