Chapter 1

Personality Traits and Consumer Behavior in the Mobile Context: A Critical Review and Research Agenda

Kaan Varnali
Istanbul Bilgi University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

Research focusing on consumer behavior in the mobile context is rapidly accumulating. However, the role of personality traits in explaining and predicting users’ perceptions regarding mobile services and behavior within the mobile context is conspicuously under-researched. If consumers are considered as dispositional entities, this lack of researcher interest on the role of personality traits on the value creation processes of mobile consumers should be scrutinized. Striving to provide guidance as to why and how to incorporate personality-based variables within prospective research models attempting to explain and predict consumer behavior in the mobile context, this research critically assesses the-state-of-the-art and presents a conceptual discussion regarding related future research avenues.

INTRODUCTION

Technological innovations, when they reach a critical threshold level of penetration, may cause tremendous impact on various aspects of daily life. As it was the case in color TV, landline telephone, and PC-based Internet, mobile technology also had a similar effect and caused fundamental shifts on the communication patterns, the temporal and spatial constraints, and the expectations of people (e.g., Balasubramanian, Peterson, & Jarvenpaa, 2002). In fact, the penetration rate of mobile handsets has well passed that of landline phone, PC-based Internet and any other technological

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devices (Juniper Research, 2008). Eventually, mobile phones have morphed into very capable, constant personal companions that are “always on” and “always connected”, enabling companies to establish an ever existing presence alongside their customers through a multitude of interactive mobile applications. The proliferation of the mobile medium and its use for customer interaction represents a discontinuity in the marketplace, and hence mobile marketing phenomena draws mounting interest from both academic and business circles.

Mobile marketing is the use of the mobile medium as a means of marketing communications (Leppäniemi, Sinisalo, & Karjaluoto, 2006). Therefore, the domain of mobile marketing research includes acceptance and use of mobile services, use of mobile applications in consumer service, acceptance and effectiveness of mobile advertising, mobile commerce that involves transactions, and topics related with consumer behavior and policy in the mobile context. More than half of the academic research focusing on mobile marketing consists of articles attempting to explain and predict consumer behavior in the mobile context (Varnali & Toker, 2010). These works have identified a multitude of factors that may have an influence on the acceptance and adoption of mobile services by consumers. Most of these studies have applied extended versions of Technology Acceptance Model, Theory of Reasoned Action, Theory of Planned Behavior, Diffusion of Innovations, and theories from uses and gratifications research. It has been found that content relevance (Heinonen & Strandvik, 2007) and user perceptions regarding various aspects of mobile marketing campaigns and services such as informativeness, entertainment (Bauer et al., 2005), usefulness, ease of use (Hsu & Lu, 2008), expressiveness, behavioral control (Nysveen, Pedersen, & Thorbjornsen, 2005), credibility (Okazaki, 2004), interactivity (Chae et al., 2002), use convenience, connection stability, cost (Park, 2006), riskiness (Chen, 2008), appropriateness of message delivery (Barnes & Scornavacca, 2004; Kleijnen, Ruyter, & Wetzel, 2007), peer-influence (Hsu & Lu, 2008), and social value (Pihlström, 2007) are the primary predictors of consumer attitudes, intentions, and behavior in the mobile context. Several studies have classified users with respect to their usage and adoption patterns of mobile services and observed that the resulting segments had different psychographic profiles (Kleijnen, Ruyter, & Wetzel, 2004; Marez et al., 2007; Mort & Drennan, 2005). Although such segmentation studies offer strategic guidelines for marketers, they do not provide any explanation for the differences in user perceptions regarding the aforementioned aspects of mobile marketing campaigns and services. Such an insight may be provided by focusing on personality traits. However, very few studies have investigated the effects of personality traits that become salient when an individual is exposed to a mobile marketing message or engaged with a mobile service. This may be due to the fact that researchers, as well as practitioners in the field of mobile marketing, are faced with a bewildering array of personality constructs with little guidance and no rationale at hand.

As an attempt to address these difficulties, this research strives to 1) underpin the importance of including personality traits within prospective research models aiming to explain and predict consumer behavior in the mobile context, 2) identify a variety of context-relevant personality traits, and 3) discuss how these traits are relevant to which specific aspects of the mobile medium. A critical assessment of the state of the art will be presented in order to facilitate future research. The resulting conceptual framework shall provide researchers who are interested in mobile phenomena with a battery of context-relevant personality traits, and shall guide them in forging empirical research agendas. It shall also be beneficial to marketers in developing innovative profiling and segmentation algorithms that would potentially produce increased return rates for their mobile marketing campaigns.
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