CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The earliest recorded experiments in the field of photography are attributed to Thomas Wedgwood. His experiments, as recorded by Sir Humphry Davy, were published in the journals of Royal Institution in 1802 which described the process of capturing images. But, Wedgewood was dismayed that these “sun prints” were not permanent....He showed them almost furtively, by the light of the candle (Newhall, 2009). One can, perhaps, sympathize with Wedgwood for his frustration to share this almost ethereal process, for his failure to convey and communicate what he captured. It may be argued that nothing much has changed since that time. Today also, as then, photography is undeniably an elegant tool of visual communication.

The history of photography’s evolution is intriguing and full of adventure, as over the past 170 years it has transformed form being an elitist hobby to a household ritual, moving on to become an everyday practice. Photography has been constantly reinventing itself and probably this is what has made it survive in a world that is dominated by other visual mediums like the television and the internet. The advent of digital technology signaled the death of photography (Ritchin, 1990) but what we are witnessing instead is photography’s rebirth as a medium of visual communication. Photography has comfortably positioned itself as a means of mass communication and is fast emerging as a reckoning force in sphere of inter-personal communication.

The history of photography’s evolution dates back to 1839, when persistent efforts of Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, Henry Fox Talbot and Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre lead to the invention of photography. It was George Eastman, who popularized the ownership of Kodak cameras in every household with his slogan, ‘You press the button and we do the rest’ in the 1888, converting the camera into a household commodity. The period post Second World War saw the introduction of the instant cameras by the Polaroid Corporation, which did away with the cumbersome process of developing prints (Sarvas et al. 2011). The next development in the field of photographic
technology was the advent of digital cameras in the 1990’s, which revolutionized the way people practiced photography. Digital cameras were affordable and easy to use as compared to their predecessors and there was no limit to the number of photographs one could click with them without an extra cost. The film had now been replaced by a memory card, photographs that did not match photographer’s expectations could be deleted and large number of photographs could be stored in the form of numeric codes, bringing an end to the worries of getting them printed and organizing them into albums. In 2000, the world of photography took another big leap with the introduction of built-in digital cameras in mobile phones. The camera now followed us everywhere, tempting us to click photographs of things that we would have otherwise characterized as mundane, banal or everyday. At present the number of mobile phones equipped with camera in Asian countries is as high as 80 % (Hand, 2012).

The coupling of the photographic technology, with telecommunication and the World Wide Web, resulted in a large scale proliferation of photographs. Platforms like Facebook and other social networking sites popularized photography, with increasing number of people using photographs to stay in touch and being updated about each other’s lives and to communicate and share their experiences. The growing popularity of Facebook is evident from the fact that in 2009 the number of photos hosted by it crossed 15 billion and the number of uploads reached 4 billion photos per month (Hand, 2012:2). By February 2012, the number of photos uploaded on Facebook was over 250 million photos per day (Facebook, 2012; Tsotsis, 2011, as cited in Wilson et al.2012:203). The growing popularity of Twitter, personal web pages, blogs, photoblogs encourage the use of photographs for sharing views with audience on a wider platform. There are now over a million documented blogs and photoblogs in the world, (Cohen, 2005: 885). Flickr hosts over 4 billion photos and 5000 photos are uploaded to it every minute, Photobucket, receives almost 4.7 million photos daily, resulting in making photography a popular hobby. Smartphone applications like BlackBerry Messenger (BBM), iPhoto, What’s App have contributed to the culture of communicating instantaneously through photographs. Corporate owned visual content websites like GettyImages, provide access to over 24.7 million photos per month (Hand, 2012: 2).
Photography and Its Uses

The world of today is being referred to as a visual world and photography has become an indispensible part of this visual word. But despite photography being a vital part of almost every sphere of human existence, it is invisible, because it has become so embedded in the scheme of things that we have started to take it for granted. Even though our day to day activities revolve around photography, we fail to take notice how it has come to pervade all areas of our life. Photography plays a crucial role in areas like art and architecture, history, science and technology, research, law and order, politics, defense and security, surveillance, education and learning, journalism, entertainment, advertising, tourism, sports, social work etc. Photographs serve as evidence or proof, objects of memory, records of history, source of information, piece of art, means of entertainment, instrument of persuasion, tool of supervision and a means of communication.

Photography and Representation of Reality

Photography has been hailed since its birth for its ability to depict reality. Photography is believed to render an objective depiction and present a true record of reality. Photography is considered to be superior to other visual mediums like painting because the photographic process is automatic and mechanical in nature, the camera is a dispassionate device and the role of the photographer is limited to pressing the shutter and his subjective interference is minimal (Bazin, 1960; Sontag, 1973; Arnheim, 1974; Barthes, 1981; Walton, 1984; Walden, 2005). Photography boats off an evidential force which no other form of art can, because a photograph is always of something that was indeed present in front of the camera (Sontag, 1973; Barthes, 1981). A photograph is not a mere resemblance or an imitation of the object it photographs rather it is the trace of the object (Bazin, 1960; Sontag, 1973; Barthes, 1981; Scurton, 1981; Berger, 2009).

Photography and Preservation of Memories

One of the first and foremost functions of photography is the preservation of memory. Photographs act as an aid to memory. The strongest motivation behind clicking photographs has always been the feeling of capturing or freezing the essence of a moment in time, and preserving memories for future reminisce. Photography’s function as a
Photography helps in identity formation. Photography helps in the production of statements of identity; experimentation and play with identities; and the deconstruction of identity (Tinkler, 2008). Photographs act as tools of self-presentation and identity formation (Slater, 1995). Camera is a tool to gather information, a device to supplement vision, an ideal arm of consciousness in its acquisitive mood and a photograph is an experience captured (Sontag, 1979:3-4 as cited in Kember, 1998). The camera is a device that enables one to capture and possess something or someone and photography acts as a defense against anxiety and a tool of power or appropriation (Sontag, 1979: 8 ibid). Photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal and helps people to take possession of a space in which they are insecure (Sontag, 1979:9 ibid).

Photography as a Compensatory Mechanism

Photography acts as a means to cope with the loss or absence of a thing or a person. Photography is a means of representation and a mechanism of knowledge and power which allows the subject to compensate for a perceived loss, absence or threat in the object world and for the feelings of anxiety, fear or despair which are thereby provoked, this may include the loss of power over the object, the absence of a ‘loved one or the threat of difference (Kember, 1998:6).

Photography and Social Integration

Photography’s popularity in its early days was attributed to its social and family function. Photography was considered to be a social and family activity that was regulated by a societal rituals and conventions. Photography was bestowed with the status
of being the custodian of family history and a symbol of family’s unity and integrity and was considered to be a cohesive force that cemented family bonds and forged relationships. The practice of photography exists by virtue of its family function as it reinforces the cohesion of the family by solemnizing and immortalizing important family events and reasserting the sense of unity and integrity of the family as a group (Bourdieu, 1990:19). Photography was regarded as a tool for chronicling family life and a witness of its connectedness (Sontag, 1973[2005]).

In the past, photography reflected as well as constituted family life and structured an individual’s notion of belonging and even today, photography allows individuals to communicate about their relationships, initiate new members into their group by emphasizing ritualized moments (Dijck, 2008). According to Hirsch, “the family photo both displays the cohesion of the family and is an instrument of its togetherness; it both chronicles family rituals and constitutes a prime objective of those rituals” (Hirsch, 1997:7).

Family photographs are characterized by a feeling of sharing, intimacy and bonding among the members of the family. In the act of taking and looking at photos, the family comes together as a group, around which the conversation is centered. Mendelson and Papacharissi (2010) maintain that photos build and sustain social groups by communicating shared values and stories and perpetuate memories for reflection and reminiscence. Generating a feeling of belonging and strengthening the connectedness and togetherness of the family are considered to be the most important functions of photography. Photographs serve as symbols of family’s unity and cohesion. The social function of photography is to strengthen social relationships, create togetherness, social bonding, and belonging (Sarvas & Frohlich, 2011:9).

**Photography and Communication**

Photographs are visual symbols that are used to communicate within and outside home. Photographs are not mere passive objects; rather they serve as active communicators of memory, family history and its cohesion, integrity and unity. Chalfen (1987) introduced the concept of home mode of visual communication to describe the photographic communication that take place in the family with the help of photographic
material like home movies, family album snapshots, wallet photographs, wedding albums, and photographic portraits displayed on household walls, on television sets, on bureaus and bookshelves.

The oral tradition of narration of family stories through family albums constitutes a vital form of communication that takes place within the family. Langford (2001) observes that family photographs and albums create occasions for communication within the family. Photography provides a common platform to the members of a family to come together in the act of clicking and viewing photographs for sharing their experiences and articulating their feelings and emotions. Edwards (2009) also emphasizes the importance of orality and narration that revolves around family photos in facilitating communication between the family members. The oral conversations that take place while viewing of the family photographs act as narratives of family life, highlighting the important landmarks and high points of the family life and communicating family history to members of the family (Kuhn, 2003).

Photography today is increasingly being used for personal communication and its importance as a tool for preservation of memories is declining. Initially preservation of memory was considered to be one of the most valuable functions of photography, but lately the communication function of photography seems to be gaining prominence over its memory preservation function. Researches in the past hint towards a shift in photography’s function from being a tool for remembering to serving the function of communication and identity formation as a result of digitalization of cameras and the integration of camera into communication devices (Harrison, 2002; Schiano, Chen and Isaacs, 2002; Gary and Gerrie, 2005).

Dijck (2008) notes that, photography is witnessing a shift in its social uses lately: “from family to individual use, from memory tools to communication devices, and from sharing (memory) objects to sharing experiences” (Dijck, 2008:57-76). Slater (1995) also suggests that images that have a place in everyday life are not those bound up with memory or commemoration, but with forms of practice that are happening now. That is they are a form of communication rather than reflective representation.
Photographs have come a long way from being permanent keepsakes and custodians of family history to temporary and transient visual codes that are used and disposed as soon as they have performed their function of communication. Dijck (2008) suggests that, the popularity of the camera phones boosts photography’s communication function. ‘Connecting’ or ‘getting in touch’ is the new meaning attached to photography as compared to its traditional meaning of ‘reality capturing’ or ‘memory preservation’.

A major revolution in the field of the photographic and communication technology is the advent of the cameraphones. Today almost every mobile phone comes with an inbuilt camera, which has resulted in almost everyone becoming a photographer. The camera phone is an ubiquitous camera, but also a device that enables new forms of photographic communication. Photographs are increasingly being used for instantaneous communication: being in touch and staying connected. Photographs can now function as communicative objects through which distant people engage with each other almost synchronously. Capturing and communicating photographs on a camera phone represents thus a new resource for both mobile and visual communication (Villi, 2010:2). The camera phones have a unique feature of combining the aural and the visual, which becomes their strength as compared to any other communication technology, resulting in photographs becoming a new visual code for communication. The coupling of the photography with the communication technologies has ushered in a new era of visual communication.

**Photography and Visual Communication**

Visual communication as a process has been defined as the communication of ideas through the visual display of information by Griffin (2008). Visual communication is communication through visual aid and is described as the conveyance of ideas and information in forms that can be read or looked upon. Visual communication may be used either independently or as an adjunct to the other methods of communication. Photography as a visual aid is increasingly used by different mass media like newspapers, magazines, television, internet etc. The power to communicate things that at times even words fail to convey is the strength that sets photography apart from other mediums. Photography has the capacity to express messages metaphorically, which no other
medium can boast off. Photography is emerging as a new visual code that facilitates communication by transcending borders. Photography has the potential to communicate beyond limitations of language. The advantage of visual communication through photographs over other mediums is that it fast, accurate, time saving and efficient way of communication.

Encoding and Decoding

Visual communication involves two processes: encoding and decoding. The creation of visual messages is referred to as encoding and the interpretation of visual messages is known as decoding. Visuals do not have a grammar like language but they have codes. All visual messages are coded and their interpretation requires the knowledge of these codes. Visual messages are interpreted differently by the audience owing to the differences in their socio-economic status, cultural background, knowledge level, communication skills and attitude and perceptions. However, visual communication overcomes cultural barriers due to the universality of its language.

Photograph as a Visual Message

Roland Barthes was dedicated to the task to develop a system to decipher photographs and the layers of meaning that lie beneath the surface of photographs. In his essay titled, "The photographic message," in his book, Image, Music and Text, he describes "a photograph as a message without a code" (Barthes, 1977:17). The reason Barthes cites for this is that it is produced automatically, without human intervention. Barthes (1977) says that a photograph comprises of two types of messages: the denotative and the connotative. The denotative message derives from the quality of photographs to depict reality, whereas the connotative meaning of a photograph arrives from the social or cultural meanings attached to it. Denotation is the literal, descriptive or obvious meaning whereas connotation refers to cultural meanings.

In his book Camera Lucida (1981) Barthes refers to the denotation as **studium** and connotation as the **punctum** of a photograph. The “**punctum**” refers to subjective or personal interpretation of the photograph, whereas the **studium** refers to the objective or the informational or descriptive interpretation of photographs. According to Barthes
(1981) “the punctum” is not coded whereas “the studium,” is coded”. The “punctum” is something that pricks the viewer and strikes an emotional chord with him.

Significance of the Present Study

We live in a world which is largely dominated by visuals, particularly photographs. Photography has acted as a complimentary medium to mass media like the newspapers, magazines, television and the internet. Photographs are used by all the above mass communication mediums for attracting audiences, making the messages more interesting and attractive and making communication effective. Over the last decade photography’s role has undergone change from being an ancillary medium to being a medium in itself for communication in inter-personal relationships. The present study has tried to contribute to alleviate photography as a means of visual communication in its own right and not as an accessory to other mass mediums.

The present research assumes significance from the theoretical point of view, as an attempt has been made to apply Uses and Gratification Perspective to understand the gratifications derived from the practice of photography, no such attempt has been made by researches done on photography in the past. The present study also applies Bourdieu’s Structural Constructionist Perspective to understand the photography practices of the photographers as well as people as influenced by the socio-economic factors. Bourdieu’s study on photography practices of the French people was conducted in 1965, the present research tried to study whether socio-economic factors still continue to influence the photography practices of photographers and people like they used to do in the past.

The current study is significant with respect to the methodology used in order to explore photography as a means of visual communication from the perspective of the encoder as well as the decoder, by examining the interpretations of the photographers who clicked the photograph and the viewer who decoded it. The results of the study emphasize the need for a uniform system for decoding of photographs. The current research also points towards the need to make the audience visually literate as it was observed that people face problems to articulate what they thought is being expressed by the photographer through the photograph. There is also a need to educate the professionals, engaged in the process of encoding of the photographic message, to ensure
a more effective visual communication with the help of photographs. The present research points towards the importance of feedback in designing an effective visual communication and the use of verbal and written communication to provide the context or the background of the photographic message to ensure successful visual communication through photographs. The present research stresses the need for a comprehensive Visual Communication Theory that will help to understand the process of visual communication.

The results of the present study indicate that photography is a popular activity. There is a growing trend of uploading photographs on the internet, which indicates that the practice of photography which was once considered to be private is now a public activity. This blurring of lines between the public and private, merits attention, as it raises concern with regard to privacy, security and confidentiality. Cameras hidden in mobile phones encourage the practice of photography in places where it is prohibited. There are instances of photographs being clicked and circulated on the internet without the consent of the person concerned. There is no mechanism in place to check such unwarranted circulation. People have no control over their photographs, there is no way they can trace the circulation of their photographs. Such a scenario calls for a need for a technology or a mechanism to monitor the unauthorized circulation of photographs.

The growing trend towards the use of software to manipulate the photographs also warrants attention. There is a need to formulate new code of ethics for professionals engaged in photographic visual communication to ensure the integrity of photography as a medium for representation of reality and guarantee its credibility. The tendency on the part of the people to digitally alter their photographs is a cause of concern, as this practice encourages creation of false memories and may result in a conflict between the real and the idealized self.

On the brighter side, the potential of photography as a means of communication can be harnessed by the state to educate the masses and create awareness. The educators can make use of photography’s communicative potential to make learning effective. Photography can also be of great help in communicating with people with disabilities, they can be taught to express themselves through photographs to help us understand their world from their perspective.
Rationale of the Study

Photography is an intriguing medium. There is no domain of our lives that can function independent of photographs. We are surrounded by photographs in one form another. Photographs have become so embedded in the scheme of things today that we fail to even notice them, there is a tendency to take them for granted. But we cannot afford to ignore the fact that photographs are now fast becoming a new language for communication. There is need to acknowledge photography’s potential as a new visual code, and understand its role as a form of visual communication.

Photographs over the years have proved their merit as a means of communication. Photographs have the unique quality to communicate deeper meanings which at times even words fail to convey. In the world of today where internet and television cater to the visual needs of people, photographs have not lost their charm or relevance. Photography facilitates communication as it overcomes the barrier of language. As the ago old adage goes, ‘a picture speaks a thousand words’. Photography is used as an aid to written and oral communication to increase its effectiveness and to facilitate better understanding. However, photography’s potential as a means of visual communication remains unexplored.

Images in the field of advertising, television, cinema and their effect on the masses have been a matter of concern but role played by images in inter-personal communication has been overlooked. Little research has been done on photography as a social, domestic or everyday practice in the past possibly because of its status as an artistic practice and as a stylistic and singular representation of the world (Rivière, 2005: 167).

Studies on domestic photography have investigated what subjects have been photographed and how they have been represented (Bourdieu, 1965; Spence and Holland, 1991; Ulkuniemi, 1998 as cited in Rantavuo, 2008:135) but research on digital domestic photography with digital cameras has been scarce. Studies on communication in the past have largely focused on the verbal communication rather than visual communication (Becker 2004; Döring et al. 2006). Personal photography has been neglected as an area of research as compared to art photography (Villi, 2010). Professional photography has been a topic of discussion but personal photography has not been paid much attention (Price & Wells, 1997). The history of photography does not find a mention of the everyday
photography practices of common people as most studies focused on the artistic pursuits of photography (Batchen, 2001). Photographic communication has been neglected in the history of photography as the focus has always been on photographs as objects (Wells, 1997). The process of creating, looking, sharing and communicating through photographs did not gain much attention by the researchers. The uses of photography, personal communication and clicking and sharing of photographs by people have been neglected as subject of research on photography (Villi, 2010).

Photography become popular with the advent of digital revolution as digitalization of photographic technology made photography instant, convenient, user friendly and affordable. Camera phones revolutionized the field of photography, ushering a new era in the field of visual communication. Interpersonal communication has been outside the preview of the studies in visual communication because camera as a communication device has not been able to provide a direct interpersonal link between two individuals but the coupling of camera phones and cameras to information networks has resulted in making interpersonal communication an organic form, motive and function of photography (Villi, 2010).

It is hard to find any theory of visual interpersonal communication which necessitates the study of visual communication through photography in terms of interpersonal communication (Villi, 2010). The present study is being conducted keeping in mind the popularity of photography as a means of visual interpersonal and mass communication and the inadequacy of research in the present field particularly in the Indian context.

**The Research Problem**

The present study explores photography as a means of visual communication from the perspective of the encoder and the decoder. The present research studies the uses of photography, and the satisfactions or gratifications derived from it. Photography’s ability to represent reality is examined, with an aim of simplifying the question which has been grappling photography theorists since the birth of photography i.e. whether photography is a medium that depicts reality or whether it is a subjective interpretation of the world by the photographer. Photography’s potential as a means of compensation is also the focus of the present research.