Chapter 6
Like, Share, Recommend:
Smartphones as a Self-Broadcast and Self-Promotion Medium of College Students

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the authors examine the use of smart phones for self-broadcasting among college students based on motivation and network externalities theories. The authors propose that smartphones have changed telephones from a point-to-point interpersonal medium to a broadcast medium for individuals to disseminate information to their networks through the use of social media. The authors hypothesized that the more friends and followers a student has on Facebook and Twitter respectively, the more likely the student will use friends and followers as self-broadcasting mediums from their smartphones. The hypothesis was supported based on survey data collected at a public university. The study also discusses the social implications of using smartphones as a broadcast and self-promotion medium.

INTRODUCTION

On October 20th, 2011, U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton read a message on her aide Huma Abedin's Blackberry of what was described as an unconfirmed report of Moammar Gaddafi's capture in the outskirts of Sirte in Libya ("Hilary Clinton reacts," 2011). Clinton was immediately able to access the news remotely via smartphone. This example illustrates the importance of smartphones today as a news medium. We can see that mobile technology today is widely used around the world and in different cultures (Khattab & Love, 2008) transforming the way people live (Kaba & Osei-Bryson, 2012). In some developing countries, there are more cell phones than landlines, since cell phones are easier to obtain and cheaper to use compared to landlines. In the United States cell phones and smartphones provide not only quick access to friends, family, and business partners, but also provide the convenience and the capability to share news stories, images, and real time updates with friends, family, and acquaintances near and far. Cell phones and smartphones help individuals

and groups shrink the time and space separating nations and time zones (Khattab & Love, 2008).

Mobile phones not only allow people to receive information and entertainment anywhere, they also facilitate the sharing and dissemination of content among friends through social networking sites. It is therefore important to realize and understand the self-broadcasting power of smartphones from an information management standpoint. Previous studies have suggested the importance of information management and the role that smartphones play in managing information on-the-go (Cousins & Robey, 2005; Edenius & Rämö, 2011; Kakihara, Sørensen & Wiberg, 2002; Wiredu, 2007). Research also suggests that social networking sites are the top destinations for mobile phone users (Li & Chen, 2009; Johnston, 2009). From an information management point of view, smartphones have become important tools for managing oneself and one's identity. The benefit of realizing the power of smartphones as an information management tool is the ability to recognize that these technologies serve as virtual nodes to which we connect. Edenius & Rämö (2011) agreed that "smartphones can be seen as such nodes, creating virtual sites as a form of remedy against possible feelings of estrangement…" (p. 51). Self-broadcasting through smartphones is therefore a way to connect to one's network from various virtual nodes (smartphones). For end users such as teenagers, the ability to self-broadcast means being able to manage and broadcast from their current location to their friends and family in other locations. For corporations and businesses, the ability to instantly access information from smart phone users has become imperative to success in a digital age (Maximilien, 2008). The self-broadcasting power of smartphones should also make us realize that these Web 2.0 devices are enabling consumers to connect, engage, collaborate, and share, displacing and altering the influence that marketers have over consumers (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011). End users such as college students have essentially become active co-creators of media content, and thus are able to exert influence on corporations and businesses through digital activities such as referring a product to their friends on Facebook or Twitter.

There are a number of studies that discuss location-based technologies including smartphones and self-broadcasting (Costa, Benevenuto & Merschmann, 2013; Humphreys, 2008, 2011; Li & Chen, 2009; Marwick & Boyd, 2010, 2011). Other studies have discussed self-presentation specifically on social networks (DiMicco & Millen, 2007; Mehdizadeh, 2010; Young, 2011). There are also studies that have hypothesized the relationship between Facebook friends and social well-being (Kim & Lee, 2011). Past studies have also used the number of Facebook friends as part of an index of Facebook use to examine social capital and Facebook use (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009). While past studies have discussed location-based technologies, self-broadcasting, and social capital and their relation to Facebook friends, what is underdeveloped and somewhat disregarded is the role that smartphones play specifically with self-broadcasting in relation to the number of friends that one has on Facebook, Twitter, or other social networks. Some scholars have examined the uses of smartphones (Chen, Harper & Yesilada, 2011; Repo, Hyvonen, Pantzar, & Timonen, 2006; Young, 2011) or discussed the motivations associated with social network use (Ross et al., 2009). Though Tong, Van der Heide and Langwell (2008) have explored the relationship between the number of friends and interpersonal impressions on Facebook, the results of their study suggest that a greater number of friend connections raises uncertainties about the Facebook user's desirability and popularity. In addition, The Nielsen Company's *Social Media Report* suggests that more people are increasingly using smartphones and tablets to access social media. Time spent using mobile applications accounts for 63% of yearly growth in overall time spent using social media, with each young person between the age of 18-24 spending just over 10

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