Self-expression Behavior of Smartphone Through In-depth Interview: Focused on Younger Generation Users

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ABSTRACT

Today's young generation users are very active in expressing themselves through smart phones, form networks in this cyber space and express their identities freely. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how young people in their 20s are expressing themselves through smart phones and the differences from the attempt of self-expression in the existing cyber space. The research method was an in-depth interview, which was a qualitative research method, aimed at people in their 20s, so that they could freely talk about their thoughts and feelings. In-depth interviews are useful for users' psychological and in-depth analysis of behavior.

Key Words : Smart phone, Self-expression, In-depth interview, Launcher

1. Introduction

As smart devices become generalized and popularized, the necessity of personalized services is raised. Personalized services improve users' satisfaction by providing users' differentiated experiences and value, which couldn't be provided at the beginning stage of smart devices.

Especially, the smart phone is a very suitable medium to express thoughts and emotions because users can participate in designs with their creativeness according to their life patterns and styles [1]. At Android operating system, separate personalized interface is provided, so personalization is most actively done in this system. Through functional contents including applications and widget used, screen can be assigned freely, and interface can be decorated according to what

users want with reorganization of background screen, texts and icons. Through Launcher App, which gathers public attention as a next generation service platform in ICT(Information and Communications Technologies) market, users who are fed up with interface mounted on the smart phone can have personalized screens by directly designing their screen with forms they want.

In addition smart phones support people to take photographs anywhere anytime; and touch up and edit through diverse applications to share their days and memories. As such, photographs are involved in users' self-expression as a means to explore and establish own identity.

The purpose of this study is to examine how the smart phones which have deeply penetrated into our lives are utilized as a means of individual self-expression instead of the functional device to call on the move.

Existing studies on self-expression based on media focused on self-expression in the cyber world with different new nature from the real world. However, since smart phones are more intimate media to individuals, different patterns are expected from the self-expression in cyber space.

In this regard, the present study seeks to probe into how people are using smart phones as a tool of self-expression and how it is different from self-expression attempts in the existing cyber space.

2. Research method

This study conducted a qualitative research method

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through in - depth interview to understand how users use smartphone as a means of self - expression. Through interviews, I tried to get a closer look at how users are using their smartphone interface to express themselves. It aims to deeply understand the feelings of respondents by freely talking about what they think and feel while using the product.

Table 1. Interviewee information

Name	Gender	Age	Smartphone model
○○**Choi**	*M*	25	Samsung Galaxy S6
○○Goo	F	21	Samsung Galaxy S4
○○Hwang	M	24	Samsung Galaxy Note4
○○Jeong	F	21	Samsung Galaxy Note5
○○Jung	F	24	Samsung Galaxy Note5
○○Kim	F	21	LG G3
○○Lee	M	23	LG G3
○○Lee	F	26	Samsung Galaxy S7
○○Lim	F	21	Pantech VEGA Secret Note
○○Lim	M	24	LG G2

As shown in Table 1, the sample of the in-depth interviews consisted of 6 female university students and 4 male students who were active in self-expression. On September 9, 2016, The interviewees were in the form of answering questions about the self-expression through the smartphone's interface for about an hour.

3. Virtual space in self representation

Today's young generations try various methods for their personality expression or self-expression. These attempts sometimes create new culture or fashion. In the past, people made those attempts by decorating their appearances, but nowadays, various devices including internet, smart phone and SNS are used, and the influence of those devices is getting bigger and bigger.

Regarding the devices that they can expose themselves in cyber space, SNS has become expanded to mobile devices have become expanded with popularization of smart phones following personal website, blog, mini-homepage and so on. The content shared through the

social networks platforms expresses the emotion of an individual sharing the content[2].

Self-expression at cyber space depends on the elements that media provides. At cyber space, people can express their ideal features by hiding their uncomfortable emotions, so that they can be provided with opportunities to form high ego and to recover their self-esteem with availability of positive self-evaluation[3].

All the people want to be acknowledged as members of society that they belong to, and this basic desire can be expressed as a symbolic meaning through products they own. In addition, people often recognise their smartphone as "another self," leading to a role reversal of "user" and "tool" [4]. The examples are mobile phone users use ring tones or wallpapers reflecting trend to imply their ages, and they make customized phone cases to feel the products are not normal but unique.

Recently, due to personal media generalization, users stay with machines all the time, so personalization is considered important. Especially, as the experience of using smart phones is extended, desires for environment setting increase. In this situation, users who are tired of interface basically installed to smart phones started to have interest in personalized applications, and the amount of use tends to increase gradually. Among various personalized applications, it is 'Launcher App' that provides the environment where users reflect their identities as active main agents and reorganize them.

Launcher of smart phone is a start manager app that enables users to decorate their smart phone screens such as changing app icon designs as shown in the figure1.

Formerly, manufactures of android smart phones of open OS installed unique interface and launchers of designs basically to establish differentiation of terminal. Recently, as technological restrictions were solved due to high market shares of android with excellent openness and increase of CPU capacity of smart phones, and users highly desire unique screens, various independent types of launchers are appearing. As these independent types of launchers gain popularity, portals and SNS also release launcher apps, leading to arrival of serious smart phone home screen competition era[5].

Therefore, this study intends to reveal in depth how the twenties users are expressing themselves through the smart phone.

Fig. 1. Use the launcher to create a smartphone interface.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Self-expression methods through smart phones

In technology and exterior designs of smart phones, there isn't a big difference among brands, so more people try expression of individuality through accessories such as cases. Besides, rather than wallpapers, they decorate lock screen more frequently.

This result is because cases or lock screens are revealed to other people, and they stay on wallpapers less since they use functions such as checking messages directly through short cut.

However, self-expression through SNS is more active than smart phone screen design because SNS is exposed to others.

『*What I concern the most about my smart phone is its case. It is most noticeable. However, I have a limit allowance, so I can't change often. Instead, I change background themes or use the launcher, but I am losing interest nowadays. At first, it was new and curious, and it was fun to decorate as my style, but nobody sees it, nothing is new, and it seems like the speed of smart phone is getting slow. It will be nice if there are themes that I can edit or revise. It might be fun if I can make my own pattern using an app*』 ○○ *Lee(female,23)*

『*I feel like I decorate a lot when I switch a smart phone. I am making my own unique phone. Wallpapers are only for me, so I decorate them with what I like*

without caring about other people. However, I don't do it that often. I don't see the wallpaper often, and there is nobody who sees it… I change lock screen sometimes when I feel like it.』 ○○ *Goo(female,21)*

『*I put Audrey Hepburn, my favorite actress, on the lock screen, but I do not change that often. Because I can use short cut through status display or multi-tasking, I do not use wallpaper that often. It seems that there is no image that I like... Instead, I change Kakao Talk profile photos or themes sometimes. Because I often use them.*』 ○○ *Choi(male,25)*

『*When I used feature phones, I changed ring tones or caller rings to songs that I like or depending on my mood, but I rarely use them. Recently I go to places where I have to my phone with mute or vibration, that's why… But I change wallpaper from time to time. I also use the launcher. Since I like girlish images, I mostly use those kinds. I also want others to view me like that.*』 ○○ *Lim(female,21)*

『*Nowadays, since I use SNS a lot, I think that it is connected to SNS like Kakao Talk through smart phone rather than decorating smart phone...I am more interested in SNS and I am more committed to changing the profile of KakaoTalk profile.*』 ○○ *Lim(male,24)*

『*The background of the smartphone changes occasionally. When the season changes or you get bored? I usually change to a picture of my favorite color or mood. Anyone can see my taste by looking at my smartphone desktop. I always use pastel tones, floral pictures, cute characters, and so on. I think it reflects a lot of my taste.*』 ○○ *Kim(female,21*

『*I use my Katok profile picture or status message more to express my emotion and feelings. I've used the launcher, but it looks like a lot of messy stuff. I used it once and I was not satisfied. Sometimes I change smartphone cases. It takes a lot of money to buy clothes and accessories, but changing the case will make you feel less money. I'm holding my smartphone in my hand, so I'm worried about the case.*』 ○○ *Hwang (male,24)*

4.2 Self-expression through smart phone interface and its intention

Users were found to use smart-phone lock screen or home screen to realistically reproduce or restrict the degree of their present emotion by emphasizing natural background images or more abstract aspect. Or they were found to use these screens to refresh their mental attitude towards an ideal or expectation every time they turn on the phones.

Changing themes through launcher app is on stagnation due to infrequency of its use, and desires for new technology appeared.

『I downloaded a photograph of a model of a brand l like from the internet and installed it in my background screen. I like the brand and I also want to be like the model.』 ○○ Lee (female,26)

『It′s the photo I took last week, I took a picture of my feet in autumn leaves. It′s my background wallpaper. The photo feels good so I want to see it every time I turn on my phone. I change my phone background often wherever I get a good photo. It′s my phone so my personality is well expressed.

Also, since I usually upload my pictures, I feel more like mine.』 ○○ Jeong (female,21)

『I use my phone background as a note. For example, what I want to buy, eat, not to forget or good phrases to memory or photos I empathize with each time, cute illustrations, selfies, etc. to show my feelings… 』 ○○ Goo(female,21)

『My phone background is my new girlfriend. I want to see her every time I turn on my phone and whenever I want to see her.

Does the launcher not use these days? Feeling that the smartphone is dirty? I just like the pictures I took.』 ○○ Hwang (male,24)

『I changed themes using GO Launcher before, but nowadays there are some useless functions, and designs are limited. So I don't use often.

The smartphone desktop looks like my room. Feeling comfortable and warm? Even if I do not change often, I like my taste. Sometimes I feel like I'm feeling relaxed or changing seasons. I'm changing the screen.』 ○○ Lim(female,21)

『At first I used the launcher app several times because it was new and curious, but there are so many useless functions...

I like the ones that images can be changed easily and conveniently like Kakao Talk profile photos. If there are themes with extraordinary designs, I would use it again. They only change fonts, images and icons... It will be nice if the whole interface is changed like Card UI, which is popular these days.』 ○○ Lee(male,23)

『In the past, the mini homepage is an image that others see, so I use a lot of nerves. I also like visitors ... I think it is more important to look at others than to satisfaction. Sensibility I used PC mainly on a sensitive night so I had a lot of written content. But from the time you use your smartphone, it's the image, and the way you write, and the feeling that it's lighter.』 ○○ Hwang (male,24)

『It took a lot of time to make blogs and mini homepages with computers. But I like it because I can customize it anytime because the smartphone is so easy to upload photos.』 ○○ Lee (male,23)

『Sometimes I take pictures of scenery or friends. I'm using Photoshop to do some color correction or brightness adjustments, so I'm putting up pretty pictures. Even if someone else does not see me, it makes me feel better.』 ○○ Jung (female,24)

『When I used my blog, I mainly uploaded something interesting to others. But with smartphones, there's more about my photos and what I like. 』』 ○○ Choi(male,25)

5. Conclusion

Young generation users are very active in expressing themselves through smart phones, form networks in this cyber space and express their identities freely. Especially, smart phones with android basis are basically equipped

theme functions, so they support to easily change basic UI environment that can show at smart phone display. In addition, by allowing users to download various themes and wallpapers through app, they try to satisfy users' desires for expression.

Nevertheless, young users are losing interest in decorating wallpapers of smart phones except when they buy new phones. The reason is that they use shortcut through lockscreen, which is the initial screen of smart phones, rather than choosing icons on the wallpaper. The frequency of using wallpapers relatively decreased, and users do not feel new in decoration functions through themes and app. Besides, wallpapers are hardly shown to other people, so users do not feel necessity of self-expression through wallpapaers.

On the other hand, they were using Kakaotalk profile photos, especially, to show own position, taste, emotional change, recent status or share experience as a venue for communication.

This study found that while self-expression in the existing cyber space was more about recording or storing and impression management in consideration of others, self-expression through smart phones was instant and freer. Nevertheless, the small profile size and limited and stalled image not only restrict expression but also disturb message communication. In this sense, further expansion into freer space of identity expression is expected by using diverse multimedia functions.

While there were smart phones that had distinction, and each brand presented their own unique technologies in the past, nowadays a technology that a company releases can be easily applied to products of other companies making it hard to find technical difference. Thus, users' desires for their own special experiences through differentiated services are getting intense, so it is necessary for the related industry to establish proper measures for this.

Acknowledgements

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