

# Mobile Screen Media Practices in Korea

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## INTRODUCTION

Along with the rapid development and adaptation of digital technology, mobile technology emerged as the center of the new techno-culture of contemporary society. This article uses the term, 'mobile technology' to designate the technology that has generated such devices as mobile phone, PDA, PSP, PMP and tablet PCs etc., which employ the 'mobility' as the predominant mode of mechanism whether its central function is a telecommunication, a gaming or computing. Not only they expand the horizon of personal communication, but also they introduce a new stage of screen media experience through the various adaptations of multimedia services on hand-held devices. While mobile phone is the central example which has realized the potential of mobile technology as a screen medium with the incorporation of digitally-enabled wireless internet as Smartphone represents, other types of mobile technology have also been under experiments that transform them into the convergent screen media.

The novelty of mobile screen technology, however, cannot be adequately explained without considering its continuity and discontinuity with the preexisting logic of audio-visual culture and the culturally specific use of its new technology. In that regards, this article aims to highlight researches that concern with the issue of 'practices' of cultural use of mobile technology, in the particular context of Korea, which refers to Republic of Korea (a.k.a. South Korea). Following the intellectual history of the given topic, this article will contribute to understanding techno-social situations of mobile screen media practices in Korea.

## OVERVIEW

Since the Electronics and Telecommunications Research Institute (ETRI) and the consortium of corporations launched the world's first commercial CDMA mobile phone service in 1996, Korea has been a step ahead in exploring CDMA-based technological innovations and the latest mobile media services including mobile TV (DMB: Digital Multimedia Broadcasting) and Wibro (the first wireless high-speed broadband). In fact, Korean mobile carriers are known for their quick and innovative adaptation of/experiments with diverse content services and savvy business strategies to operate the most segmented markets customized for various age groups (McClelland, 2004).

While the Korean innovation and uptake of information technologies has drawn academic and popular interest, most in-depth analyses concern technological innovation, macro policy and industry models of information technologies' implemented in Korea. The majority of early studies on mobile phone practices in Korea have mainly focused on the relations between mobile phone technology and social changes particularly in terms of the transformation of interpersonal communication, from a communication studies perspective. However, as mobile phones have evolved into convergent media with the continuous technological development, playing a central role in the personal screen media environment, more ethnography or cultural studies based research studies have increased in order to examine the significance of diverse practice of multimedia features of mobile screens. Dr. Sindong Kim (Kim, S, 2002; 2003; 2005) at Hanlim Univer-

sity (Korea) and Dr. Dong-Hoo Lee (Lee, 2005; 2012) at Incheon University (Korea), are among the earliest examining the topic. Dr. Larissa Hjorth (Hjorth, 2006; 2007; 2008) at University of Sydney, Dr. HyeRyoung Ok (Ok, 2008; 2010; 2011) at University of Oregon, Dr. Dal Yong Jin (Jin 2008; 2013) at Simon Fraser University, and Dr. Florence Chee (Chee, 2006; 2014) at Loyola University, Chicago are among the leading experts in this area.

## **CURRENT SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE IN MOBILE SCREEN PRACTICES IN KOREA**

### **Mobile Phone Communication**

Most discussions in the early days of the mobile media technology focused on the mobile phone's distinctive cultural identity and the significance for the transformation in Korean society (Kim, J., 2005) Dr. Shindong Kim (Kim, S., 2002; 2003; 2005; 2007) is among the earliest leading the research about the impact of mobile phone technology on the social changes in Korea from communication studies perspective. In his study about the early uptake of mobile phone technology, Dr. Kim provides findings on the changed everyday practices of interpersonal communications with the use of mobile phone and the emerging patterns of 'personal' communication both in domestic and public space (Kim, S., 2002).

One of the most significant changes that follow the transformation and the expansion of informational and relational communication with the mobile phone use is the development of the alternative communication channel for public participation. Dr. Kim's assessment of the crucial role of the mobile phone and Internet in 2002 presidential election represents the increasing interest in the potential of mobile phone as a new communication medium for political activism. Dr. Kim investigates unexpected success of mobile phone based campaign on the side of the president

candidate Roh Moo Hyun and reveals that not only mobile phone was used for exchanging political information and discussion that often challenged the discourse on the mainstream media but also contributed to the mobilization and participation of young people. His analysis parallels with other research findings that show new media have significantly changed how young people engage with the political or civic issues and thus emerge as new political agents. The 2002 presidential election was the moment that demonstrated the power of new media to empower the young generation in Korean society as the young people was able to construct "a meaningful political solidarity that dare to express progressive ideas and publicly support a presidential candidate of their own choice via internet connection, cyber community and mobile text message." (Kim, S., 2003)

Other subsequent researches have reiterated and also complemented the general traits of mobile phone use in Korea that Dr. Kim discusses with more diverse empirical findings. One of the shared tendencies among these researches is the continuous focus on young people not only as active users of the mobile technology but as agents of the new mobile media culture. In general, young people's quick adoption of mobile phones was interpreted as reflecting their increasing desire to sustain individualism against the traditionally collectivist Korean culture: young people prefer the mobile phone because it allows informal, personal, and unregulated communication (Kwon & Choi, 2003). However, Korean youth also demonstrated the predominant "relation-oriented" usage pattern, which characterizes the localized practice of mobile phone use and challenges the general assumption that the mobile phone is an individualistic technology (Yoon, 2003; 2006)

### **Text Messaging and Youth Mobile Phone Culture**

Early global youth mobile phone studies have showed that youth mobile phone culture, which is centered on the use of text message and play

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