Full Length Research Paper

Culture and characteristics of cellular phone communication in South Korea

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This study investigates the characteristics of cellular phone communication and analyzes the relationship between the Korean culture and the characteristics of cellular phone communication in South Korea. In order to examine the uses and functions of cellular phone communication, this paper reviews several communication theories such as the uncertainty reduction theory, the uses and gratifications theory, the predicted outcome value theory and the expectancy-value theory. The findings of this study indicate that the cellular phone is becoming a necessity for interpersonal communication because of 3 characteristics, immediate accessibility and control, direct interaction between individuals and constant contact availability. Especially in South Korea, a rapid increase in cellular phone use is occurring because of the growth of desire for direct and immediate contact between individuals passing over the group boundaries (such as family). This increase is based on the growth of individualism, which has increased through the change of personal identity in South Korea. Another characteristic that affects cellular phone use is uncertainty reduction. Lastly, the other characteristic that affects the cellular phone use is an increasing self-opinion value that has influence on increasing the use of cellular phones. As a result, the popularity of cellular phone communication in South Korea is due to an increasing individualism, the tendency of uncertainty reduction, and an increasing self-opinion value.

Key words: Uncertainty reduction theory, uses and gratification theory, interpersonal communication, individualism.

INTRODUCTION

In modern society, people are living in radically changing times. Many things are changing rapidly, especially, the change of communication styles. Developing telecommunication technology brings many basic changes in the interpersonal communication process. The developing direction of communication methods is in terms of more direct and immediate communication between individuals. Therefore, it is important to research the essence of human communication as new telecommunication technologies develop. This paper will review research on cellular phone use in the fast growing culture of South Korea and suggest some area of needed research and application of theory to cellular phone use.

The cellular phone has developed from the simple transmission of voice messages to more multi-channel communication including e-mail and nonverbal messages. When the telephone was invented in 1876, the transmission of vocal information was regarded as a miracle, as it allowed interpersonal communication between individuals who were a long way off. However, it has evolved more and more into a closer face-to-face communication device with new telecommunication devices like the internet and cellular phones. As a result, it is now possible to communicate while seeing the other's facial expressions and other nonverbal messages through the cellular phone and doing visual chatting through computer mediated communication (CMC).

Asian countries (especially, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan) have the highest rate of diffusion of cellular phones with European countries such as Luxemburg and Sweden. For example, in South Korea, by 2008, 45.6 million people used cellular phones. The subscribers to cellular phones outnumbered the 22.1 million subscribers of wire telephones at that time. The diffusion rate of the cellular phone is 94% in South Korea. That means almost everybody in South Korea has a cellular phone if infants and babies are discounted. In South Korea, the number of cellular phone subscribers has shown a sharp increase

by doubling every year from 1997 to 1999 (Na, 2001). Nowadays, the increase in the cellular phone subscription rate is not only a special trend in South Korea, but a general trend throughout the world (e.g., Luxemburg 138.2%, Hong Kong 118.8%, Sweden 108.5%, Italy 108.2%, England 102.2%, and Taiwan 100.3%). However, in South Korea, it is unclear why cellular phone communication is so popular.

This research has 3 purposes (i) to outline briefly the characteristics of the cellular phone communication form as an interpersonal communication process (ii) to review and critique prior research on cellular phone use and (iii) to examine the relationship between the characteristics of the Korean culture and cellular phone communication in South Korea. This paper will review the characteristics of cellular phone communication styles, review the reasons for the popularity of cellular phones and analyze the relationship between the Korean culture and the characteristics of cellular phone communication in South Korea. To achieve these research purposes, the following research questions were formulated (i) what are the characteristics of cellular phone communication as an interpersonal communication process (ii) what are the strengths and weaknesses of prior research on cellular phone use (iii) what kinds of relationships are there between the Korean culture and the characteristics of the cellular phone communication in South Korea and (iv.) what are the differences between older and younger generations and between men and woman in cellular phone use in South Korea.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While a variety of studies related to the technology of cellular phones have been conducted, this paper will review only a small number of previous studies associated cellular phone communication. This paper will focus on those studies that dealt with the social phenomenon of cellular phone use. One such study was conducted by Laurier (2001) who analyzed a feature of cellular phone conversation looking at why people give their geographical location as part of the opening sequence of a phone call. Through this study, the author tried to describe methods, in particular formulations of places used by people who competently make and receive phone calls on their cellular phones day in and day out as an ordinary, every day achievement. Laurier asked the research question "why do people say where they are when calling on their (cellular) phones that is versed through actual instances" (Laurier, 2001).

The author argued that unlike typical phones, cellular phones overcome the limitations of space and time. This insight goes some way to reveal why one person seldom answers another person's cellular phone, as the caller is likely not to be calling a place but a person and accounts for why they are picking up the phone without recourse to a phrase such as "she's not here right now" (Laurier, 2001). The author concluded that a concern with theory

construction effectively distances such people from everyday affairs where ordinary people understand in particular terms and account competently for what is going on in their worlds. This practical understanding is inherent in the intricacies of a conversational ordering, which is at one and the same time also an ordering of the time and space of their worlds (Laurier, 2001).

In another study related to cellular phone use and social phenomenon, Forgacs (2001) tried to characterize the digital age. He explained that until the beginning of the 1990s, a typical national media system consisted of 3 discrete segments: print, film, and broadcasting. In addition, he pointed out that telephony was a technology used primarily for interpersonal voice communication and secondarily, for fax messages. However, he noted that these characteristics of the telephone changed with the appearance of the cellular phone (Forgacs, 2001). Therefore, he categorized the digital age (including cellular phones) into 3 characteristics, convergence, personalization and exclusion (Forgacs, 2001).

In order to look at future trends of the cellular phone use and socialization, Charlton et al. (2002) investigated cellular phone ownership among a sample of primary school pupils. These recent findings showed that nearly half of both girls and boys owned cellular phones in England. While only 19% had self-funded their cellular phone purchase, almost 50% had cellular phone service paid by their parents (Charlton et al., 2002). The results indicated that the favorite call destinations were parents. Also 38% reported that they had used their cellular phones when confronted by a crisis. One of the interesting findings is that the large majority both sent and received text messages and about 1 in 5 were able to send texts via the Internet and search the net (Charlton et al., 2002). In conclusion, they raised concerns that non-ownership of cellular phones may lead to social exclusion as well as limit pupils' involvement with and proficiency in using other communication technologies (Charlton et al., 2001).

The literature that most closely supports the present research is the literature from Korean communication scholars (Na, 2001; Kim, 2001; Lee, 2001) on cellular phone communication. Na (2001) examined the characteristics of cellular phone communication and discussed the relationship between Korean culture and cellular phone communication. Through this research, she pointed out that because of the characteristics of immediate and direct interaction of cellular phones, Korean people who do not have a smooth flow of communication between groups adapted cellular phones quickly to satisfy their communication desires (Na, 2001). In conclusion, she argued that modern society is a coexistence period of variety so that various immediate and direct individual communication styles are desired. Because of this desire, use of cellular phones is increasing especially in South Korea where cellular phone communication serves as a connection between individuals without the limitation of time and space (Na, 2001).

Another study of cellular phone was conducted by Kim

(2001). Through this study, he tried to find the meanings of a new communication system that was developed by using cellular phones. He found that the technologies of cellular phone such as mobility, individuality and secrecy has influenced the rapid diffusion of cellular phone use.

Finally, Lee (2001) researched the characteristics of textual communication used by Korean teenagers through cellular phones. Through her research, Lee explained that a cellular phone is not only a verbal communication device but also a multi-communication device (e.g., Internet, e-mail and textual communication) (Lee, 2001). In addition, according to her survey about the frequency of use of cellular phones for textual communication, 61% of the total respondents used textual communication every day and 34% of the total of 100 respondents used textual communication every hour. Targets of textual communication were usually close friends, family members and girl/boy friend. These findings indicate that the textual communication of cellular phones is a method to connect persons within a group (Lee, 2001).

While much work has focused on the characteristics of communication by cellular phones and the diffusion of cellular phones in South Korea, less research has looked at the relationship between traditional Korean culture and cellular phone usage.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF CELLULAR PHONE COMMUNICATION

To understand cellular phone communication, we need to understand interpersonal communication because these 2 communication styles are similar. To maintain relationships between individuals, amicable communication is needed and for this amicable communication, a speaker needs to easily access a receiver (The receiver means the person answering the phone call).

Furthermore, the receiver should respond immediately. If the receiver is always available to talk and if the speaker can access the receiver immediately anytime and anywhere, interpersonal communication is quickly accelerated. Cellular phone communication has similar characteristics to these characteristics of interpersonal communication. The characteristics of cellular phone communication are 3 immediate accessibility and control, direct interaction between individuals and constant contact availability.

IMMEDIATE ACCESSIBILITY AND CONTROL

Cellular phone communication can be defined as "an immediate and direct interaction between individuals through transcendence of time and space" (especially space) (Na, 2001), which is one of the characteristics of cellular phone communication. According to Na, between immediate and direct interaction, there are similar meanings, but there are different meanings as well. "Immediate interaction" means that whenever a speaker wants to send

send a message, the speaker can send the message anytime and as soon as a receiver gets the message, the receiver can respond to the speaker. On the other hand, "direct interaction" (non-mediated) refers to communication between the speaker and the receiver. Both parties can send and receive the message without any intermediation (Na, 2001). In short, in cellular phone communication, no one interrupts the speaker and receiver except noise or technological problems (e.g., an antenna, relay station, or network) because the speaker and receiver control their cellular phones by themselves.

In addition, cellular phone communication is also similar to computer-mediated communication (CMC). Computer-mediated communication is a direct contact between individuals via computer or the internet through transcendence of space, and it normally uses written language. This definition is similar to the previous definition of cellular phone communication. Computer-mediated communication is a contact method between people who are separated by time and space through a computer network (e.g., Internet or e-mail). Computer-mediated communication (such as chat rooms through the internet) is very similar to cellular phone communication because both media share the characteristic of immediate interaction. Currently, people can send visual and spoken language through the Internet but the difference between cellular phone and Internet communication styles is that cellular phone communication uses spoken language and computer-mediated communication most often uses written language. However, nowadays, even cellular phone communication can use written language to send text messages. In addition, computer mediated communication can use visual and spoken language by using video cameras and microphones.

Another characteristic of cellular phone communication is communication control. If the receiver does not want to talk with the speaker or does not want to receive a message, the receiver can control communication in several ways. For example, in cellular phone communication, people can turn off their cellular phones anytime if they do not want to receive messages or talk with the speaker. In this way, people can avoid being the object of immediate and direct interaction via a cellular phone. In addition, people can limit receiving calls by giving their cellular phone numbers to only a limited group of people. In cellular phone communication, personal direct control of phone communication is becoming a more advantageous way of sending and receiving messages. In computer-mediated communication, people also can control communication by turning off their computers and giving their e-mail address to only a select group of people.

DIRECT INTERACTION BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS: CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Since this study focuses on cellular phone use in South Korea, we must first explain some differences between Korean and Western cultures. This will allow us to identify
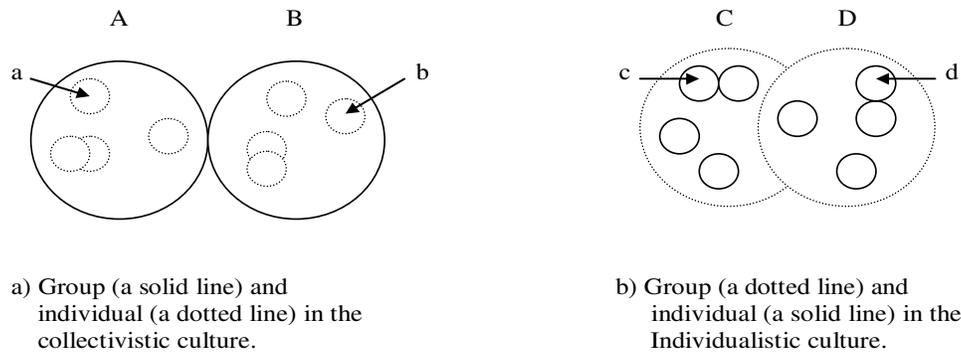
a) Group (a solid line) and
   individual (a dotted line) in the
   collectivistic culture.

b) Group (a dotted line) and
   individual (a solid line) in the
   Individualistic culture.

Figure 1. The model of group and individual in collectivistic and individualistic cultures

unique research needs and specific communication challenges affecting cellular phone use in South Korea. Min and Na (1998) presented a model of symbolic groups and individuals who are in collectivistic and individualistic cultures. For example, the U.S. is mainly individualistic and South Korea is mainly collectivistic. Figure 1 illustrates these two models. In these two diagrams, a solid line represents a part (group) that cannot be crossed over because the boundary is clear. In contrast, a dotted line means the part (group) can overlap because the boundary is not clear. As seen in Figure 1, individuals in a collectivist culture have a clear boundary between the inner groups. In the inner group of collectivism, there are many parts that are held in common without classification of "yours and mine" (Min and Na, 1998). Thus, communication between group members overflows to the inside of the group (Park, 1994, 1996).

In this circumstance, through cellular phones, the possibility of immediate and direct interaction means contacting individuals directly without the consciousness of the groups' boundaries. For example, if a person (c) who belongs to group (C) wants to contact a person (d) who belongs to group (D), the person (c) can contact the person (d) directly without considering the group (D) itself. For example, before the cellular phone existed, if a boy (a) wanted to talk with his girlfriend (b), he had to call his girlfriend's house (group (B) first, and then through one of the householders (gatekeepers) he could talk with his girlfriend. However, through cellular phones, there are no gatekeepers, so he can call his girlfriend directly.

In another example, if someone wants to talk with a company director, he/she can call directly through a cellular phone without gatekeeping (by a secretary) if he/she knows the company director's cellular phone number. However, most of time, the company directors control cellular phone communication by giving their cellular phone number to a limited number of people. Unlike in typical phone communication, people can interact only with people the speaker wants to talk to through cellular phones. Increasing use of cellular phones makes possible direct interaction between individuals anywhere and anytime

without passing through groups. This means that human culture is gradually changing to prefer person-to-person contact without the intervention of a group.

According to Hofstede (1991), because of increasing individualism, the media or the medium of communication has become gradually smaller and smaller. Hofstede (1991) explains the process by noting that almost every medium of communication has become individualized after increasing the level of wealth

When a country's wealth increases, its citizens have access to resources which allow them to 'do their own thing'. The storyteller in the village market is replaced by TV sets, first one per village, but soon more. In wealthy Western family homes every family member may have his or her own TV set. The caravan through the desert is replaced by a number of buses, and these by a larger number of motor cars, until each adult family member drives a different car. The village hut in which the entire family lives and sleeps together is replaced by a house with a number of private rooms. Collective life is replaced by individual life. (Hofstede, 1991)

The telephone has similar circumstances. The first time the telephone was introduced, only one phone existed in a village, after several years, almost every house had its own phones, nowadays, in many families (in South Korea), every household member has his/her individual phones. Moreover, in many cases, one person has more than 2 phones (including cellular phones).

CONSTANT CONTACT AVAILABILITY

Cellular phone communication gives the feeling of constant contact availability without the limitations of time and space. The cellular phone also is useful to build trust between persons (especially in close relationships). For example, in South Korea, many parents buy cellular phones for their children to check upon their locations. Through cellular phone communication, people can have the feeling that the receiver is always there whenever they need to talk with him/her. Constant contact availability is one of the characteristics of cellular phone com-

munication and is useful in the security of a relationship. Even though the speaker and the receiver are in different locations, whenever the speaker wants to talk with the receiver, the speaker is able to contact the receiver. If by chance, a speaker cannot contact the person immediately, the speaker may leave a message. As soon as the receiver gets a message, the receiver can call back through a cellular phone. However, although the receiver can call back to the speaker immediately, the receiver may not call back. In that case, the speaker cannot contact the receiver immediately. Nevertheless, through cellular phones, it is be possible to contact people anytime and anywhere.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FOR UNDERSTANDING CELLULAR PHONE COMMUNICATIONS

This section reviews various traditional communication theories that are useful in understanding the uses and functions of cellular phone communication.

UNCERTAINTY REDUCTION THEORY

The characteristics of cellular phone communication generally are relevant to a person's inclination to reduce uncertainty. The qualities of cellular phone commu-nication such as immediate accessibility, control, direct interaction between individuals and constant contact availability reflect a desire of persons to conduct tasks and relationships surely and quickly. Hofstede (1991) ex-plained that Koreans have weak uncertainty avoidance. Thus, Koreans prefer constructed situations with weak content Koreans feel easy with many rules and official documents, Koreans sense danger about strange things, Koreans want to conduct tasks as quickly as possible (Na, 2001). Therefore, according to these characteristics of Korean people, immediate and direct communication of the cellular phone tends to suit most Koreans' inclinations. Berger and Calabrese (1975), in their article, "Some explorations in initial interaction and Beyond," describe the Uncertainty Reduction Theory. In their article, authors did not call the theory "Uncertainty theory". However, later, their notion of uncertainty reduction was called as the "Uncertainty reduction theory" by Sunnafrank, M. In this theory, generally people, in a first meeting, enlarge the range of reconnaissance through increasing the quantity of communication gradually to reduce uncertainty. This theory regards the self-exposure aspect as important (Berger and Calabrese, 1975). For example, a study by Berger (1975) revealed that during the course of interaction between strangers, the amount of demographic (low intimacy) information asked for and given was highest during the first minute of interaction. After the first minute, statistically significant decreases in the amount of demographic information exchanged were observed, while the amount of information asked for and given in such more intimate categories as "attitudes and opinions" and "other persons"

increased. (Berger and Calabrese, 1975)

Later, Sunnafrank (1986) defined the uncertainty reduction theory as follows Uncertainty reduction theory, the most formally articulated theoretical treatment of this position in communication, proposes that a key element in relational development is [an] individuals' uncertainty level concerning knowledge and understanding of selves and others. The original uncertainty perspective focused exclusively on potential influences of uncertainty and uncertainty reduction during beginning acquaintance. (Sunnafrank, 1986)

Cellular phone communication usually takes place between individuals who have known each other for a long time and more often than between individuals who meet each other for the first time. These are the people who the uncertainty Reduction Theory is focused on. Cellular phone communication seems to be a more useful com-munication method than the typical telephone and electronic mail communication in uncertainty reduction.

Furthermore, Berger (1979), Berger and Bradac (1982) and Sunnafrank (1986) proposed a distinction between 2 types of uncertainty, cognitive and behavioral. "Cognitive uncertainty encompasses uncertainty that individuals have about their own and relational others' beliefs and attitudes. On the other hand, behavioral uncertainty refers to the predictability of behavior in particular circ-umstances (Sunnafrank, 1986)." Between these two uncertainties, cellular phone communication has a connection to behavioral uncertainty reduction through increasing predictability. Berger and Calabrese (1975) have argued that crucial to an understanding of a given individual's communication behavior is a knowledge of the kinds of predictions and explanations the individual has for the behavior of the person with whom he is interacting. In short, "in some circumstances behavioral uncertainty may be strongly influenced by knowledge of situational constraints on behavior that have little relation to cognitive uncertainty" (Sunnafrank, 1986).

PREDICTED OUTCOME VALUE THEORY AND EXPECTANCY-VALUE THEORY

After the introduction of the uncertainty reduction theory, some theorists did follow up research (Berger, 1979, 1987; Berger and Bradac, 1982; Berger and Celabrese, 1975). Based on this research and his own research, Sunnafrank (1986) presented an expansion and reformulation of the uncertainty reduction theory through introducing "a predicted outcome value". Sunnafank explained the differences between the uncertainty reduction theory and the predicted outcome value in his article as follows; uncertainty reduction theory proposes that communication behavior in these situations is primarily understandable through interlocutors' goals of predicting and explaining the actions of partners and self.   Conversely, predicted outcome value theory posits that interactants' goals of achieving positive relational outcomes provide a more accurate and complete account of both communica-

tion behavior and uncertainty reduction attempts in beginning interactions. (Sunnafrank, 1990)

Through the predicted outcome value theory, Sunnafrank continues to explain that "positive predicted outcome value leads individuals to communicate in a manner calculated to continue, expand, or escalate their interaction and relationship with initial interaction partners" (Sunnafrank, 1990).

As the predicted outcome value theory proposes, cellular phone communication continues to exist as a personal communication method with an increasing usage rate because people can obtain many positive values as a result of using cellular phone communication. Possible positive values brought about by cellular phone communication may include; direct and immediate interaction, spatial-temporal transcendence, and person-to-person interaction. When these values exceed the discomforts that a person gets by using a cellular phone, the quantity and expression of cellular phone communication will increase and continue, according to this theory.

On the other hand, to examine the attitude toward usage of cellular phones, the expectancy-value theory can be useful. Perhaps the expectancy-value theory is best known as the subjective expected utility model of the behavioral decision theory (Edwards, 1954). According to this theory, when a person needs to make a behavioral choice, he/she will select that alternative that has the highest subjective expected utility (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). This theory is usually used for research about consumer behavior or voting behavior. However, although this theory is criticized for too much dependence on rational decisions, it is still applicable to many situations. Figure 2 shows the decision process about whether a person continues to use a cellular phone or not. The model shows that the decision is affected by self-attitude and personal norms.

The attitude of using a cellular phone is predicted through results that are positive or negative based on past experience using a cellular phone. When the expectation and value of a positive result (e.g., it is possible to talk as other people and the devices turn into necessities that with a friend anytime) exceed the expectation and value of a negative result (e.g., price is a burden), the behavioral intention of using a cellular phone is increased. Furthermore, the subjective norm is determined by the results of the important person's agreement rate about using a cellular phone and the intention to follow his/her opinion. This norm then determines the personal attitudes and behavioral intention of using a cellular phone. The behavioral intention model may apply differently in eastern or collectivist cultures. According to previous research, in the western culture, behavioral intention is generally determined by personal attitudes. In the eastern culture, behavioral intention is determined by not only personal attitude but also the important person's (e.g., family and close friends, etc.) thinking (Na, 2001).

Lee (1988) amended and adjusted the behavioral inten-

tion model to Confucian culture. In Lee's research, he substituted the norm factor of Fishbein and Ajzen's model (1975) to prestige pressure and conformity pressure. Through this research, he found that the face-saving pressure works on visible things, and conformity pressure works on invisible things. In Na's research (1995) using Lee's paradigm, she revealed that prestige pressure works on visible necessary articles for marriage, and the conformity pressure works on invisible small tokens of one's gratitude powerfully. Moreover, she pointed out that older generations and men are weak to the prestige pressure, and younger generations and women possibly are weak to the conformity pressure.

Relating to people who have cellular phones, the possible working time of the prestige and conformity pressure can be changed. In general, possession of the thing that is expensive and is possessed by only a few people is regarded as the symbol of privilege. For example, in South Korean culture, the power gap (psychological gap between high position people and low position people) is large. Almost everybody wants to have privilege and have the symbols of high position (Hofstede, 1991). When the cellular phone was introduced and was expensive, people who had a cellular phone appeared to have a high position and privilege and became an object of envy. Therefore, people preferred to have a cellular phone as a way of increasing their prestige (importance or power).

The cellular phone and many other telecommunication devices are considered as symbols of privilege and high positions when these devices are introduced. Thus, although these devices are expensive in the beginning, people want to possess the devices to show off their privileges. As telecommunication devices become more common, conformity pressure comes into play and status differences may be reduced. In other words, people who do not have the devices feel pressure: why do I not have one although everybody does; don't you have one yet? As a result, many people buy the devices to be the same almost everybody has.

USES AND GRATIFICATION THEORY

Through cellular phone use, most people get the satisfaction of immediate and direct communication that was not served by a typical telephone. In other words, to obtain satisfaction and benefits, people usually buy and use a cellular phone. One of the most popular theories of mass communication, the uses and gratifications theory, explains that an individual chooses media (including communicating devices) to gratify needs. In general, the uses and gratifications theory focuses on the consumer rather than the media (including messages). In other words, the uses and gratifications theory argues that "we should ask not only 'what media do to people,' but also 'what people do with the media' (Webster and Phalen, 1997).

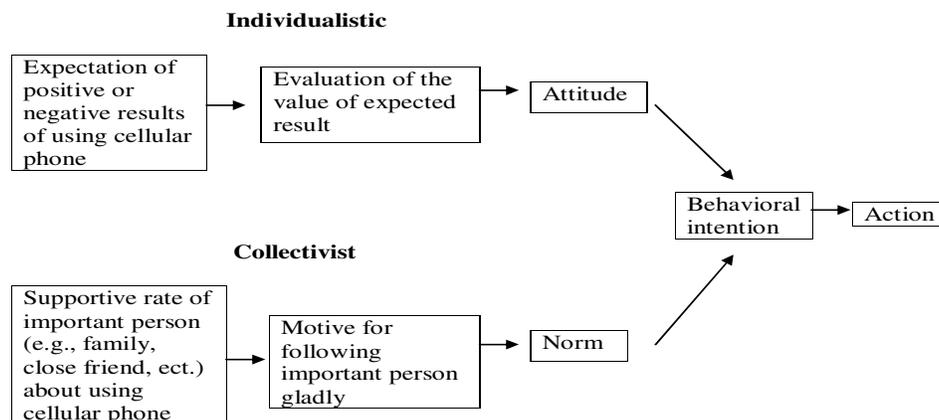Since the early 1970s, the uses and gratifications theo-

Individualistic

Figure 2. Behavioral intention model about the decision process of a cellular phone using behavior

Source: Na (2001). The communication characteristics of cellular phone and Korean culture. Paper presented at the seminar of Korean Society for Journalism and Communication Studies, Seoul, South Korea p.10.

ry and research have attracted considerable attention (For more information, see Rosengren, K. E., Wenner, L. A. and Palmgreen, P. (Eds.). (1985). Media gratification research: Current perspectives. CA: Sage) (Webster and Phalen, 1997). Unlike the traditional studies (such as powerful-effects), this theory considers the audience to be an active user of media. Katz et al. (1974) discussed this concept as follows: compared with classical effects studies, the uses and gratifications approach talks about the media consumer rather than the media message as its starting point, and explores his communication behavior in terms of his direct experience with the media. It views the members of the audience as actively utilizing media contents, rather than being passively acted upon by the media. (Katz et al., 1974)

In the uses and gratifications theory, the audience is the subject that has the responsibility for choosing media to satisfy his/her needs. Although no prior research on cellular phone from the uses and gratifications perspective was found, we can guess that cellular phone users probably choose cellular phones to know and meet their personal needs. In short, people choose a cellular phone as a personal communication device to satisfy their needs (e.g., immediate and direct interaction with close friends, family members, and girl/boy friends).

Overall, like the uses and gratifications theory in which the audience is imagined to be active and goal-directed, cellular phone users actively adapt new communication devices (such as cellular phones) and use them to satisfy their needs (such as direct and immediate communication and constant contact).

KOREAN CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS AND CELLULAR PHONE COMMUNICATION

The change of identity and the change of communication style from a cultural perspective between individualism and collectivism, generally, South Korea is classified as a collectivistic culture. However, in the last two decades, the value of individualism has increased through the change of personal identity (Na and Cha, 1999). This change is especially conspicuous in the younger generation. Because of this change and the desire for individualization by the younger generation, the need for individual value and contact are increasing, even though group, national, and organizational values are emphasized externally in South Korea. In the Korean culture, because the boundary between groups is clear, crossing the boundary is difficult. Therefore, a rapid increase in cellular phone use is possible due to the growth of the desire for direct and immediate contact between individuals passing over the group boundaries.

To illustrate the rapidly changing values of young people in South Korea, Na and Cha (1999) noted that individualism has increased in South Korea. According to their research, during the last two decades, Korean people chose themselves and their families as more important aspects in their lives than national and group identities (Na and Cha, 1999). For example, in Na and Cha's (1999) research, 33.3% (men) and 49.3% (women) chose themselves and their families as the most important aspect of their lives in 1979, but in 1998, more than 71% of people chose themselves and their families as more important than the nation or the group. Even though the cultural aspects have changed, if communication still stresses the group, it is reasonable that the desire for direct contact between individuals will expand. This family-central individualism goes along with the cellular phone communication. Thus the cellular phone communication is utilized to strengthen close relationships between close friends or between family members.

Besides the increasing individualism in South Korea, another conspicuous change of identity is the increase of self-opinion which could also indicate a change in the

way people communicate their opinions. For example, according to Na and Cha's study, in 1998, 90.6% of male respondents and 83.3% of female respondents responded that younger people should point out a mistake when older people make a mistake. On the other hand, in 1979, 87% of male respondents and 61% of female respondents responded that younger people should indicate an error when older people make a mistake.

Since Korean culture is changing, this change has affected communication style and phone usage in South Korea. For an example of cultural change in South Korea, Na and Cha (1999) discovered a conspicuous change in their survey question about whether people should be patient about family members' requirements or ask to correct about family members' mistakes. In 1979, among male respondents, correction (81%) is higher than patience, and among female respondents, patience (52%) is higher than correction. On the other hand, in 1998, the number of male respondents who chose correction was reduced by 20%, but the female respondents increased by 20%. In the typical Korean culture, to keep happiness with family, women usually should be patient when men require something of them. In short, for women, patience was a noble attribute in Korean customs of long standard, however, it is changing now. Thus part of Korean culture is being reduced in South Korea.

These changes of identity in South Korea bring necessarily changes in communication style. Because of increasing individualism, people want direct communication (person-to-person) without going through the group. Unlike western countries, in the Korean culture, direct and expressive communication has become pressed by social hierarchy and customs of long-standing traditions (especially, for women and the younger generation). Once immediate and direct communication between individuals on cellular phones became possible, women and members of the younger generation quickly adapted the cellular phones.

Besides individualism and self-opinion, the other cultural characteristic that affects cellular phone use is the uncertainty reduction, as mentioned above. Relating to cellular phone communication, people tend to prefer communicating directly and immediately with the desired person and to dislike waiting to connect with their desired person. The certainty that people can take a call anywhere and anytime and transmit their messages on the first attempt affects people who have a great need to uncertainty reduction. The reason for the preference is that cellular phone communication has immediacy and spatial-temporal transcendence and is based on immediacy of response, whereas electronic mail communication has spatial-temporal transcendence but does not have immediacy.

The most immediate communication device as a direct connection device between individuals appropriately satisfies South Korean people who have a desire to hurry. In addition, when people face impossible forecasts or uncertain situations (such as traffic jams), the desire for a communication device by which people can quickly inform other people about the situation is increased. In short, the popularity of the cellular phone communication in South Korea is due to the tendency of uncertainty reduction, increasing individualism, and an increasing self-opinion value.

Cultural gap between the older and younger generations and the cellular phone communication

In the last two decades, the change of Korean identity can be summarized as an increasing generation gap and decreasing gender gap (Na and Cha, 1999). Because of the cultural gap between the older and younger generations, there is a difference in general communication styles. Furthermore, like general communication styles, in cellular communication styles the difference follows naturally. In general, because the older generation has great reluctance to use new technological devices and is unaccustomed to using new technological devices, the new device increases uncertainty.

In contrast, because the younger generation is more willing to embrace existing telecommunication devices and is accustomed to using new technological devices, the new device can help to reduce uncertainty through immediate communication. Because of these characteristics, the younger generation might be expected to have an open mind to adapt and use cellular phones in various ways (e.g., talking, sending text messages, using it as a video camera, finding information, reservation of tickets and tele-banking). The younger generation not only prefers direct and immediate communication but also has a tendency to show off their uniqueness. In other words, in general, because the younger generation might prefer informal, private, and unregulated communication, their characteristics are in accord with the characteristics of cellular phone communication naturally. In addition, because the younger generation has low rejection and has high curiosity about new technological devices, they are enjoying the new device in various ways.

Cultural gap between men and women and the cellular phone communication

Through their research, Na and Cha (1999) argued that the identity gap between men and women is decreasing in South Korea while the identity gap between old and younger generations is increasing (Na and Cha, 1999). However, between men and women, there are still differences. For example, in the usage rate of the Internet, between men and women, there is a large difference. According to the findings of the research conducted by the Korean Computer Agency (2001), 45.1% of men respondents use the Internet while only 28.8% of women respondents use the Internet in South Korea (p.342). This difference between Korean men and women naturally influences the daily communication patterns between them.

Furthermore, this difference of daily communication pattern between Korean men and women influences cellular phone communication patterns as well. When cellular phones were introduced, cellular phone communication was limited to use at only important or urgent times. However, as the cellular phone has gradually become more and more popular, daily communication patterns reflect on cellular phone communication (Na, 2001).

In general, according to Gray (1992), in daily communication, when they communicate, men usually consider facts and results, but women usually consider emotions and processes (Gray, 1992). Although empirical research is needed, we assume that cellular phone communication is similar to daily communication.

In spite of the differences of communication style between men and women, unlike between old and younger generations, men and women both prefer immediate and direct communication between individuals. Between men and women, no matter what kinds of subjects and style they use for communication, they want immediate and direct interaction of communication. In short, modern society is the period of coexistence of variety, thus modern society is the time that the importance of immediate and direct communication between individuals who have different perspectives is increasing more than in any other period. Now, cellular phone communication functions as an important role as a bridge that connects various individuals without the limitations of time and space.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the characteristics of cellular phones and the relationship between Korean culture and cellular phone communication. The findings of the current research indicate that nowadays, the cellular phone is becoming a necessity for interpersonal communication because of three characteristics: immediate accessibility and control, direct interaction between individuals, and constant contact availability.
Especially in South Korea, a rapid increase in cellular phone use is occurring because of the growth of the desire for direct and immediate contact between individuals passing over the group boundaries (such as family). This increase is based on the growth of individualism, which has increased through the change of personal identity in South Korea. In addition to increasing individualism, another characteristic that affects cellular phone use is the uncertainty reduction (e.g., people's tendency to prefer communicating with target person and to dislike dealing with intermediate interlocutor or waiting to communicate with the person they want to talk to). Lastly, the other characteristic that affects the cellular phone use is an increasing self-opinion value, which has influence on increasing the use of cellular phones. As a result, the popularity of cellular phone communication in South Korea is due to an increasing individualism, the tendency of uncertainty reduction, and an increasing self-opinion value.

This study does not analyze people's reactions to cellular phone use but analyzes the characteristics of cellular phone communication and the relationship between Korean culture and cellular phone communication, based on a survey of prior research. Suggestions for future research are numerous. Many additional studies are needed to make the cellular phone usage and culture more clear. Future research should include the cellular phone user's reaction to examine their satisfaction with cellular phone use. Additionally, examining user's reactions allows us to see what kinds of desires users have and whether (and how) these experiences satisfy users' desires or not.

Second, it might be useful to test theories related to cellular phone usage (e.g., Uncertainty reduction theory, Expectancy-value theory, and Uses & Gratification theory). Attempts should be made to examine the validity (or efficiency) of these theories to understand cellular phone usage. To confirm the validity (or efficiency) of these theories, future research needs to examine whether these theories are effective and well-directed in explaining cellular phone usage or not.

Third, numerous additional comparisons are possible. For example, future studies can compare the different contexts of cellular phone usages. Evaluating cellular phone usage differences in developed and undeveloped countries can be made. Cross-cultural comparisons would be useful, as would comparisons between Western and Eastern cultural contexts. Also, an exploration of cellular phone usage differences between Democratic and Communist countries might reveal some interesting findings with regard to characteristics and cultures of the cellular phone.

Finally, a range of studies focusing on cellular phone communication as an interpersonal communication form is also possible. Regardless of what avenue future research takes next, exploration of differences between typical interpersonal communication and cellular phone communication as an interpersonal communication form needs to be an ongoing line of scholarly research. An examination of these differences might reveal some interesting findings about the relationship between technological devices and communication style.

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