The study of communication effected by mobile instant messaging software between family members

ABSTRACT
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The appearance of smart mobile devices removed the limitation of instant messaging on general computers. This study wishes to understand the use of Mobile Instant Messaging (MIM) in the pre-elderly’s (50-60’s) family life, also, the habit and behavior of interactions with family members. Furthermore, the study analyzes the effect of MIM on Family Bond and the characteristics of communication.

The content analysis method is used. We classified five categories to design the question structure for interview, they are “frequency of communication”, “frequency of stickers usage and preference”, “chatting object preference”, “chatting topic preference”, and “reply duration”

The study shows: MIM presents the conversation in a timeline matter, and it makes it hard for users to look up previous conversation records. Also the function of sharing and managing photos and videos between family members needs to be worked on.

KEYWORDS
The appearance of smart mobile devices removed the limitation of instant messaging on general computers. Mori & Harada (2010) pointed out that through the assistance of family members, the difficulty of using digital products can be lowered for elders; Wellman (2011) also states that through virtual network communication, even without meeting face to face, network communities can still strengthen the bond between people. Therefore this study wishes to understand the use of Mobile Instant Messaging (MIM) in the pre-elderly’s (50-60’s) family life, also, the habit and behavior of interactions with family members. Furthermore, the study analyzes the effect of MIM on Family Bond and the characteristics of communication.

In the first phase of this study, content analysis method is used. 16 married subjects born between 1940 and 1960 (in their fifties and sixties), whom have experience using “LINE”, the MIM with the highest utilization rate in Taiwan, to chat with family, are chosen. A one to three day continuous dialogue record with family is gathered from their smart phones “LINE” app. The data analyzed in the study includes the type of the smartphone, the family structure and conversation members, subject of dialogue, location, topic of conversation, sticons, photos, and voice message usage, and response holding time. After the first phase analysis, we classified five categories to design the question structure for interview, they are “frequency of communication”, “frequency of sticons usage and preference”, “chatting object preference”, “chatting topic preference”, and “reply duration”.

In the second phase, 8 representative subjects were chosen out of the 16 and interviewed. Using guided narratives method to further understand the actual experience and attitude towards the user experience of mobile messages within the previous five categories interview. Then lastly after the interview, content are sorted out by using the JK method, and divided into four main classification: “the transformation of communication forms”、” the impact of visual and audial communication”、” family relationships Influenced by MIM”、and “how emotion conveyed in the expression via MIM” as the core of results to
help understand whether MIM affects family bond, and provides reference to future practice design in strengthening family bond via mobile technology. The study shows:

1. Due to unfamiliarity towards the operation and time consuming to learn, elderly people have low willingness to use MIM in the start, but have positive reviews after using. At the same time, they tend to have trouble understanding more complex functions and use more basic ones, or have younger family members help them regularly update settings.

2. Using MIM to communicate with family members can help with the family bond. Communication frequency rises and chatting topics widens, the effect is even more obvious when chatting members are in different regions. However, the messages come in shorter forms and mostly aren’t prompt communication. It is also convenient for one to give a quick response when busy.

3. The usage of images and videos can broaden the range of topics, raise the willingness to use MIM, and increase the variety of ways to share. The chances to share small details of life increases and conversations are more humorous than traditional one to one conversations. Different family structures (ex. single parent) have little effect on the willingness to use MIM’s, but the relation between family members and conversation topics create different conversation groups.

4. The sticons function can ease direct conflict caused by language or text, and communication not prompt can also lengthen the response time, which is helpful to avoid direct argument. But even if the sticons function and lengthening of response time can help reduce conflict, direct phone calls and face-to-face meetings are still needed to deepen conversation and resolve practical problems. At the same time, the general stickers in the market now often can’t properly express one’s feelings.

5. MIM presents the conversation in a timeline matter, and it makes it hard for users to look up previous conversation records. Also the function of sharing and managing photos and videos between family members needs to be worked on.
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