



Exploring the influential factors in continuance usage of mobile social Apps: Satisfaction, habit, and customer value perspectives



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ABSTRACT

The emergence of mobile application software (App) has explosively grown in conjunction with the worldwide use of smartphones in recent years. Among numerous categories of mobile Apps, social Apps were one of those with the greatest growth in 2013. Despite abundant research on users' behavior intention of mobile App usage, few studies have focused on investigating key determinants of users' continuance intention regarding social Apps. To fill this gap, we integrated customer value perspectives to explore the influential factors in the continuance intention of social App use. Moreover, users' satisfaction and habit from both the marketing and psychology literature were also incorporated into the research model. A total of 378 valid questionnaires were collected by survey method, and structural equation modeling was employed in the subsequent data analysis. The results indicate that the continuance usage of social Apps is driven by users' satisfaction, tight connection with others, and hedonic motivation to use the Apps. In addition, full mediation effects of satisfaction and habit were found between perceived usefulness and intention to continue use. These findings extend our understanding of users' continuance intention in the context of social Apps. Discussion and implications are provided.

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1. Introduction

The social mobile Apps such as WhatsApp, WeChat and LINE are changing the way in which we communicate and maintain relationships with others. Most of these applications offer free messaging capabilities and are helpful for users to connect with their friends immediately. According to a recent survey by [Flurry Analytics \(2014\)](#), overall downloads of mobile Apps in 2013 had reached 115% year-over-year growth in 2013. Looking in more detail, the category of “utilities and productivity Apps” posted 150% year-over-year growth, whereas “messaging and social Apps” (i.e., social Apps) was up to 203%, the most dramatic growth in Apps in 2013.

With the rapid explosion of the release of new social Apps offering a wide variety of functions, some leading social Apps such as Facebook have shown a decline in use, especially among teenagers, mostly due to privacy issues. Alternative social Apps, such as Instagram and Line have been gradually gaining in popularity. Another example is the launch of FireChat, an anonymous and non-Internet-based messaging social Apps. It first became popular in 2014 in Iraq after government restrictions on Internet use ([Hern, 2015](#)), and thereafter successfully gained over 500,000 downloads during a political rally by the

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umbrella movement in Hong Kong (Meinecke, 2015). Unlike most social Apps, FireChat relies on peer-to-peer connections through wireless mesh networking via Bluetooth or Wi-Fi, making it an excellent communicating tool with a high degree of privacy.

With more developers launching new social Apps, users have plentiful opportunities to access them. How to retain existing users has become important for related industries such as mobile services; businesses can benefit from understanding how users develop continuance intention, and then efficiently provide new social Apps to meet users' needs. This also raises some issues for this study: Will users continue using the social Apps they are currently using? How satisfied are users with their currently used Apps? How will users habitually use the social Apps which they are using now? What are the major factors influencing users' post-acceptance usage of social Apps?

To answer the above research questions, this paper proposes a research framework of social App continuance intention based on Bhattacharjee's (2001) post-acceptance model of information system (IS) continuance. As such, satisfaction is adopted to explain users' continuance intention. In addition to satisfaction, we also apply a habitual construct "habit" in the proposed model, mainly because users access mobile social Apps frequently and daily; thus, social App users' behaviors may become habitual. Therefore, we adopt both satisfaction and habit as predictors of continuance intention (e.g., Kim et al., 2005; Limayem et al., 2007), and test their mediating effects. We also assume that continuance intention is influenced by consumer perceived values, which are generally considered as motivations of behavioral outcomes, such as customer satisfaction, behavioral usage intentions, and loyalty (Yang and Peterson, 2004). Note that three perspectives of perceived value are applied in the context of mobile social Apps, namely utilitarian, hedonic, and social views concerning the distinct nature of social Apps. The research framework is presented in Fig. 1.

The contributions of this study are threefold. First, we shift the focus from initial adoption to continued use of social Apps. Our proposed model differs from previous models by incorporating satisfaction and habit. Second, we identify three importance customer values in the context of using social Apps, and simultaneously test their effects on satisfaction, habit, and continuance intention. Third, the mediating effects of satisfaction and habit are tested and compared in the present study for the first time. In the following sections, we draw on the related literature to develop the conceptual model and a series of hypotheses.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses development

2.1. Overview of past research on mobile applications

Mobile Apps were originally offered for general utilitarian purposes, including emailing, calendars, and stock market and weather information. Due to public demand and the development of the availability of mobile technology, more functions were established, such as mobile games, banking, order-tracking, GPS, and location-based services. As such, the popularity and tremendous growth of smartphone usage has facilitated the research on the extensive adoption of new mobile applications. This study focuses on exploring social Apps' continued usage, as few researchers have worked on this issue (Lankton et al., 2012; Lee, 2014).

In the study of information systems and mobile technologies, the theory of reasoned action, the theory of planned behavior, the technology acceptance model (Davis, 1989), the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (Venkatesh et al., 2012), and the IS expectation–confirmation model (Bhattacharjee, 2001) have all been widely used to examine factors influencing user acceptance and continuance usage. However, in consideration of the distinct nature of mobile Apps, which are mostly freely downloaded, prior studies have proposed various extended models to explore the usage behavior of mobile App users. For example, Verkasalo et al. (2010) compared users and non-users' adoption of new mobile applications (e.g., mobile Internet use, games and the use of maps) and identified the significant variables (e.g., perceived enjoyment and usefulness) for both users and non-users. Islam et al. (2013) employed the technology acceptance model (TAM) and the diffusion of innovation model to investigate users' adoption of advanced mobile phone services (e.g., multimedia messages, location-based information, mobile gaming, mobile chatting, and so on). They concluded that perceived usefulness and compatibility are key factors for using advanced mobile phone services. Park et al. (2014) proposed an integrated model based on TAM to examine the satisfaction and usage intention of mobile social network games. The results indicated that perceived enjoyment, perceived usefulness, perceived mobility, and perceived control skill are motivational factors for players.

Mobile applications are usually divided into utilitarian (e.g., business scheduling, stock trading, online banking, etc.) and hedonic services (e.g., picture/music downloading, gaming, chatting, social networking, etc.). While some studies have explored the general content of mobile Apps in all categories, as mentioned above, others have distinguished these two mobile services (Kim and Hwang, 2012; Kim et al., 2014) or focused on a sole mobile App as an illustrative case study, such as mobile games (Park et al., 2014).

Although the above theories have provided considerable theoretical underpinnings to examine new IS adoption, few empirical investigations have been found concerning the adoption of social mobile Apps. Moreover, the above theories do not fully capture user continuance behavior regarding social App usage, which users frequently perform and which is likely to become habitual and automatic over time (Lankton et al., 2012). Consequently, there is a need to explore the satisfaction and continuance usage of social mobile Apps to provide a better understanding of users' post-adoption (i.e., continued usage) in the mobile Apps research. In addition, a past study has shown that users' intention is considered to be strongly correlated

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