Chapter 11

A Cross-National Study of Mobile Internet Services: A Comparison of U.S. and Korean Mobile Internet Users

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ABSTRACT

This study surveyed mobile users in the United States and Korea to determine the key differences between the two countries. Survey questions, developed in two languages, were presented in each country to explore the influences of informativeness, entertainment, interactivity, and availability on mobile user dimensions. The study design methods were based on the revision of a uses and gratifications approach, and a relational model of antecedents and consequences was tested with a structural equation modeling approach. Mobile Internet service uses and gratifications were analyzed cross-nationally in a comparative fashion focusing on the differences in the composition of motives in the two countries. Based on the results of this study, practical implications for marketing strategies in mobile service markets and theoretical implications for cross-country studies are recommended accordingly.

INTRODUCTION

Mobile Internet services have become a major interest for the information system research community. Current mobile devices provide users with various advanced services, including mobile television service with additional audio and data services that can be viewed on cell phones, portable receivers, or vehicle terminals (Shin, 2008). Recent technological convergence allows cell phone and personal digital assistant users to watch terrestrial digital television on their portable communication devices. Through advanced mobile devices, users can tune into regular TV programming or watch
content-on-demand through portable terminals that include mobile handsets and mini-TVs installed in their cars. Various data services based on two-way communication capability are also available. For example, users watching a movie on their mobile devices can retrieve the background data of one of the movie’s stars by clicking on a certain part of the screen. While watching a cooking program, users can store the recipe in a computer or get a print-out. When other software applications are in place, mobile devices will also enable users to pay for purchases while watching a TV home shopping program on mobile handsets. This mobility increases users’ control over mobile services, allowing them to enjoy interactive services. Industry and academia alike wonder how users utilize mobile device, what they watch, and with what gratifications (Shin, 2007, 2008).

Even though the literature on the adoption and the use of media and the Internet is quite extensive, few studies have explored the motivations for using the recent convergence mobile services, such as satellite mobile TV, telematics, and IPTV, and the associated antecedents and consequences from a comparative perspective. Traditional models of media uses and gratifications (U&G) can be applied to convergence technologies, improving our understanding of U&G of these new services. The U&G theory claims that users are seen as active and focuses on the explanations for users’ motivations and associated behaviors (Eighmey & McCord, 1998; Ruggiero, 2000). The key research question of the present study is to investigate user attitudes toward mobile services in a two-country context in order to investigate differences that may exist for U&G of mobile services. Although there might be no universal measurements of user activities, motivations, and cultural values that is applicable to different countries, this information is basic to understanding why certain mobile services are adopted in some countries and not in others. Shin (2008) and Kim, Lee, and Lee (2004) urged researchers to conduct cross-country studies to determine if U&G were universals or if they serve different functions in different societies. The innovative and global nature of mobile services has fostered many visions of comparative understanding among countries, although the research in this area is still at a very early, exploratory stage. As mobile services become more and more global, a cross-national comparison would be useful in providing practical implications for the industry for developing global markets. This comparative study can also be useful in academia by providing theoretical implications for the cross-cultural studies of technology adoption and usage.

The relational model of the antecedents and consequences of attitude toward mobile services is tested by a structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis. The SEM approach is adopted because this study vigorously tests the convergent, discriminant, and nomological validity of U&G constructs or the extent to which predictions of the model are verified. SEM as compared to multiple regression has advantages: inclusion of more flexible assumptions (particularly allowing interpretation even in the face of multicollinearity), use of confirmatory factor analysis to reduce measurement error by having multiple indicators per latent variable, the desirability of testing models overall rather than coefficients individually, the ability to test models with multiple dependents, and the ability to model mediating variables rather than be restricted to an additive model. Moreover, where regression is highly susceptible to error of interpretation by misspecification, the SEM strategy of comparing alternative models to assess relative model fit makes it more robust.

The study applies the attitude scales toward mobile service (Stafford & Gilleson, 2004) to recently developed mobile services. Consumers’ attitudes toward mobile services have been considered a key indicator of service effectiveness and consumers’ belief in mobile services (Tsang, Ho, & Liang, 2004), just as attitude to services has been supported as a key predictor of subscriptions in the literature (e.g., Laughlin, 2001). Thus, the explanatory effects of U&G can be generalized