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Adoption of mobile internet applications as a means of communication in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Mobile network operators in South Africa are experiencing a decline in their voice and messaging revenues as consumers continue to find new and cheaper ways to communicate over the mobile internet. The availability of high speed mobile broadband access and increased smartphone penetration in South Africa has created an environment in which the availability and use of Mobile Instant Messaging (MIM) applications (such as Whatsapp, Mxit, BBM and iMessage) are flourishing. Consumers are now downloading MIM applications onto their smartphones to support text messaging over the mobile internet as opposed to using mobile operators' own messaging platforms. Consequently, every text message sent via MIM communication is lost revenue for mobile network operators. With limited research pertaining to the factors that influence consumers' to adopt MIM for communication, this study attempts to identify these factors and the extent to which they affect consumers' behavioural intention to adopt MIM for communication. Data collection was facilitated by means of an online survey via the internet and respondents were contacted via e-mail to participate in the survey. The samples used were mainly from the economically active population in South Africa that have valid e-mail accounts and have access to the internet. There were 259 valid respondents for the survey. The findings suggest that the factors, facilitating conditions, attitude, compatibility, perceived behavioural control, relative advantage and self-efficacy (in descending order of importance) have significant positive influences on consumers' behavioural intention to adopt MIM for communication. While, subjective norms and significant others were found to have no significant impact. The results of this study are expected to give mobile network operators in South Africa an insight into how consumers come to accept and adopt MIM services for communication. Mobile operators must recognise that consumer behaviour is changing and that there is an imminent risk of their services being eroded by MIM communication.