



Why do people access news with mobile devices? Exploring the role of suitability perception and motives on mobile news use



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ABSTRACT

Using self-reported survey data ($N=281$), the present study explores the structural relationships among mobile users' perceptions of the suitability of two types of mobile news (political feature news and entertainment news), users' motivations for mobile news usage, and their behavioral patterns. Our findings show that two types of perceived suitability for mobile news, particularly for political feature news, are strongly associated with all dimensions of motivations for mobile news usage. Furthermore, as predicted, our findings show that the information-seeking motive is the very factor that determines mobile news usage. The results also reveal that the accessibility motive mediates the relationship between the perceived suitability of obtaining news via a mobile device and users' mobile news behavior. However, contrary to our expectation, the social utility motive does not mediate the relationship between users' perceptions of the suitability of mobile devices for this purpose and their mobile news usage. Finally, the information-seeking and accessibility motives each have an indirect effect on the association between perceived suitability and mobile news usage. The implications of the study and recommendations for future research are also discussed.

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1. Introduction

News content is among the most popular mobile content (Pew Research Center, 2013), because it is easy to circulate on a mobile device, and the smartphone interface greatly simplifies the process of accessing news. With new functionality in the current mobile environment, the LTE-enabled mobile device has expanded beyond a person-to-person conversational device to a media-rich platform for delivering news (Wei, 2008; Goggin et al., 2014). In fact, the number of mobile news apps downloaded by users has increased in many countries, including South Korea, even though newspaper reading has significantly decreased since the advent of the new millennium (Westlund and Bohlin, 2008). A recent report from the Pew Research Center (2012) confirms this phenomenon, showing that over half of smartphone users access news via their mobile phones.

Furthermore, as mobile news delivery services have become diversified, users have become increasingly able to select mobile news channels based on their specific preferences. For example, mobile users are able to easily access news content anywhere, anytime by visiting mobile news websites (i.e., mobile news apps) and/or logging into social networking services

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(SNSs) such as Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, and Metoday (Falaki et al., 2010). In fact, SNSs comprise a large segment of online news services in which users share, bookmark, and reproduce news content.

Given the aforementioned availability of news sources on mobile devices, how people use such sources has come to be influenced by diverse psychological factors. First, a number of previous studies have argued that news consumption behaviors are dictated by discrete motives for consuming news on mobile devices. In particular, uses and gratifications theory (U&G) explains that individuals' media usage behaviors are guided by specific needs and motives (Rubin, 2002, 2009). In addition to considering users' motives, the present study postulates that the perception of mobile devices' suitability for accessing news can also influence people's mobile news consuming behaviors by driving certain motives. In other words, if people perceive mobile devices as good tools for accessing certain types of news, then they are more likely to use them for that purpose, which in turn leads to specific usage patterns.

Thus, the present study aims to determine (1) how users' perceptions of the suitability of mobile devices for obtaining mobile news drives mobile users' motives, and (2) the particular types of motives associated with mobile-based consumption of different kinds of news. More specifically, this study considers two kinds of news—political feature news and entertainment news—and identifies the extent to which users perceive mobile devices as suitable for accessing these types of news. Furthermore, the study investigates how three motives – information utility, social utility, and accessibility – influence mobile news consumption patterns via mobile news apps and mobile social-networking services.

2. Literature review

2.1. Changes in news consumption behaviors with smartphones

The arrival of smartphones has changed the way in which people consume news media. Presently, it appears that many people, particularly those aged 18 to 34, are more likely to use smartphones to get their news than they are to use any other source (Pew Research Center, 2012). The rapid growth of mobile phones as a source of news has not only altered the way in which people consume news, however; it has also changed the landscape of news media content, as the news content of mobile devices (e.g., in mobile news apps) predominantly consists of soft news, particularly entertainment news (Kim, 2011).

Today's mobile interface offers a unique set of features – including a small touchscreen, limited data storage, and ubiquitous information access – all which have caused shifts in news production and consumption. For instance, users might prefer to read short articles on mobile devices due to the devices' small screen size and limited data storage, as well as the long loading times necessitated by content-rich articles. Therefore, in accordance with these limitations of mobile phones, news organizations might reorganize content in order to optimize it for a mobile phone interface by making it short. For these reasons, articles in mobile news apps tend to focus on celebrity or sports news, rather than news about politics or current events (Kim, 2011). Given the abundance of soft news featured on mobile news apps or mobile news websites, it can be speculated that people's news consumption behaviors via mobile phones differ from traditional news consumption behaviors. For example, they might have different perceptions about the suitability of particular types of news for mobile phones. In other words, as news organizations produce and place entertainment-oriented content on mobile news websites, users might become more likely to perceive mobile devices as suitable for consuming soft news.

Furthermore, due to the accessibility of mobile devices, SNSs have become primary sources of news. SNSs provide new opportunities for users to interact with the news: for example, users can choose the news articles to post on their SNSs, thereby increasing the users' sense of agency. At the same time, SNS users are more likely to be exposed to a series of randomly-selected news articles posted by others. Thus, on SNSs, users are exposed to multiple layers of sources (the person who posted the article; the medium itself – e.g., Facebook; and the original news source), which may result in the drowning out of the authoritative voice of the original news source. More importantly, it is assumed that news consumption via SNSs can be guided by more diversified motives such as accessibility or information-seeking, rather than merely by social utility, which has been found to be a primary motivation for using SNSs.

As such, an increase in the use of mobile devices as a means of accessing news has changed people's news consumption behaviors in that the devices offer a wide range of possibilities for accessing news. Therefore, at this point, it is necessary to understand how mobile devices influence our perceptions and the manner in which we consume news. Taken together, this study helps elucidate the factors driving changes in news consumption behaviors on mobile devices.

2.2. Perceived suitability for accessing mobile news

A number of psychologists have investigated the relationships among perceptions, motives, and behavioral patterns by arguing that an individual's perception (or recognition) of his or her desires or needs drives the motive to obtain gratification; then, the motive stimulates the individual's behavior (Fernando et al., 2013; Steers and Porter, 1991; Wicklund and Gollwitzer, 1982). For example, (extended) technology acceptance model (TAM) studies have been conducted to analyze the relationship between behavior and perceptions associated with the motives of information technology users by investigating how perceptions associated with motives influence behavior across the many information technologies and contexts (King and He, 2006). Consumer behavior is another important area of study, with research shedding light on the cognitive

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