



When lifestyle becomes behavior: A closer look at the situational context of mobile communication



Veronika Karnowski ^{a,*}, Olaf Jandura ^{b,1}

^a Institut für Kommunikationswissenschaft, und Medienforschung, LMU München, Oettingenstr., 67, 80538 München, Germany

^b Kommunikations- und Medienwissenschaft, Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, Universitätsstr. 1, 40225 Düsseldorf, Germany

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ABSTRACT

The web is going mobile, and the scope of mobile communication is widening tremendously, thus paving the way for a wide array of new forms of mobile device use. However, not every user is necessarily all the time taking advantage of the expanded affordances of mobile devices. Texting and phoning are still the predominant services in mobile communication. Previous research has argued that different styles of mobile communication are related to different user lifestyles. Thus, a remapping and matching of the landscape of mobile communication in relation to user lifestyles seems necessary. In this paper, we take one step back and first consider the instances in which lifestyles become behavior; i.e. actual usage situations of mobile communication. We outline three empirically deduced types of mobile communication usage situations, as well as three types of mobile web usage situations, to shed light on the instant at which lifestyle becomes behavior; i.e. at which specific usage situations of mobile communication actually occur.

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1. Introduction

The web is going mobile—a trend which cannot be denied any longer. The scope of mobile communication has widened tremendously, thus paving the way for a wide array of new forms of use. However, not every user is necessarily taking advantage of these expanded possibilities of mobile phone use. Texting and phoning are still the predominant services in mobile communication (e.g. Boase and Ling, 2011). Previous researchers have argued that different styles of mobile communication are related to the different lifestyles of users (e.g. Bouwmann et al., 2012). Thus a remapping and matching of the landscape of mobile communication in relation to user lifestyles seems necessary.

In this paper, we take a step back and first consider instances in which lifestyle patterns become communication behaviors; i.e. we examine actual usage patterns of mobile communication and their specific contexts. On the one hand, research in the tradition of communication studies has been mostly blind to the situational contexts of new media usage; on the other hand, research in information systems and computing has integrated context factors, but not precisely at the situational level, and mostly from the viewpoint of technical artifacts rather than user standpoints. We would like to help close this gap by integrating situational context factors in a user-centered analysis of mobile communication behavior. In this first step we outline a classification of mobile communication usage situations based on situational contexts, and examine differences among the services used in relation to these situational contexts.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +49 89 2180 9495; fax: +49 89 2180 9429.

E-mail addresses: karnowski@ifkw.lmu.de (V. Karnowski), jandura@phil-fak.uni-duesseldorf.de (O. Jandura).

¹ Tel.: +49 211 81 10660; fax: +49 211 81 15212.

2. Situational contexts and usage of new media services

Researchers commonly refer to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB; [Ajzen, 1985](#)) or various permutations thereof, to explain the adoption and usage of new media services (e.g. see [Bouwman et al., 2007](#); [Wang et al., 2008](#)).

The TPB ([Ajzen, 1985](#)) developed as an offshoot of the Theory of Reasoned Action ([Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975](#)), which takes into account the influence of social norms on the adoption decision. According to the TPB, behavior is influenced not only by attitudes towards the behavior in question, but also by subjective norms and perceived behavioral control.

Attitudes towards a behavior consist of two interacting components: an individual's expectations regarding the consequences of the behavior in question, and his/her positive or negative evaluations of these consequences. Subjective norms refer to the pressure exerted by the social surroundings of an individual, which influence the individual to execute or not to execute the behavior in question. Social norms also consist of two components: the individual's appraisal of what behavior is expected by his/her peers, and his/her evaluation of these expectations. Perceived behavioral control refers to the extent to which an individual feels able to execute his/her behavior; it consists of both situational and internal dimensions. The situational dimension describes the extent to which an individual objectively can execute a given behavior, while the internal dimension refers to whether the individual subjectively feels that he/she is able to execute the behavior (see [Ajzen, 2005](#)).

The most prominent extensions of TPB in the field of new media include the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM; [Davis, 1989](#)), the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT; [Venkatesh et al., 2003](#)), and the Mobile Phone Appropriation model (MPA-model; [Wirth et al., 2008](#)). These theories elaborate on the TPB in terms of differentiating both the factors that influence new media behaviors (TAM, UTAUT, MPA-model) and the actual forms of the new media behaviors (MPA-model). However, these theories have one prominent shortcoming: they do not include situational contexts. This limitation becomes especially poignant when analyzing mobile communication. As mobile services are ubiquitous, the situations that are involved, and their respective requirements, are virtually unlimited.

Situational contexts of usage must, therefore, be integrated into our analysis. The information systems literature has discussed similar factors for over a decade, although they have generally been labeled as context factors. As early as [Kristoffersen and Ljungberg \(1999\)](#) pointed out that the use context of mobile handsets in work life varies widely across different professions. Similarly, [Perry et al. \(2001\)](#) noted the influence of social and infrastructural factors on mobile computing. In subsequent years, several studies in the field of information systems drew upon context factors when analyzing the adoption and intended usage of various innovations, clearly stating the impact of these context factors on adoption and usage patterns (e.g. [Mallat et al., 2009](#); [Bouwman et al., 2012](#); [Turner et al., 2008](#); [van de Wijngaert and Bouwman, 2009](#)). However, these studies did not focus on the usage situation per se, but were still operating under the assumptions of mixed and/or broader levels of analysis.

The analysis of single usage situations requires that we probe deeper, and ask what exactly constitutes a single usage situation. [Belk \(1975\)](#) defined the environment of consumer behavior on the basis of five categories: physical, social, temporal, task, and antecedent states. While not completely based on a specific situation, these categories provide us with insights into relevant dimensions of situational contexts; i.e. physical and social. Similarly, [Lee et al. \(2005\)](#) and [Vartiainen \(2006\)](#) split situational contexts into physical and social (human) factors. The situational model of [Zhang and Zhang \(2012\)](#) follows similar lines, but focuses on media behaviors. Zhang and Zhang's model distinguishes between two interdependent factors influencing new media behaviors: personal psychologies on the one hand, and location-related conditions on the other (see [Fig. 1](#)). Personal psychologies are conceptualized alike gratifications sought, as in the Uses and Gratifications Approach (see [Katz et al., 1974](#); [Palmgreen and Rayburn, 1985](#)). Regarding location-related conditions, Zhang and Zhang differentiate

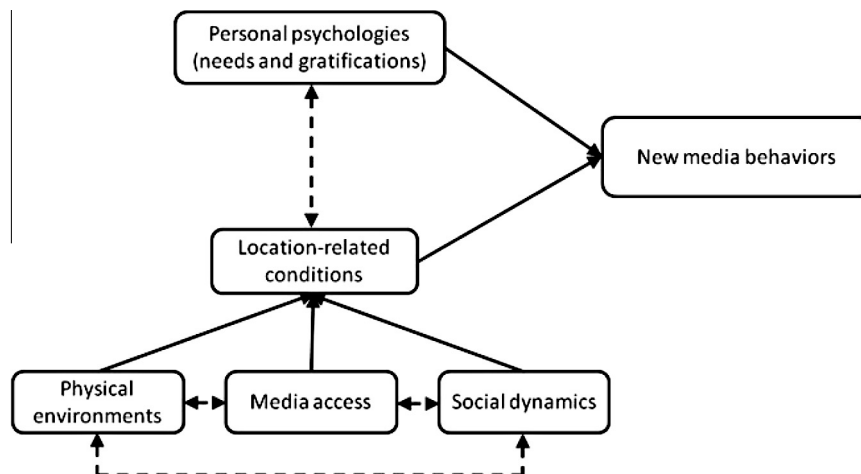


Fig. 1. The integrated model of computer multitasking ([Zhang and Zhang, 2012, p. 1886](#)).

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