

Customer Value of Adolescents in LINE Services: Application of Grounded Hermeneutics

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Abstract

This article starts off by discussing the emic perspective of adolescents (microcosmic level) on LINE services in order to produce an etic account (macroscopic level) that will show the link between the adolescents' values and its social context. In defining the adolescents' customer value for LINE services, the teenagers of Taiwan and staff of Chung Hwa Telecoms were used as objects of the study. The data were processed in the 3-stage coding of grounded hermeneutics and used in the intertextual analysis. The main contribution of this research is the formulation of an overall customer value framework for adolescents in line with LINE services, and the discovery of the 3 core concepts of customer value path, namely: mass customization of digital content, conformity behavior, and relationship quality. The 3 core concepts converge to form the overall customer value that provides valuable insights on both the main proposition and value paths.

Keywords: LINE services, customer value, grounded hermeneutics

INTRODUCTION

The global wave of LINE services brought about the widespread use of among adolescents. This trend has seeped into every aspect of the adolescent's life - macroscopic/social psychological structure and microscopic/personal level - that it is no longer possible to ignore this popular technological device.

Since LINE services have penetrated every aspect of an adolescent's life, it is no longer considered as a mere communication device. It has slowly formed a distinctive customer value (Jackson 2007) and manifested several unique qualities. In addition, the multimedia functions of LINE include simulation of virtual space. Objective elements like screen colors and ring tones, along with the subjective interpretation of the adolescents, call for a thorough analysis of the customer value of adolescents in LINE services.

Therefore, this research aims to: (1) use grounded hermeneutics in examining the self-subjectivity of adolescents with regard to LINE services; (2) to initiate a macroscopic discussion on the customer value of adolescents and the psychological level in the current social context; (3) to establish an overall theoretical framework that will capture the general image of the adolescent's customer value for LINE services.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Adolescent and the LINE Service

The Executive Yuan (2018) gives a clearcut definition of adolescent in its Adolescent Policy. According to the policy, adolescents are composed of young boys and girls from 12 to 18 years old. LINE service is not only a communication tool used by adolescents for it has created a distinct psychological model on the interpersonal and networking aspect of human life. This service has also produced mutual benefits in business marketing and social stratification (Marcelo and Michele, 2008). According to Turel and Serenko (2006), LINE service refers to the type of service that delivers wireless transmission of data such as messages, e-mails, multimedia message system, downloadable images, latest news, stock information and other services.

Perspectives on Customer Value

Holbrook (2006) defined customer value as a type of "interactive and relative experience". Most studies done on customer value focused on 2 main perspectives - instrumental and hedonic (Mano and Oliver, 1993; Holbrook, 2006; Jackson, 2007; Ming et al, 2008). Material and utilitarian perspectives

emphasize product functions and attach great importance to product usability. On the other hand, the hedonic perspective claims that a product is expended because of its significance to the user, which is related to the lifestyle he has chosen for himself (Wei, 2008). Woodruff (1997) differentiated desire and possession based on the “customer value stratification model”.

Although previous models are capable of large-scale measurement of customer value, they present various defects and limitations, such as: (1) Inability to reconcile the significance and hermeneutics of the consumer’s self-subjectivity; difficulty in measuring the “significance” value annotation; (2) Difficulty in thoroughly understanding the macroscopic perspectives of the social context of situational sequence; (3) the lack of an overall framework on the customer value of adolescents in LINE services in previous studies; (4) As the theoretical perspectives and value measurement on customer value of various scholars were identified in the review of literature, it was discovered that there is still no common ground to date. This makes it difficult to present an integrated and complete set of customer value theories in the research system, which in turn impedes the identification of the actual value. Therefore, this research shall apply grounded hermeneutics to examine the connotation of customer value of adolescents in LINE service based on modern perspectives, and to determine the overall adolescents’ customer value by extensively exploring the field.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to utilize grounded hermeneutics in establishing the interpret meaning of the adolescents’ customer value in LINE service. An overall customer value framework for LINE service is established in order to obtain the overall holomorphic image of the adolescents’ customer value in LINE service.

Participant

Chung-Hwa Telecoms is chosen as the object of this study because it is currently the market leader in Taiwan’s telecommunications industry. Theoretical sampling is the primary method used for the subject testing of both service and customer: (1) Service – Chung Hwa Telecoms, widely known to promote mobile service business, is chosen as the subject of the study; (2) Consumer – The subjects chosen are adolescents from ages 12 to 18 years old. The 2 subject groups were interviewed regarding their knowledge about the value of mobile services; afterwards, the overall customer value is summed up.

The different perspectives on customer value for LINE services were gathered from 2 groups of data sources. The first group consists of 5 professional staff: accredited Chung-Hwa Telecoms shop personnel (F01), Chung Hwa Telecoms LINE product manager (F02), 3 LINE directors (F03, F04, F05). The second group presents 17 adolescents comprising of 7 male and 10 female adolescent customers: M06, F07, M08, F09, M10, M11, M12, F13, F14, F15, F16, M17. The researcher made use of the semi-structured interview, tape-recording, and observation methods. The outline of the interview was carefully drafted in advance.

TEXT ANALYSIS

The data were coded in three levels. A computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) program, NVivo 10, facilitated the sorting of the data into the three levels of codes. As we collected the interview data, we began analyzing them, adhering to specific guidelines for naturalistic inquiry and constant comparison techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Line-by-Line Analysis Text

Line-by-line open coding was applied in the interview of 17 individuals. The excerpt of the interview with Subject #13 was used as the model (see Table 1).

Table 1. Line-By-Line Text

TEXT- F13 Coding NO. F13 15:00, February 8, 2018

Interviewer: May I ask why you are currently using LINE Service?

Interviewee: It was introduced to me by relatives and friends [*recommended by families and friends*]. And then I realized that it is actually good and besides, Chung Hwa is the biggest telecoms company [*knowledge of the company image*]. It is also one of the oldest brands in the market [*knowledge of the company brand*].

Interviewer: In other words, Chung Hwa brand has been in the market longer than the others.

Interviewee: Hmm. I use LINE service because I can communicate with my friends through video conferencing. That way I know where they are and it makes me feel safe. [*LINE Video*]

Interviewer: It allows both parties to see each other’s images.

Interviewee: Another thing is that I feel LINE service offers a lot of value-added services [*LINE value-added service*] which is a good thing among my friends.

Customer Value of Adolescents in LINE Services: Application of Grounded Hermeneutics

Coding analysis

Open coding was applied on the line-by-line interview content in this research wherein the definition obtained produced conceptual labeling. Another overall summary was made based on the axial coding derived from the open coding. The conceptual

summary of similar properties was developed to form the higher level of context-bound concept. Finally, the concepts produced by axial coding were summarized; these comprise the high level of categorical context. The definitions representing each of the select coding and their respective axial coding are shown in Table 2.

Table2. *Select Coding and Axial Coding*

Select Coding	Explanation	Axial Codin Axial Coding
LINE Service Demand Value	Customer requirements for LINE communications	Requirements for LINE Communications
LINE Service Product Functions Value	Refers to the LINE telephone value of customers	LINE Communication Product Capability
		LINE Communication Usability and Effectiveness
		Product Quality of LINE Communication
Service Quality and Value of LINE Services	Refers to the service value of LINE	Service Quality of LINE Communication
		Convenience and Speed of LINE
Brand Image Value of LINE Services	Image and Brand	Image and Brand of LINE Telecoms Firms
Emotional Value of LINE Service	Individual perceived value of LINE users	Emotional Benefits of LINE Communication
		Personal Value
Convenience of LINE Services	Convenience, pleasure and speed brought about by the use of LINE	Convenience of LINE
		Pleasure in using LINE
		Fast speed of LINE
Business Marketing Strategy	Promoting the use of LINE may produce certain effects.	Collection of LINE Product Information
		Systematic business marketing strategy

The 3-stage coding of grounded hermeneutics was used to obtain the text meaning of the adolescents' customer value in LINE service. From 7 different text meanings, we derived the self-subjectivity meaning of consumers and by doing so, we achieve the first objective of this research.

Propositions

It is quite easy to yield errors in the first stage of the interview due to time and situational limitations. It was imperative to go out in the field and conduct "guided and repeated interviews" which comprised the second stage of the survey. The adolescent group

was interviewed in the first stage. Habermas (1988) clearly pointed out in his communication action theory that the "proposition contents" must reflect the actual situation of social context.

Demand value of LINE service

"I use it to communicate with my boyfriend. It allows me to hear his voice and see video images. This way, we can be constantly in touch wherever we are. It is very convenient to use." (TEXT – M12)

"LINE is a new technology that attracts a lot of customers. We constantly promote this service through different market channels" (TEXT – F02)

Customer Value of Adolescents in LINE Services: Application of Grounded Hermeneutics

LINE services provide voice sounds, data and video communication functions. Its data transmission is faster than 2G/2.5G. The convenience, practicality, and usefulness it provides are derived from the value-added services of its application contents and user-friendly features. Therefore, this research arrives at the following proposition:

Proposition 1: Lead-in strategic for LINE services must be based on the usability and efficiency of sound, data and video functions. Advertisements and various marketing channels must focus on the wants of adolescent users.

Brand image value of LINE services

"It gives me a great sense of security because it is very reliable. The message quality that it offers is much better in terms of picture definition and stability." (TEXT - M08)

During the guided interview, it was found out that after acquiring a LINE, this type of personal network and contact device gradually connects the LINE's chip and computer memory with the base station and telecoms control facilities. The integration is seen on the LINE screen. Each personal network becomes a recorded image and text. Thus, the following proposition is derived:

Proposition 2: LINE service manufacturers must ensure clear LINE interface and reliable messaging functions in order to generate psychological dependence from the adolescent users.

Convenience value of LINE services

The grounded interviews in this study revealed that the communication records, display of incoming messages, information, and recorded messages of LINE services can reveal the network contents of the LINE owner. Surreptitious photo shots, eavesdropping, and network system trailing are no longer limited to paparazzis.

"I have no idea whether a person is holding a LINE or any recording device in his hand, or if the person carries one in his pocket or bag" (TEXT-M11)

"I frequently experience line disconnection in the middle of a conversation. Whenever a friend calls me up, I hear a third or even a fourth person talking even though my LINE did not receive any other calls. I wonder if my calls are actually being monitored..." (TEXT-F07).

Therefore, this research offers another proposition.

Proposition 3: LINE services must be designed to provide freedom and mobility among adolescents. The ability to manage security and privacy must be considered aside from convenience.

Emotional value of LINE services

"We are relatively satisfied with its service quality and product value. We tried LINE services upon the advice and recommendation of friends." (TEXT-M06)

The grounded data show that adolescents and manufacturers share a mutual relationship in the midst of an uncertain consumer market. They frequently interact and their closeness and understanding are reflected in their relationship quality.

"I am very happy with it because a lot of my relatives and friends are also using it." (TEXT-M-17)

The guided interview revealed that the satisfaction and commitment adolescents feel towards LINE service can be attributed to relationship quality. Their satisfaction and trust in the product are important driving factors.

"I am very happy with this type of LINE. You see, it is only during semestral breaks in Australia that I get the chance to go home and be with my *A-mah*. But now, I can see her everyday! I would definitely tell my friends to switch to LINE." (Text code: TEXT-F07)

The grounded data showed that purchase decisions of adolescents are influenced by the opinions of others whenever they buy a new gadget. Therefore, based on product value, word of mouth and interpersonal network, this research offers the following relational embeddedness perspective:

Proposition 4: Word of mouth, product value, interpersonal network are all behavioral factors of the overall customer value of adolescents in LINE services. A more dynamic relationship quality intensifies the satisfaction and trust of the adolescents.

In the guided interview, it was found out LINE services which customize their products to capture adolescent consumers are able to stimulate the curiosity of this market segment.

"Using a LINE access in sending emails is cool. Some of my classmates even use LKK handsets (obsolete units)." (TEXT-F13)

Customized LINE is a system that allows the adolescent users to use various network services through their

Customer Value of Adolescents in LINE Services: Application of Grounded Hermeneutics

handsets. A 6A5Fzx cellular phone has built-in internet access to exclusive sites that contain value-added digital technology services. Most customized handsets are used by adolescent users because they facilitate the use of value-added services and therefore, indirectly supply earnings for manufacturers.

Thus, the following proposition is raised:

Proposition 5: The value-added service of mass customization digital content secures the market segment and emotional value of adolescent users of LINE service.

Business marketing strategy

The grounded data show that possessing a flashy LINE raises the ego of adolescents especially when he or she gains the admiration of his peers. This way of thinking is very common among children of this age group.

“Bringing along one’s LINE while on a leisurely trip to Japan or Korea is especially cool.” (TEXT-F15)

“All my friends exchange messages in the internet. Why can’t I have one?” (TEXT-M16)

“We need to download ring tones, download games, send and receive e-mails. We need to have LINE computer games, beat time, interact online, and our own MP3 music.” (TEXT F-16)

LINE increased the desires of adolescents and had successfully made handsets a necessity. The opinions and use behavior of other people were instilled in the

minds of adolescents that they have replaced their own opinions and use behavior. They feel that they must possess what other people have. Therefore, we raise proposition 6:

Proposition 6: Value-added services, LINE functions and mobile communication produce a signal spillover. Signal spillover of LINE services creates more wants for the adolescent users. These wants establish the use value of herding behavior.

The above-mentioned core propositions on the customer value of adolescents can be divided into the following: Proposition 1: Lead-in strategy of LINE service; Proposition 2: Adolescent customers; Proposition 3: Unleash mobility and restraints; Proposition 4: Satisfaction and trust in relationship quality; Proposition 5: Mass customization of digital content; Proposition 6: Herding behavior. Following the presentation of theories in this research is the formation of the overall customer value framework as discussed in the succeeding sections.

FINDING: CUSTOMER VALUE FRAMEWORK IN LINE SERVICE

The theories and framework are composed of 6 mutual propositions. Their relations with one another were derived from the grounded interview data. There are 3 kinds of customer value paths discovered in this research. The core concept of these 3 paths converged to form the “overall customer value of the adolescents in LINE service” as presented in Figure 1.

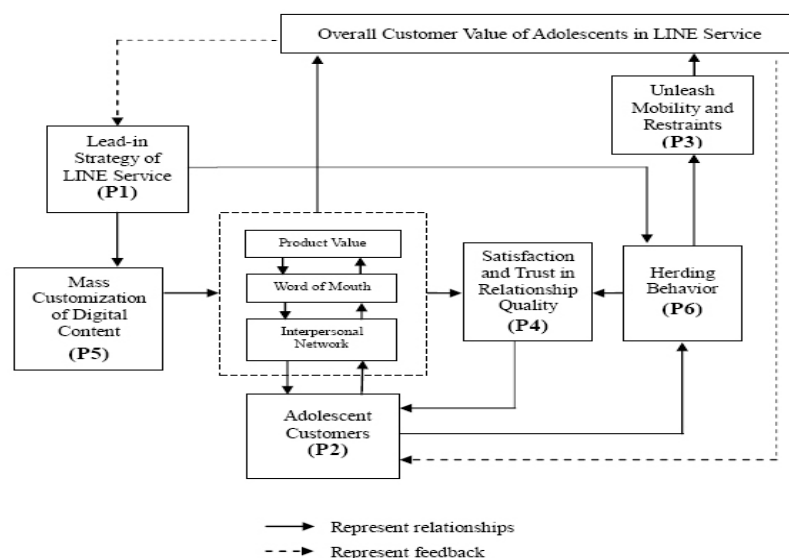


Fig 1. Overall customer value framework of adolescents for LINE service

Mass Customization of Digital Content Value Path

The central part of this path lies in the “mass customization of digital content”. The lead-in strategy of LINE service show that the usability of speech sounds, data functionality, and authentic videos can fully satisfy the value demands of the adolescents. For them, these LINE services are “liberating” for they provide mobility and freedom in their everyday lives. This occupies an integral part of their lifestyle and ensures peer acceptance. Therefore, it achieves the overall customer value for LINE services and creates a feedback mechanism.

The main idea of this value path echoes the “interactive concept” of the value theory raised by Holbrook (2006). The mass customization of digital content is a form of interaction between the product and the adolescents that generates a pleasant experience. The value produced should come from the interaction between the two entities. In this case, the adolescent achieves maximum demand value, while the mass customization method of digital content also provides the manufacturer maximum market benefits.

Herd Behavior Value Path

The main idea of this path is “herd behavior”. It was observed in this research that the perception of adolescent customers about LINE services was brought about by their sense of identity amongst fellow adolescents. Since these adolescents are very conscious about many things, their degree of influence is just as strong; adding to the fact that they belong to the puberty stage which is usually dominated by isolation or loneliness. The emergence of LINE services fulfilled their longing for social acceptance and put an end to their loneliness. The satisfaction they derive from the message quality produces a positive relationship quality which makes them trust about the product. This achieves the customer value for LINE services and yields a positive feedback mechanism.

This value path represents the “perspective of instrumental” (Mano and Oliver 1993; Holbrook, 2006; Jackson, 2007; Ming et al, 2008). From the standpoint of adolescents, the usability of sounds, practicality of data, and effectiveness of video images are enough to make them buy the product. In evaluating a certain product, the adolescent relies on the opinions of his peers or fellow adolescents. Should they realize that

it was a mistake to have bought the product, they will never hold themselves accountable for the error. As soon as the child appreciates the superior quality of LINE services, he will be loyal to it. The child can also quickly shift to another product once he senses the poor quality of the product.

Relationship Quality Value Path

The main thrust of the third path is “relationship quality”. Relationship quality is an important index that measures the advantages, disadvantages, and strength of the relationship between adolescents and LINE. Since relationship quality is a form of perception, it pertains mainly to the perceptual process of the adolescent starting from his interactive experience all the way to the satisfaction and trust he derives during the process. Both the theoretical saturation and declaratory framework promote the operative link between the adolescent and LINE services. This generates satisfaction, trust, and loyalty and thus achieves customer value for adolescents in LINE service as well as a positive feedback mechanism.

The concept of this value path mirrors the “hedonistic outlook” (Mano and Oliver 1993; Holbrook, 2006; Jackson, 2007; Wei, 2008; Ming et al, 2008). Because the usability of speech sounds, practicality of data, and effective video images allow the adolescent to achieve maximum satisfaction and trust, they also stimulate the other senses of the child, his imagination, and emotions.

CONCLUSION

Discussing

The application of grounded hermeneutics in this study captured the self-subjectivity of Taiwanese adolescents with regard to LINE services. It was able to obtain the psychological level of the adolescents' customer value and the situation of social context. Furthermore, it established the “overall customer value framework for adolescents in LINE services” and reinforced the limitations of previous studies in terms of the theoretical and interpret meaning of LINE service customer value. The study of customer value showed the completeness and value of the theoretical concept.

In the actual implementation of strategies, maximum market benefits are derived from the advertisement of signal spillovers, sales promotions, brand image, and publicity events. This meaning or signification

has 2 key channels. First, the LINE service provider must initially clear up any discrepancies between 4G; otherwise, the LINE value-added services which are meant to attract the adolescents will only remain a trendy product among a handful of students. The second channel is to apply novel experience marketing on the adolescents. This method can really induce participation from the adolescent like for example sending emails through LINE internet access and international roaming. These are the very features that adolescent users of LINE can never overlook.

From the standpoint of consumers, customization and LINE service directly influence their perceived benefits. The quality demanded by adolescent users such as excellent communication quality, wide signal coverage, reliable signal, and clear sound quality must be satisfied by means of customization. Therefore, mass customization of “focus-type LINE” is the future market trend.

How can service providers sustain their profits from call rates or what intelligent measures can they adopt in the midst of a stiff price war? Perhaps they can launch an attractive LINE plan, focus their marketing campaign on the adolescents, and create further needs and demands from the consumers. Say for instance, the use of LINE is very popular among adolescents especially in communicating with peers or loved ones. The desire to keep in touch with family members may be attributed to emotional and social motives.

LINE service is currently faced with several challenges and one of which is the uncertain market demand. LINE is hoped to be the mainstream communication tool in the future and the occurrence of data transmission after the speech sounds are conveyed shall be widespread. Possible ways of conducting oral marketing, product value, and personal network must be examined in order to maintain favorable relationship between adolescent customers and producers. The user's advantage must be optimized to sustain the customer value and customer relationship. Being able to provide a sense of satisfaction and confidence among the customers and capturing their loyalty leads to the adolescents' customer value in LINE services.

Research Limitations and Recommendations

This study divides the customer groups into two but is constrained by the limitations of other fragmented groups. This consists of the first limitation of this research. It is recommended that customers be further

distinguished and classified in order to understand the customer value of various groups. Doing so may actually affect customer value. Second, even though the methods used can provide an in-depth understanding of the situation, the greatest limitation lies in the inability to gather a bigger sample size. It is recommended that future studies expand their survey of the LINE service industry in order to obtain a broader understanding of consumer behavior. Future researchers can conduct their study from a wider point of view such that they scrutinize the position of LINE service customer value according to the developmental history of communication technology, as well as the social and cultural atmosphere of the products. On the other hand, researchers can also take the micro point of view and observe how people use these LINE gadgets and how they would control and modify the interactive patterns. The researcher can also take the viewpoints of phenomenology, semiology and anthropology to examine LINE service customer value and to expand the boundaries of this field.

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Customer Value of Adolescents in LINE Services: Application of Grounded Hermeneutics

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