Chapter 48
Mobile Internet in Portugal: Adoption Patterns and User Experiences

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary society, Internet services and phones are blending into a mobile device frequently called smartphone. As a consequence, mobile Internet is having an exponential growth and new practices of mobile social networking and mobile communication are emerging, as these devices make it easier to maintain networks of relationships. Resulting from this convergence, contemporary mobile user experience also contributes to the blending of local and global through the permanent dynamic articulation of communication and coordination. This chapter deals with the emerging adoption drivers of mobile Internet and the behaviors of use that characterized it, highlighting the importance of mobility for online activities and the industry's and user's perspective of this technology adoption, patterns of use, motivating factors, and type of activities performed online. The authors' main hypotheses argue that the nature of social interactions allowed by m-Internet is a key adoption driver and that, as consequence, social activities are integrative and relevant parts of m-Internet service. Moreover, The authors discuss that the type of access has an influence on the type of activities undertaken online, arguing that mobile access facilitates interaction and participation and supports more collective-based activities.

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INTRODUCTION

The effects of technological mediation on human interaction have always been one of the concerns for researchers within the field of human-computer interaction (HCI). The work of Barry Wellman (1999) on online communities and of Howard Rheingold (2002) on mobile phone mediated communication and coordination are examples of these early efforts. Nowadays, as the Internet is accessible through a multiplicity of mobile devices (some of them still classified as phones although their functions largely exceed those of a phone), an articulation is needed between research on online communities and mobile communication.

One of the main differences between online and offline communities is that the first are not subjected to the limitations of time and space as the latter. As a consequence, geographical proximity is not determinant of online communities, whose members are free to aggregate according to common interests, regardless of temporal or spacial restrictions. However, distance still plays a role on online communities, as mediated communication is not as rich as face-to-face communication. As for mobile phone mediated communication, the first findings pointed to an increase in connectivity but only within small networks of close relationships, as well as to the coordination of activities as one of its main uses.

As the Internet and mobile phones blend in contemporary mobile devices, emergent practices of mobile social networking and mobile communication point to an articulation of these findings. On the one hand, these devices make it easier to maintain and expand peripheral networks of relationships, promoting cross-cultural communication and contributing to a sense of living in a global village. On the other hand, users also find these devices extremely useful to coordinate with those who are geographically close, thus reinforcing small networks of close relationships. Resulting from the convergence of the Internet and the mobile phone, contemporary mobile user experience (UX) also contributes to the blending of local and global through the permanent dynamic articulation of communication and coordination.

This chapter approaches mobile Internet adoption patterns and analyzes the interdependencies between the socio-economic environment surrounding technology deployment and personal interactions and activities undertaken via this type of technology. The problem we address deals with the emerging adoption drivers of mobile internet and the behaviors of use that characterize it, questioning the value of mobility for online activities and the relationship between the industry's and users' perspective of a particular technology adoption, patterns of use and motivating factors.

Our research provides data about both macro and micro level of analysis, exploring the industry's standpoint and users' perspective of the problem posed. Our hypotheses argue that the nature of social interactions allowed by mobile Internet is a key adoption driver and that, as a consequence, social activities are an integrative and relevant part of mobile Internet service. Moreover, our hypotheses posit that the type of access and the determinants thereof have an influence on the type of activities undertaken online, arguing that mobile access facilitates more interactive and participative activities and supports more collective-based activities.

Thus, this chapter presents the results from two complementary studies performed with users and with mobile industry stakeholders, focusing specifically on the results from the study with the users as it approaches in a deeper way mobile user experiences and analysis patterns of use and activities performed online via mobile technologies. Both studies are complementary, though the first is based on a set of interviews performed with the main stakeholders of mobile industry using more qualitative techniques of analysis and approaching the market's perspective of mobile technology adoption drivers. On the other hand, the second study is based on a quantitative inquiry on mobile Internet use and drivers of adoption,