

Probing question: Are smartphones changing photography?

July 25 2013, by Amy Milgrub Marshall

You're going to an amusement park with your family, where photo-ops abound. When packing up the sunscreen, water bottles and snacks for a day of roller coasters and skee-ball, you don't bother with your camera—after all, you'll have your smartphone, which you can whip out of your pocket and use to take a picture in seconds.

It has been almost 25 years since the first digital cameras were introduced to consumers, and 10 years since the number of [camera phones](#) eclipsed the number of stand-alone digital cameras sold worldwide.

Is the prevalence of smartphones changing the way we take photos?

Yes and no, according to Assistant Professor Katarin Parizek, who teaches photography in Penn State's School of Visual Arts.

"Image making and image transmission using [cell phone](#) cameras has become part of our popular culture," she explains. Eastman Kodak company was founded in the late 19th century on the premise that cameras should be accessible and easy to use for a broad audience. According to Parizek, the early Kodak cameras "were not professional cameras and they were never meant to be. They were made for a different market than professional photographers. Smartphone cameras are made for that same popular audience, that same market."

Thanks to that audience and their smartphone pictures we have been able

to see images of news events around the world within seconds. From riots in the streets of Cairo to severe weather—including a tornado that touched down minutes from Penn State's University Park campus—today's technology has turned almost everyone with a smartphone into a roving photojournalist.

"The news media has picked up on the importance of these images as they use the photos and stories from first-hand witnesses who are at the scene of an event," says Parizek. "From hurricanes and floods, to uprisings and wars, cell-phone imaging has played an important part in transmitting news throughout the world."

That immediacy is a big part of the appeal to smartphone users. "It's not that people are 'settling' for smartphone photos. I think that it is more about accessibility and the ability to be connected to the world at any moment in time—as long as you have a signal," Parizek says. "Since cell phones have become such an extension of our being, people have become addicted to carrying their phones with them everywhere they go, and image-taking and posting has become an extension of that experience."

Parizek also points out that, because of smartphones, people take more photos. "The difference is, in the past, images cost something. Film was expensive and it had to be developed, which also cost something, so there was a worth associated with this process. For this reason, people thought a little more before they snapped a picture."

While camera-phone technology has improved, just like any other type of technology, Parizek doesn't think those improvements have contributed to more photo taking with cell phones. "It's really all about convenience—it has little to do with technology," she notes.

Given the prevalence of smartphones, especially among college students,

perhaps it's no surprise when Parizek says most of her students in Photography 200—an introductory course—don't own a camera when they start the class.

Many are "scared to death of their camera" on the first day, she says, "but by the end of the semester, most own cameras and would not replace them with cell phones." She notes that one of her students, on a recent vacation to Rome, took 18 photos with his iPhone, but more than 1,500 with his Nikon D-90. "Photographers don't look at cell phones as real cameras. They do use them just like anyone else, but they use them just for fun. They know you have much more control with a 'real' camera."

Smartphone camera or "real" camera, it's the camera you have with you that's most important, explains Parizek, citing famed photographer Annie Leibovitz. Smartphones may not be affecting the art of photography, but they do make taking photos much easier. And it's not all about the type of camera, Parizek notes. "Ultimately, it's not the lens or the camera that creates the image. It's the person behind the lens."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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