

A Psychology Framework of WhatsApp Services: Grounded Hermeneutics Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study began with a micro view of the WhatsApp services phenomenon, leading to a macro view of social context. To decompose the customer value in the WhatsApp services, using a three-stage coding process through grounded hermeneutics. The contribution of this study is to reveal a theoretically saturated of a psychology framework of WhatsApp services and to discover the six theoretical propositions.

Key words: Grounded hermeneutics, social context, WhatsApp services

INTRODUCTION

According to the definition, “WhatsApp services” are the services of delivering data to WhatsApp through wireless transmission such as SMS, e-mail, multimedia message system, ringtone downloads, news, weather forecasts, and stock quotes.^[1]

Choi and Lee^[2] found that WhatsApp services can deliver very important customer value creation as described in value-based adoption of WhatsApp internet: An empirical investigation. However, there is a significant breach of insufficiently and limitation when discussing the micro view of subjective self-consciousness meanings of the customer value in WhatsApp services from the macro view of customer value and social context.^[3-6]

Therefore, the purposes of this research are: (1) Through grounded hermeneutics, thoroughly decomposing the meaning of the customer value in WhatsApp services and (2) constructing a conceptual framework in the WhatsApp services.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Study on WhatsApp services

WhatsApp services became an indispensable technology devices for personal consumption and recreation, even technology jewelry.^[6] They are not just a part of many people’s exterior decoration for their functions (personal digital assistant, digital camera, MP3, internet, etc.) and appearances can be combined to market different WhatsApp services to different market segments.

Furthermore, the use of WhatsApp services also reflexes the differences between social categories or economic groups.^[7,8] The use of WhatsApp services also reflexes the differences between generations (teenagers and youngsters are the main users),^[9,10] classes or income levels (conspicuous consumption for upper-class customers and low subscription rate for lower-class customers),^[11] and the differences between genders (special design, production, marketing, and WhatsApp services advertisement delivery for female customers, to form female stereotyped impression) and sex appeal.^[2,3]

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WhatsApp services are not products of this company or other company, but also socialized products.^[5] There are socioeconomic bases for the spread and use of WhatsApp services. New behavior model can also be built with the constraints of social actions and social structure. The contents of value-added WhatsApp services such as color screens or dual screens of multimedia WhatsApp, polyphonic ringtones, external or internal digital cameras, SMS messages, pictures, and other downloads through WhatsApp services, have encouraged the rend of WhatsApp capitalism commoditization by helping customers get rid of black-and-white screens and monotone ringtones.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research objects are selected from Chunghwa Telecom Co., Ltd. (CHT), the telecom company with the largest market share in Taiwan. Theoretical sampling was performed and the WhatsApp service customers were categorized into three groups by their customer values.

The first group of respondents includes five people in total: The CHT counter supervisor (F01), the CHT WhatsApp product manager (F02), and three mobile phone directors (F03, M04, and F05).

The second group of respondents includes six people in total: An enterprise manager (M06), an enterprise assistant manager (F07), two business owners (M08 and M09), a chairman of the board, and a CEO (F10 and M11).

The third group of respondents includes six people in total: Students with age below twenty-five (M12, F13, F14, F15, F16, and M17).

There are seventeen respondents in total. Semi-structured interviews, recording, and observation were conducted.

TEXT ANALYSIS

The purpose of performing a three-stage coding process through grounded hermeneutics is to obtain the text meanings of customer value. To efficiently deal with a large data set of 17 respondents, a qualitative coding software package was used for this study to organize and analyze the results from the three-stage coding.

To find out customers' value concepts in choosing WhatsApp services, open coding was performed on the content of the interviews to define phenomenon and generate concept labels in this study. Then, the axial coding was performed after open coding to induce the concepts with the same properties into a higher-level context-bound concept. Besides the factors themselves, the relationships between other factors were also considered when selective coding was performed, to achieve the purposes of selective coding in grounded hermeneutics, which are: (1) To build the relationships between categories, (2) to strengthen the proof-concept relationships between, (3) to continuously search for the properties of the main categories and the subcategories and to confirm the dimensional locations of the data, and (4) to explore and explain proofs in the phenomenon. This study was assisted by qualitative coding software: Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software: NVivo 12 and analysis by the three-step coding result, as shown in Table 1.

With the assistance of a qualitative coding software package, seven text meanings of customer value were derived: Customer needs, product value, service value, image value,

Table 1: Selective coding and axial coding

Selective coding	Description	Axis coding
Customer needs	Customers' needs for WhatsApp services	Needs for WhatsApp communications
Product value	The product value of customers' WhatsApp	WhatsApp communication product functions Practicability and effectiveness of WhatsApp communications WhatsApp communication product quality
Service value	The service value of the WhatsApp	WhatsApp communication service quality The convenience and rapidity of WhatsApp
Image value	Image and brand	Company image and brand
Individual value	Individual cognition value of using WhatsApp	Affections or benefits for WhatsApp communications Individual value
Overall customer costs	Cost, time and strength cost, and the effort cost of using WhatsApp	The convenience and speed of WhatsApp Time sensitivity WhatsApp effort
Influential factors	The possible influences of intervening variables on promoting the use of WhatsApp to customers	WhatsApp product information gathering Marketing strategies from system manufacturers

individual value, overall customer costs, and influential factors. Thus, the “subjective self-consciousness meaning” of customer value is given in this study.

A PSYCHOLOGY FRAMEWORK OF WHATSAPP SERVICES

The theoretically saturated framework built in this study is composed of six intertextual thesis concepts. It follows the meanings of the theoretic reference model from grounded hermeneutics. Moreover, this structure is also the “hermeneutics meaning” obtained from this study [Figure 1].

Development theoretical propositions

The practicability, effectiveness, and easy-to-use characteristic of WhatsApp services come from the applications of content value-added services and the universality of use.

Proposition 1: With the easy-to-use characteristic of voice, the practicability of data, and the effectiveness of video, the implementation strategy of WhatsApp.

Proposition 1.1: WhatsApp creates customer needs through advertising and all the other channels so that the capital in the circuit of capital can be consolidated.

Proposition 2: Through WhatsApp interface, WhatsApp service system limits the transmission resolution quality and stability in the frame of WhatsApp forming customers’ dependency on WhatsApp services.

Proposition 2.1: The stronger the customers’ dependency on WhatsApp services, the stronger the commodification of self-construction is.

Proposition 3: Enterprise customers of WhatsApp services first take security and privacy into consideration.

Proposition 3.1: Although WhatsApp services bring huge convenience; it is also accompanied by the control of surveillance.

Proposition 4: Public praise, product value, and social network are the dynamic factors of the overall customer value in WhatsApp services.

Proposition 4.1: The more dynamic the relationship quality is, the stronger the driven force of customer satisfaction and trust is.

Proposition 5: WhatsApp service market segmentation can be done by the value-added services of mass-customized digital content.

Proposition 5.1: Personalized designs of WhatsApp services can be achieved by the customization of WhatsApp.

Propositions 5.2: The customization of digital content and WhatsApp can deliver the maximization of individual value.

Proposition 6: The production and marketing model and advertising strategies of WhatsApp are the bases of mobile information fetishism and commodity fetishism.

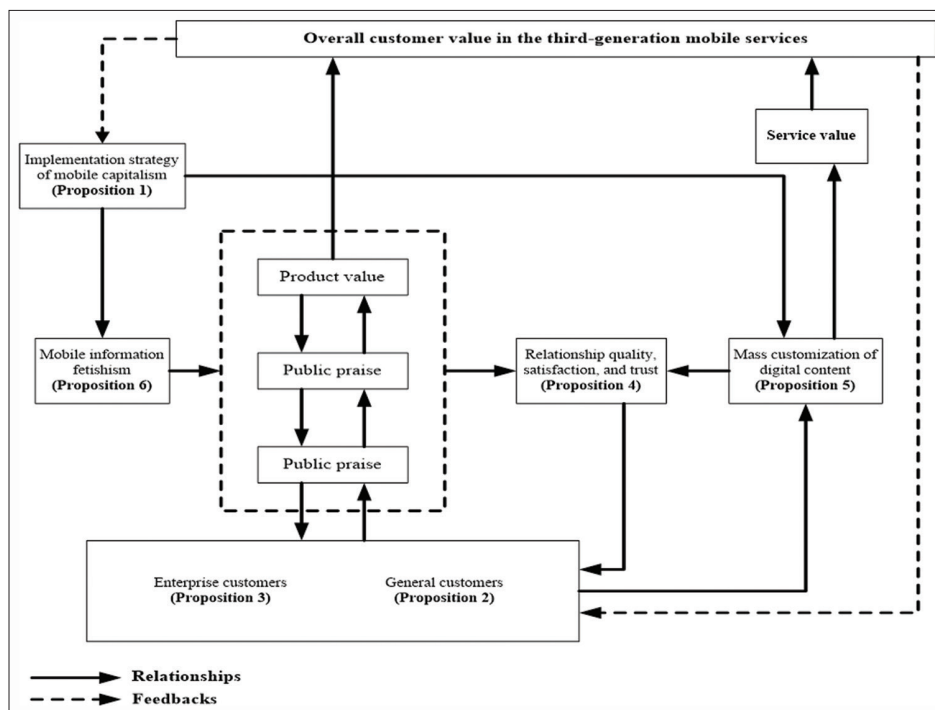


Figure 1: A psychology framework of WhatsApp services

Proposition 6.1: The commodification of self-construction is achieved through products. The individuality and liberty are built on the use value of commodification.

CONCLUSIONS

In the practical strategy business aspect, by the means of the advertisement, promotions, brand image, and campaign in mobile information fetishism, marketing effect can be maximized. There are three key paths of this meaning: (1) WhatsApp service providers must close the knowledge gap between the information poor and the information rich, especially the gap between the next-generation and the five-generation. Otherwise, WhatsApp services would just be fashion commodities for the minority of elites and students. (2) Use customer curiosity well with experiential marketing. Through experiences, consumers would actually be convinced to participate. For example, sending emails through a WhatsApp is very cool or being able to roam with the same WhatsApp from abroad is very cool. This group of WhatsApp users is the largest and should not be ignored.

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