

ACCEPTANCE OF SMS TEXT INFORMATION USAGE AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Short Message Service (SMS) Text Messaging has become popular as mobile devices increased tremendously in recent years. The modes of communication in modern society have been redefined. Hence, this study was conducted to investigate and explore the usage of SMS text messaging as a notification service for reaching young adult students in a college environment. The questionnaire survey on INTI College students indicated a high acceptance of SMS usage and the preference of notification types or services. A few factors in SMS acceptance among college students were also suggested and discussed. Although confined to SMS text notification in one college, the results were also likely to be relevant to other colleges or tertiary institutions. The writers have also suggested six services that could be incorporated into SMS text notification to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of communication in a college environment, and to ensure efficient dissemination of information for intended recipients.

INTRODUCTION

Acceptance of Short Message Service (SMS) due to mobile penetration has been an important area of study recently in many countries. Of the estimated 576 million people reported to be using SMS, 256 million were in the Asia-Pacific Region, and 196 million were in Europe (McKenna, 2002). The highest mobile penetration recorded is in Europe, where the technology has reached a stage of maturity with 75 to 89% saturation

(Belhoul et al., 2003). In the UK alone, a rapid growth was shown in the adoption and usage of mobile phones, with an overall penetration of almost 70% in August 2001 (Barwise and Strong, 2002).

Approximately 52% of mobile phone users in Southeast Asia used SMS more than once a day, compared with a global average of 23 per cent (Anon., 2002a). In Singapore, over 50% of mobile phone callers used SMS more than once a day, according to a survey done by Cambridge University Business School. Meanwhile, Malaysian statistics showed approximately 3.5 million mobile users by the year 2002 (Anon., 2003).

Although voice is still the key medium, short message service (SMS) text messaging has also proved to be a huge success (Harvey, 2001). The global SMS usage from 1999 to 2002 has increased drastically from approximately 4 billion to 24 billion monthly (Belhoul et al., 2003). SMS Text Messages which were sent each day in the UK continued to grow every month. According to figures released by the Mobile Data Association (MDA), the figure has reached 71 million per day (Anon., 2004c). Sixty-eight percent of mobile phone owners said that they used SMS.

SMS Usage according to Age Groups

Nonetheless, the percentage of usage varies by age group (Table 1). The younger age group of 14 to 24 years used SMS very frequently (over 90% usage). In another report by LG Mobile Phones Personal Call Survey, almost two thirds of Americans aged between 16 to 29 years of age

Table 1. Text Messaging Usage in the United Kingdom according to Age Groups (Barwise and Strong, 2002)

Age Group	SMS Usage (%)
14 - 15	97
16 - 17	94
18 - 24	93
25 - 34	81
35 - 44	74
45 - 54	50
55 - 64	38
65+	23

would choose a mobile phone ahead of a landline phone. (Anon., 2004a).

The volume of text messaging sent is also impressive with 81 percent of 18 to 24 year old mobile phone users sending at least one text message a day, and 31% of them sending at least five a day. A study conducted by Enpocket on 5,000 mobile phone users revealed that the degree of acceptance for SMS in advertising and marketing has reached more than 60 percent of respondents (Anon., 2002b).

SMS Usage and Text Services

Text messages were used for a wide range of purposes such as intimate messages, work-

related messages, personal information, humour and so forth (Figure 1). Seventy percent of the text messages were concerned with making arrangements.

SMS text messaging has four main uses: Discussion (35%), Entertainment (30%), Customisation (20%) and Information (15%) (Belhoul et al., 2003). As for information service, different users require different types of information. Examples of SMS-based information services currently available include travel updates, news alerts, stock alerts, sports updates, horoscopes, health information, event calendar and auctions. Most of these SMS information services are provided by telecommunication companies for the benefit of the public.

A generic classification of SMS text services was proposed by Intel Corporation. The services were (1) User-to-user Text Messaging, (2) Informational Messaging, (3) Notification Services, (4) Premium-based services and (5) Mobile Commerce (Anon., 2003a).

Diffusion of Innovation

Since the 70s, the diffusion of the innovation theory was studied as a framework to analyze the factors that can account for the different

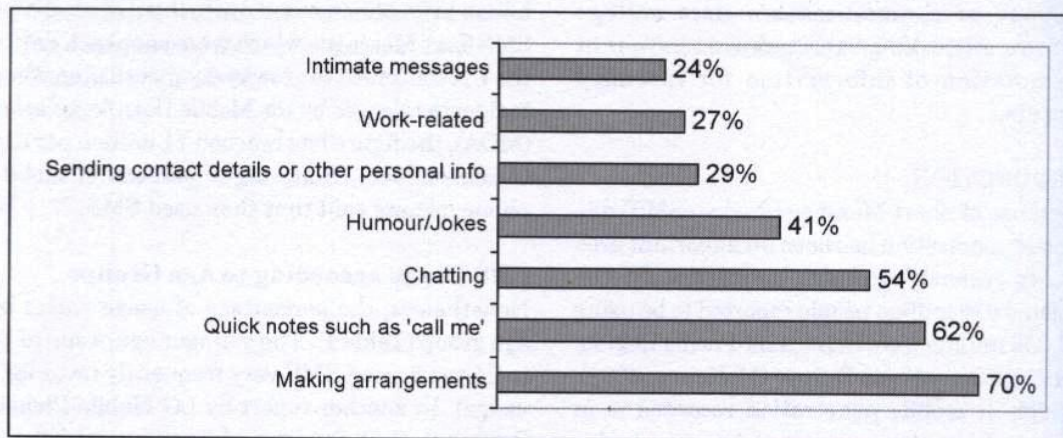


Figure 1. Types of Text Messages sent in the United Kingdom (Barwise and Strong, 2002)