



Full length article

Playfulness in mobile instant messaging: Examining the influence of emoticons and text messaging on social interaction

Sara H. Hsieh ^a, Timmy H. Tseng ^{b,*}^a Department of Business Administration, Tunghai University, Taiwan^b Department of Information Management, National Changhua University of Education, Taiwan

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 17 October 2016

Received in revised form

16 December 2016

Accepted 21 December 2016

Available online 22 December 2016

Keywords:

Text messaging

Emoticons

Perceived playfulness

Social interaction

Mobile instant messaging

ABSTRACT

Mobile instant messaging is the communication technology revolution that is changing the way people communicate. The adoption rate is surging and the massive growth is experienced worldwide. Prior studies on instant messaging have been primarily concerned with its task-relevant or functional aspects, while less attention is paid to social interaction aspects. Drawing from media richness theory, present research highlights that social interaction factors can be facilitated by an enriched communication channel to create closer interpersonal social relationships. Specifically, the findings illustrate that the combined effect of text messaging and emoticon use increases information richness, which leads to perceived playfulness in mobile instant messaging. In addition, the perceived playfulness fostered in the instant messaging process plays a driving role in facilitating social connectedness, identity expressiveness between users and advocacy of mobile instant messaging usage.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Mobile instant messaging is a type of online chat app that offers real-time text transmission over the internet. Because of its low-cost or free chat service, mobile instant messaging has proven to be an inexpensive alternative that is a more superior substitute to operator-based text messaging via SMS. Many messenger apps offer features such as group chat, graphics exchange, video and audio messages as well as stickers or emoticons. WhatsApp is one of the most popular mobile social apps worldwide with reach particularly strong in markets outside the United States. In February 2014, the social network Facebook acquired the mobile app for 19 billion U.S. dollars. Mobile instant messaging, which provides ubiquitous online chat capability over the Internet, has become a prevalent mode of online communication that is changing how we communicate. The adoption of mobile instant messaging has undergone massive growth in recent years. By August 2014, WhatsApp had more than 600 million monthly active users, which represents a global mobile Internet user penetration rate of 24%. However, by April 2016, the number of users had substantially increased, as it has nearly 1

billion individuals actively using WhatsApp worldwide each month (Statista, 2016). Other mobile instant messaging applications are also gaining widespread acceptance. For example, Facebook Messenger has 900 million monthly active users, WeChat has 697 million monthly active users. Line which was initially established in response to the damaged telecommunications infrastructure in Japan after the 2011 earthquake, has also evolved into a widely prevalent social platform with 215 million monthly active users (Statista, 2016). According to a report by QuestMobile, the most popular activity of smartphone users in China is instant messaging, which accounts for more than one-third of the time such users spend on their smartphones. Online video is the second-most popular activity, consuming less than half the time that Chinese smartphone users spend on instant messaging (eMarketer, 2016). What are the factors behind the wide adoption of mobile instant messaging? Despite the pervasive use of mobile instant messaging worldwide, our understanding of the underlying factors that drive user stickiness of mobile instant messaging, which has transformed how we engage in social interaction, is far from comprehensive.

Prior studies on instant messaging have been primarily concerned with its task-relevant or functional aspects, such as the effect of usefulness on adoption (de Vos, Hofte, & de Poot, 2004) how workers adopt instant messaging in organizational situations (Isaacs, Walendowski, Whittaker, Schiano, & Kamm, 2002; Nardi, Whittaker, & Bradner, 2000), the loss of productivity that may

* Corresponding author. Department of Information Management, National Changhua University of Education, 500 Shi-Da Road, No.2, Changhua, Taiwan.

E-mail addresses: hhsieh@thu.edu.tw (S.H. Hsieh), timmytseng@gmail.com (T.H. Tseng).

occur as a result of instant messaging interruptions and distractions (Thatcher, Wretschko, & Fridjhon, 2008), the use of instant messaging and communicative workload (Brodt, DeSanctis & Emery, 2002) and network security compromises (Swartz, 2005). However, despite the numerous studies on instant messaging, there is a lack of research that addresses the critical issue of how mobile instant messaging influences social interaction. Prior research in instant messaging has discussed how friends communicate and how friendship can be enhanced (Huang & Yen, 2003). However, the effect of perceived playfulness between instant messaging communication users has seldom been carefully investigated.

Playfulness, which may play a fundamental part of human social relationships, receives relatively less attention in the mobile communications literature. Playfulness is the essence of play (Bundy, 1993). Typically associated with children, playfulness is related to creativity, sense of humor, curiosity, pleasure and spontaneity (Guitard, Ferland, & Dutil, 2005). Although adult playfulness is seldom discussed, this fact does not indicate that playfulness does not occur among adults. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is generally perceived as a relatively more work-related medium because it does not involve facial expressions and non-verbal cues. However, with the help of emoticons, CMC has developed into a playful medium (Danet, Ruedenberg-Wright, & Rosenbaum-Tamari, 1997). Emoticons, which are images used to express emotion, enable individuals to enliven online conversation by displaying emotion and humor, which adds to the amusement and playfulness experienced by users. The literature indicates that engagement in play produces positive affect, such as happiness, joy, excitement and laughter, which reduces everyday stress and offers a temporary escape from routine (Barnett, 1991; Hurwitz, 2002). Additionally, play between friends has been shown to enhance a relationship's emotional capital (Van vleet & Feeney, 2015). Thus, it is likely that on an online platform perceived playfulness in mobile instant messaging can strengthen the connections of friendship. Therefore, we propose that perceived playfulness plays a crucial role that drives the stickiness of mobile instant messaging and the consequent social connectedness between users.

The objective of this study is to shed light on this important topic by examining the significance of perceived playfulness in mobile instant messaging and its effect on social interaction. Mobile instant messaging, which enables users to communicate and interact with their friends using text messaging and emoticons, may be the key driver that facilitates the experience of perceived playfulness in the process of interaction. According to media richness theory, communication channels capable of delivering multiple cues can provide media richness, which facilitates communication effectiveness (Daft & Lengel, 1984). It is likely that the combined effects of text messaging and emoticon use create media richness, which facilitates the perceived playfulness in the social interaction of mobile instant messaging users. Thus, drawing on media richness theory, we propose a conceptual model that elucidates how perceived playfulness is made manifest through the combined effect of text message and emoticon use to enhance social relationships. Moreover, in addition to facilitating social connectedness, the playfulness triggered by using mobile instant messaging may also encourage users to more freely express themselves. Thus, the positive effect of perceived playfulness on user identity expression and word-of-mouth intention in mobile instant messaging is also examined in the proposed framework.

2. Theoretical foundations and hypotheses

2.1. Media richness theory

According to media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1984),

communication channels differ with respect to the amount of information that they can convey. Media richness describes a communication channel's capabilities to deliver messages with rich information. The theory postulates that four factors determine a communication channel's capacity for information richness: (1) the ability of the communication channel to convey multiple cues, such as facial expression, body gesture and vocal inflection; (2) instantaneous feedback, such as the immediacy of response to a query; (3) language variety, such as adopting various language symbols; (4) the ability of the communication channel to convey personalization, such as displaying personal emotions (Daft & Lengel, 1984). For effective communication, messages must be communicated on channels that exhibit adequate and appropriate media richness capacities (Purdy, Nye, & Balakrishnan, 2000). Communication channels, such as e-mail, the telephone and instant messaging, exhibit varied attributes with differing richness capacities. Generally, computer-mediated communication lacks nonverbal cues, which limits the range of information exchange and creates distance among users. For instance, e-mail primarily transmits messages using text. Therefore, non-verbal content is lacking. Communication channels that can provide verbal and nonverbal cues are considered to exhibit high information richness.

Although mobile instant messaging resembles other computer-mediated communication, such as email, in its text transmission feature, it has a unique feature that allows users to express emotions and facial expressions using emoticons. Thus, instant messaging, which enables users to send verbal and nonverbal cues through text messages and emoticons, is considered to provide enriched information richness in the online communication process. A number of studies have adopted media richness theory in their investigations of the online environment (Brunelle, 2009; Lai & Chang, 2011; Oh et al., 2009; Pollach, 2008). Past research indicates that the information richness of online stores facilitates the process of the shopping task in a manner that makes online shopping more interesting. Thus, enhancing the information richness of the online channel facilitates the enjoyable, playful shopping experience (Oh et al., 2009). Therefore, media richness theory is adopted in this research to provide theoretical insight into the adoption of text messaging and emoticon use in social interactions and their effect on playfulness in mobile instant messaging.

2.2. Text messaging use and perceived playfulness

Mobile instant messaging enables users to chat ubiquitously online by the use of text-messaging, thus making such messaging closely weaved across the fabric of people's everyday lives. Five features of instant messaging contribute to its popularity: presence awareness, within-medium polychromic communication, "pop-up" receiver notification, quiet interactivity, and fleeting transcripts (Rennecker & Godwin, 2003). Individual can set up a chat room function, which enables individuals to chat in groups of individuals while enabling text message transmissions to be exchanged among multiple users simultaneously. Compared with other communication technologies, the features of instant messaging are more similar to face-to-face communication. Mobile instant messaging has a short transmission time and provides the experience of immediate interaction, thus making it a near synchronous one-on-one CMC (Nardi et al., 2000). The synchronicity instills a sense of co-presence, particularly with tasks that require rapid interactions, such as clarifying quick appointments, initiating impromptu social gatherings, and maintaining close contact with friends (Nardi et al., 2000). The instantaneous exchange of text messages back and forth, creates a sense of being present together among the communicators, although the co-presence is temporal instead of spatial.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4937649>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4937649>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)