Apps, Apps, and More Apps: Motivations and User Behaviours

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the reasons millions of people use stand-alone, task-oriented software programs designed for use on mobile devices, commonly known as “apps.” This study uses a survey with a probability sample of 576 app users. Consistent with the uses and gratifications approach, respondents were asked about their attitudes, interests, and opinions regarding apps. These measures were reduced to five factors. Then, regression analyses considered the factors as well as app use statistics and demographics to predict app use. The motivations of entertainment, convenience, and instrumentality are consistent with previously studied gratifications of the Internet and the mobile phone. However, the constant availability gratification for apps is unique because they provide quick access to information anytime and anywhere. Regression analysis showed these motivations predicted patterns of app use.

KEYWORDS

Factor Analysis, Mobile Communication, Mobile Internet, Multiple Regression, Survey Research Method, Uses and Gratifications Theory

INTRODUCTION

Mobile applications, or “apps” for short, refer to stand-alone, task-oriented software used on mobile devices, including smartphones, tablet computers, electronic readers, and digital music players with an Internet connection (3G, 4G, or Wi-Fi). In 2007, Apple introduced its first-generation iPhone, which could access thousands of apps from its App Store; the phenomenon grew with updated...
versions of the iPhone, iPod, and the arrival of the iPad. Because of their simplicity, low cost (many apps are free), and ease of use, the number of apps has mushroomed, offering specialized software programs for exercise planning, news, maps, social networking, music, or games.

The massive popularity of apps on mobile devices has given rise to an “Apps culture” (Pew, 2011). Despite the exponential growth of apps, little research has been conducted to investigate this culture. To fill the void, this research seeks to explore major motivations behind the use of apps. The goal of the present study is to understand how gratifications together with interest in current affairs and psychological dispositions, such as sensation seeking, predict the use of apps, which are now a bona fide form of mass communication.

An understanding of apps use is sorely needed because of the explosive growth of digital media products and interactive media platforms. People have embraced these technologies and rely on them for news, information, and entertainment at the expense of the traditional media, such as television and newspapers. Even though as an innovative media technology, apps are an emerging phenomenon, but because of role of they play in the work and play of million of users, apps deserve scholarly attention.

Additionally, the mantra in information technology development is that if you build it, they will come. A focus on identifying gratifications sought from massively popular apps will generate some theoretical insights into the motivations of using one type of apps over another. Findings of this study will contribute to an already rich body of uses and gratifications research literature. As Ruggeiro (2000) argued, new media offer a lease of new life to uses and gratifications research in examining how people use new communication technologies such as the Internet or apps, which have the attributes of interactivity, demassification, and asynchronicity.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The uses and gratifications theoretical framework is based on the assumptions that an individual’s sociological and psychological makeup influences an individual’s media use and effects from mediated communication (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1974; Rosengren, 1974). It further assumes that (1) in using the chosen media, the audience remains active with “goal-directed media behavior”; and (2) individual predispositions, social interaction, and environmental factors shape audience members’ program expectations (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000).

Rubin et al. (2003, p. 129) defines uses and gratifications as “(a) media behavior is purposive, goal-directed and motivated, (b) people select media content to satisfy their needs and desires, (c) social and psychological dispositions mediate that behavior, and (d) media compete with other forms of communication—or functional alternatives—such as interpersonal interaction for selection, attention and use.”

When new technologies are diffused widely in society, scholars apply the uses and gratifications paradigm to understand new media use behaviors and motivations behind the uses (Rubin and Bantz, 1987; Rubin, 1983) and how and the new technologies are being used (Rosengren et al., 1985) In the past U&G research of television, Rubin (1984) found that media use is either ritualized or instrumental. Ritualized use, as described by Rubin, is the habitual use of media to pass time or to divert attention from reality. Instrumental use is identified by active and goal-oriented use of the media. Papacharissi and Mendelson (2007) examined reality television programming through
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