Intention to Adopt a Text Message-based Mobile Coaching Service to Help Stop Smoking: Which Explanatory Variables?

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ABSTRACT

Cell phones make it possible to offer coaching services through text/video messages, to support users trying to break addictions. Given that use of such services is still low in France, it is important to have greater understanding of what leads users to adopt them. Therefore, the authors propose and validate an explanatory model for the intention to adopt a mobile coaching service to help people to stop smoking. This article uses the concepts of vicarious innovativeness, social influence, perceived monetary value, perceived enjoyment, and perceived irritation.

Keywords: Mobile Coaching Services, Smoking Cessation, Social Marketing, Tobacco Consumption, Vicarious Innovativeness

INTRODUCTION

Addictions to tobacco, alcohol, drugs and food are a serious problem for society. Breaking the habit takes enormous willpower, and in many cases the help of therapists or support groups. The rising popularity of cell phones, with or without internet connections, has led to a dramatic increase in mobile services. The current tendency to use cell phones or other mobile devices for health offers a very interesting opportunity to improve public health worldwide (Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2011). One such service could provide support for giving up smoking. This type of service is relatively new in France, hence the relevance of studying the profile of potential adopters. However, there are already some mobile apps to help quit

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smoking such as MyQuit Coach (Livestrong.com). A related study of this application that surveyed 266 users, released by the University of Southern California’s Institute for Communication Technology Management (CTM) and the USC Center for Body Computing (CBC) found that the ability to immediately and continually track cigarette consumption along with encouragement and social support can lead to smoking cessation (www.healthcareitnews.com). The first research study on a mobile phone smoking cessation programme was published by (Rodgers et al., 2005).

In France, almost 60,000 deaths each year are directly attributable to smoking, which is the primary cause of avoidable premature death, and the problem of nicotine addiction continues to grow despite efforts to curb it. Across the whole French population aged 15-75, the proportion of daily smokers rose from 26.9% to 28.7% between 2005 and 2010, and cigarette sales saw a slight upturn between 2008 and 2009 (from 53.6 billion to 55 billion packets) after dropping significantly between 2001 and 2004 (from 82.5 billion to 54.9 billion, due to substantial increases in the price of tobacco products).

This article concerns a mobile coaching service providing support for people trying to stop smoking. The service takes the form of short text messages (SMS or MMS) sent to cell phones to help individuals in a range of situations or anti-smoking activities. The principal objective of this study is to identify drivers fostering the intention to adopt such a service in the young smokers segment in France. The article is structured as follows. Firstly, the conceptual framework is presented and after that the model of the intention to adopt the mobile coaching service is introduced. The methodology is then described along with the operationalization of the underlying hypotheses. After reporting the main findings and managerial and social implications, the paper concludes by considering limitations and avenues for future research.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The effectiveness of a mobile coaching service has already been tested in various countries, including New Zealand where a program to stop smoking was developed and tried out (Whittaker et al., 2008). But such mobile coaching services are relatively little used in France, and this is why they are considered as an innovation for the purposes of this study. Several definitions of an innovation have been proposed. The one used here is by Rogers (1962), who defines an innovation as an idea, practice or object perceived as new by the individual. Diffusion of an innovation is the process by which it is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system (Rogers, 1962). Rogers identifies three factors that explain how an innovation spreads and is adopted: 1) the characteristics of the product or service, 2) the characteristics of consumers and 3) the profiles of different adopter categories through the innovation diffusion process.

Adoption of an innovation can be defined as the initial purchase or repeated purchase of the innovation, depending on the context. For frequent-purchase products, repetition of the purchase is necessary to consider a product adopted, and the threshold of three purchases appears to be an acceptable threshold for judging whether a product has been adopted by the consumer (Cestre, 1996), whereas for durable goods and services, adoption is generally considered to take place from the very first purchase, regardless of regular use or replacement purchases (Le Nagard-Assayag & Manceau, 2011). Gatignon and Robertson (1985) propose a general model of innovation diffusion, taking the conceptual bases proposed by Rogers (1983) (which include the concept of innovation, diffusion over time, influence of interpersonal communication and opinion leaders, the adoption process, the role of innovators and other adopter categories, and the social system in which the diffusion takes place) and adding the influence of marketing campaigns and competitors’ actions.
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