Mobile Learning Usage of LIS Students in Mainland China

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the usage behaviors of smartphones for learning purposes by Library and Information Science (LIS) students of mainland China. A quantitative questionnaire was used for collecting the subjects’ usage behavior, their perceptions on learning experience through using smartphones, and their needs of accessing library services using smartphones. The authors analyzed the results from two major universities in mainland China. This research discovered that LIS students in mainland China used smartphones for their daily-life matters more readily than for learning purposes. They were also interested in accessing library services with smartphones, but not many of them were already using these services. The undergraduate and postgraduate respondents had some differences in their usage preferences and behaviors. This paper suspected those library services are already available but the promotion has been inadequate. There are obviously opportunities for educators, librarians, and technology providers to get some insights to improve mobile learning (m-learning) in universities and for students to learn better with mobile technology and apps. This study provides insights into the users’ needs and the application of m-learning in mainland China, where scant similar studies have been conducted before.

KEYWORDS

China, Information Needs, Mobile Devices, Mobile Learning, Online Information-Seeking Behavior, Technology Adoption

DOI: 10.4018/IJSSOE.2019040102
INTRODUCTION

According to the China Internet Network Information Center (2016), the Internet penetration rate in mainland China (People’s Republic of China) is quite high, 50.3% by December 2015, with 688 million Internet users. 90.1% of them use their mobile phones to access the Internet, though there has been significant Internet censorship. In particular, 26 out of 31 Chinese provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities have more than 10 million Internet users, with Beijing and Shanghai being the top two cities of penetration rates. Given such unique political situations and different information landscape as China is becoming a developed country, it would be interesting to find out the usage patterns of university students in mainland China.

According to the International Communications Market Report (Ofcom, 2016), smartphones are popular devices for people to get access to the Internet across all the 17 comparator countries (including mainland China). The younger generation gets used to handling their daily tasks and spending much time on their smartphones. The impact of advancement in technologies on communication has over daily life for everyone in the world and is increasing and expanding. The effect of technology development has simplified the way people e-communicate with each other around the world. It is not surprising that there is a growing interest in learning with mobile devices. While there is a global trend on mobile learning (m-learning), libraries and other information resource providers, such as e-databases, digital libraries, e-learning platforms, should adapt to this emerging needs of access via mobile devices (Ko et al., 2015; Dukic et al., 2015; Lau et al., 2017, Lo et al., 2017). It is crucial to understand patrons’ preferences in how they use their smartphones now, in order to provide more suitable services to them via mobile devices.

Library and Information Science (LIS) students are the professionals in their workplaces in the future. They are expected to stay alert to and adapt to the new technologies quickly. Based on the above rationales, this study aims to find out the current m-learning usage behaviors of LIS students in mainland China, focusing solely on smartphones. We further discuss the results as compared with the other two regions within Greater China (Hong Kong and Taiwan) from a prior study conducted by Ko et al. (2015). It is expected that the findings on the needs and concerns of the LIS students from mainland China can provide libraries and other information resource providers insight on the potentials and directions on future developments for m-learning in the region. In particular, this fills in the large research gap that scant studies have explored this subject in mainland China.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mobile Learning Definition

The way of learning has been evolving over time along with the development of technology. Keegan (2002) defined m-learning as the provision of learning on wireless and mobile devices and traced the evolution from distance learning to electronic
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