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Chapter 11

Smartphones: Resource Dimensions and Uses

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the adoption of technologies is crucial for researchers and practitioners, as identifying key factors helps to predict and explain users' attitude towards adopting or rejecting technology. However, as smartphones are well-diffused technologies, there is contention that research efforts shift to understanding their usage comprehensively. As personal technologies that users make meaning of, smartphone usage is assumed to be more comprehensive than that of previous generation mobile phones. This chapter examines how the usage of smartphones is redefining and increasingly adding value to consumer consumption processes.

INTRODUCTION

The continually evolving usage of smartphones suggests that they are both consumer and prosumer devices used for both personal and business purposes. Individuals pursue goals with their smartphones and construct meaning regarding their devices, hence the smartphone as an extension of self (Arbore, Graziani, & Venturini, 2014; Jung, 2014). However, while a significant body of work informs on the personal use of smartphones globally, the business orientation of smartphone use is lacking from an individualistic standpoint. Value and use are complementaries; perception of smartphone value influences adoption and experiential value is resultant of usage. The proliferation of smartphones comes with dependency, as people increasingly hinge on smartphones for varying reasons. One of such reasons appears to be the ability of the smartphone to serve as a business administration resource, wherein it is used to mediate business activities and processes.

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This occurrence is evident in the United Kingdom (UK). A 2013 study reports that 85 per cent of the adult population would not leave home without smartphones; and smartphone penetration is projected to be at 90 per cent of the population by 2020 (Deloitte, 2017; Google Confidential and Proprietary, 2013). Another recent nationwide study by the country's telecom regulator, Ofcom (2016), which aimed to investigate how heavy reliance on a smartphone could affect digital behaviour and media literacy, found interestingly that micro-business owners choose to use the smartphone to run their businesses. This suggests that the business use of smartphones transcends the organisational context in which it has been predominantly studied. Considering the rising trend of entrepreneurialism in the country, as a result of people valuing autonomy and creativity over linear career progressions, rather than a response to a recent recession or a waning job market (Yoshioka, 2016), it is surprising that smartphones are still generally viewed as technological products users consume, rather than resources used to facilitate business administration. In fact, there is a consensus amongst market experts that smartphone use for leisure and enjoyment is likely to exceed its use for productivity purposes (Yang & Kim, 2012). The adoption of workflow apps, when compared to communication apps, was found to be modest among UK workers in a recent survey (Deloitte, 2017).

To advance understanding with respect to the usage and the resource dimension of smartphones in the *adoption of technologies context*, this enquiry utilises the concept of the business actor. In the context of this study, business actors are individuals involved in business activities who use their smartphones actively for business administration. Hence their use is assumed to be different from both the broad consumer archetype and business users within the enterprise. Research shows that these users are likely to be 'digital daters' (Forbes, 2010); i.e. they own and use more than one mobile device. It is of theoretical importance to gain more insights into the deployment of smartphones specifically for business purposes. The variety of technological platforms, multiple operating systems and therefore different application designs are the most significant drawbacks to ensuring the future success of m-business (Burger, 2007). In the case of these business actors, what rationales guide the use of a smartphone for business purposes? What impedes smartphone usage in this context? What unique values does smartphone use offer in this context? What influences the preference of smartphones amongst other available mobile devices?

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Physically, the smartphone is a technological convergence that can be understood objectively through device specifications; the effect of human interaction facilitates values that are intrinsic and individualistic. The subjective view of smartphones regards them as an extension of self (Arbore *et al.*, 2014; Jung, 2014). Analysis of the definitions provided by publications since 2007, when the iPhone changed the paradigm of the platform (Sarwar & Rahim Soomro, 2013), indicates that smartphones are defined by what they are physically, and the potential and implications of their application through human interaction.

There is agreement that smartphones are mobile devices: a categorisation of mobile technologies (which include a network infrastructure that facilitates connectivity) and Information Systems (IS) scholars have contended that smartphone technology deserves investigation in its own right (Chen & Park, 2007; Y. M. Kang, Lee, & Lee, 2014); yet the term lacks a standard definition in the literature (Kim, Chun, & Lee, 2014). Cumulatively, smartphone definitions include 'technicality', 'socio-technicality', or 'contradiction'-oriented approaches within two broad perspectives of 'user/personal/consumer' and 'business/enterprise' vantage points.

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