

Lotte VERMEIR

Anytime, Anywhere
Our Ambiguous Relation with Our Mobile Phone

The mobile phone is a technology that has been adopted very fast. “Anytime, Anywhere” used to be an advertisement one-liner in the early days of the mobile phone. Nowadays several authors question if constant availability is uniquely positive. The mobile phone and the blurring of borders between private and professional life has already been researched thoroughly yet, but in this paper we focus on constant availability for one’s social network. The main research question asks if a social pressure from family, friends and partner to be constantly available via mobile phone exists and if so, how people experience this pressure. How are they coping with the constant availability via mobile phone? Is there a need for a (technical) solution? Relevant theoretical fields are discussed, such as *surveillance*, *consumer resistance* and *the public and private sphere*. Also, the (limited) existing research on expectations about constant availability is summarized as well as literature on possible ways of handling those expectations and avoiding them. Empirical research was conducted by in depth interviews with people without mobile phones, people who first used a mobile phone since less than six months and experienced users who had a mobile phone for more than two years. The main conclusion is that a social pressure to be available via the mobile phone exists indeed. We can make a distinction between a direct and an indirect pressure. Also, a typology of users was developed, based on how they experience this social pressure. Three categories of users could be extracted: ‘*No-time*’, *Nowhere (unless...)*, *Sometimes*, *Somewhere*, and *Anytime, Anywhere*. According to their specific situation, a technical solution turned out to be (not) useful.

Lotte VERMEIR graduated *summa cum laude* in 2007 with a master thesis on the social pressure to be constantly available via mobile phone for one’s own social network. The thesis was covered in national print and audiovisual media. She currently works as a researcher for SMIT (Studies on Media, Information and Telecommunication) – part of IBBT (Interdisciplinary institute for Broadband Technology) – at the Free University of Brussels. Her current project involves ethnographic user research in the European research project Citizen Media. E-mail: lotte.vermeir@vub.ac.be.

