

# In Between the Face to Face: Sharing Images as a Means of Maintaining Momentum in Multi Country Research

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In this paper we report on our experiences of using online photo and video sharing to sustain our international research collaborations in between fieldwork visits.

## Categories and Subject Descriptors

J.4 [Social and Behavioral Sciences]: Sociology

H.5.2 [Information Interfaces and presentation (e.g. HCI)]: User Interfaces – theory and methods, Miscellaneous

## General Terms

Human Factors, Image Sharing, Visual Activism.

## Keywords

Photo Sharing, Social Networking

## The Visible Voices Social Network

Visible Voice is multi country participatory video and photography collaboration between researchers and research participants in Brazil, Kyrgyzstan and the UK. We use four main websites to disseminate information and project materials. The Visible Voice website hosts information about all of the projects ([www.visiblevoice.info](http://www.visiblevoice.info)). Portuguese and English versions of our work in Brazil are available on the Viramundo website ([www.viramundo.org](http://www.viramundo.org)). Our work with refugees and asylum seekers in the North West of England is displayed on the Salford Refugee Link website ([www.sareli.org.uk](http://www.sareli.org.uk)) and student submitted images and podcasts are hosted on our Shared World Site. ([www.sharedworld.org.uk](http://www.sharedworld.org.uk)).

Online networking has its origins in the first Usenet groups emerging in the late 1970's[1] but has developed significantly in the last few years with the growth of multimedia social networks.[2] We set up the network shortly after completing fieldwork in Brazil in 2007 with the aim to *"bring together researchers, project participants, visual activists, health and community workers and students with an interest in the use of*

*visual methodologies for health improvement and social change."* ([www.visiblevoices.ning.com](http://www.visiblevoices.ning.com))

Conceived as a means of keeping research groups in contact between fieldwork visits, the network has extended to include a wider group of academics, artists and activists with a general interest in using visual media to support actions for social change. The inclusion of more personal materials and communications alongside the 'reportage' of research related activities suggest that, for some members, the network may also develop into a more coherent online community [4].

The network has 37 registered members, mostly from outside of the Visible Voice project teams. Many research group participants do not have sufficient mastery of English to feel confident posting directly to the network and prefer to send contributions through a third party. Although the network is structurally very similar to other social networking sites such as Facebook and My Space in that they allow users to build and share their personal profiles [2]. Social networking raises issues about the balance between information sharing and privacy [3] and some members do not post personal pictures or detailed personal profiles on the network. We believe that this may be a consequence of concerns about anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality that dominate European and North American research communities. To date there have been 121 photographs and 10 videos posted on the network supplementing the images and videos posted on our other websites.

The network is the primary means of sharing materials in our ongoing work with communities in Brazil and Kyrgyzstan and is key to sustaining research activities in between face to face meetings during fieldwork visits. In Brazil a small group of eight 'activists' living in the Rocinha favela are engaged in developing a photo record of health and lifestyle issues in the community. The group aim to select 30–40 photos each month which are used to support local actions and are shared on the network. In Kyrgyzstan a group of eight people living in the capital Bishkek, are engaged in developing photo galleries focusing on public health issues in the republic for sharing on the network and other Visible Voice sites.

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