

Chapter 12

Technology Facility and News Affinity: Predictors of Using Mobile Phones as a News Device

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ABSTRACT

Based on a theoretical framework drawn from the diffusion of innovation theory, the expectancy-value model, and the technology-acceptance model, this chapter presents an empirical study of technological and informational factors as predictors of the use of second-generation mobile phones as a news device. The study differentiates the initial adoption of a mobile phone as a technology innovation from second-level adoption, which refers to the acceptance of a distinctive new function of a technology device serving a communication purpose different from that for which the device was originally designed. The study found that technology facility and innovativeness were significant predictors of mobile phone use as a news device; further, it partially confirmed the model of predictors of mobile phone use for news access. However, the two informational factors—perceived value of information and news affinity—were found to have no direct effect on mobile phone use as a news device. The study departs from the traditional approach of adoption research and offers a novel perspective on examining the adoption of new media with multiple evolving functions.

INTRODUCTION

The mobile phone, a technology innovation originally designed as a portable device for interpersonal communication, has evolved in its functions as a multimedia device (e.g., camera), a media player, and a media channel through which to access news information. Technological advances have expanded the mobile phone's capacity to enable communication for various purposes (Goggin & Hjorth, 2009). The use of mobile phones as a news device has been possible since the mid 2000s, when the second-generation of mobile phones was configured for digital data transmission and mobile Internet. The third generation

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mobile phones, such as Apple's iPhone and the phones on Android system have expanded transmission capabilities making it easier for a mobile phone user to browse the Internet and access news information, including photos and videos. More recently, mobile phones have become a functional device to access news information due to the growing information channels available through mobile phone applications. While traditional media, such as newspapers and television, and the Internet still serve as mainstream media to deliver news information to a large number of people, the advancement of media technology and mobile phone applications has caused the mobile phone to gradually emerge as a multimedia device that enables users to browse information from news websites and get news information through various applications and social media. As a result, more people have started to access news information through mobile phones. For those people who need quick access to news information and who tend to read or watch headline news, the second-generation mobile phones worked as an efficient media channel. With an increasing amount of information accessible through mobile phones combined with the flexibility of access to news through them, the mobile phone has become a viable alternative to traditional media and the Internet as a media channel through which to obtain news information.

The changes brought about by the use of mobile phones as a news device could have a significant impact in the long term on how news information is distributed and on how people access and react to news information (Bivens, 2008). As an effective channel of delivering news information, mobile phones have already brought about significant changes to both news consumers and society. For news consumers, because mobile phones are always at hand, news information is accessible immediately through various platforms and applications as soon as it is distributed. To get the latest news, mobile phone users can open a news application on the phone any time. Using mobile phones to access news has become a daily routine for many news consumers. When mobile phones are used by a large number of people as devices to access news, the ways that news information is produced and delivered and the extent to which media content influences its audience could change significantly due to the pattern of news consumption and media exposure.

At the society level, the use of mobile phones as a news device will result in quicker responses to social events and changes. For example, mobile phones could serve as a more effective channel in the situation of a disaster or a crisis than most of the regular information channels. Before the Internet became widely available, people used to rely on traditional media for information during a disaster (Neal, 1998; Piotrowski & Armstrong, 1998). More recently, they have turned to the Internet for information. Now people can turn to mobile phones to get news information and explanations and interpretations of the event. Mobile phones could become the most widely used and depended on media when people need to obtain information urgently. Immediate access to news information, especially information about a disastrous event or a crisis, enables people to react to the situation in a quicker and more reasoned way, resulting in a significant reduction in the impact of the crisis. The information distributed through mobile phones to the public in a crisis or an important social event will have significant positive effects on public interest and social order.

As more people start to use mobile phones as news devices, many important questions regarding the use of mobile phones as a multimedia communication device remain unanswered. Few studies have explored the use of mobile phones as a multimedia device (Ling, 2004; Wei & Lo, 2006), and even fewer have examined the use of mobile phones as a news device (Humphreys, Von Pape, & Karnowski, 2013; Westlund, 2008). The use of mobile phones as a news device is based on an adopted innovation, but most of the adoption studies have examined such multimedia media adoption as a one-time event. Few studies have explored the factors that influence the adoption of a distinctive new function of an adopted

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