

**The extension of the individual into the multiplicity:  
Influence of mobile phone as internet media on media use in Japan**

**Ron Korenaga (Rikkyo University)**

In this report, I consider the social aspects of media convergence and its influence in Japan with respect to mobile phone usage.

The quick and wide spread use of Internet in Japan depended largely on the diffusion of mobile phones nowadays. The importance of mobile phones as Internet media is still increasing now. Thus, it seems appropriate to call them "computer" rather than "phones" as it is possible to use almost all kinds of internet-based services and applications.

**More mobile internet, less PC internet**

The Japanese mobile phone service began in 1987 and the market has almost saturated by now. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the diffusion rate of mobile phone is increasing rapidly from 3% of households in 1993 to about 94% in ten years. The rate of mobile internet users (users of mail with @-address or web contents) presenting in 2005 an increase of people who are over 6 years of age is at 81%. This is an increase of about 19% since 2004.

On the other hand, the PC internet diffusion rate is 77% with people over 6 years old. Thus, there are more people who access Internet on mobile phones than those who access by personal computers.

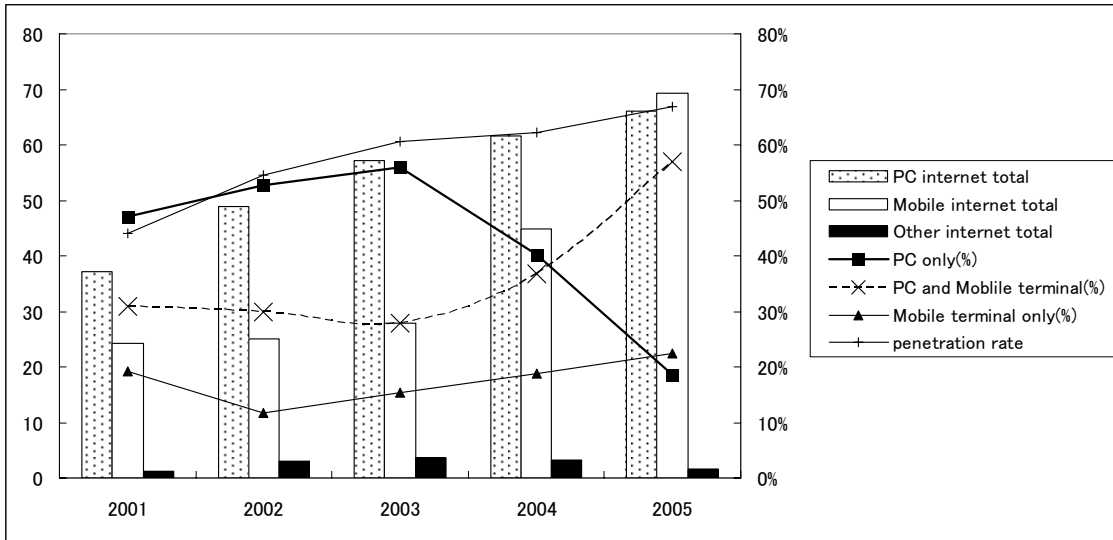


Fig.1 Number and Rate of users of mobile internet and PC internet in Japan (left axis;million) [Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2006]

This trend has been continuing since 2002. Mobile internet use has increased from 2002 while fixed internet use only by PC (PC internet) has decreased. In Japan, it can be said that mobile internet use has surpassed the role of PC internet and it is one of the reasons why PC internet use has not risen as rapidly especially among home users, although PC internet quality is being improved with broad band.

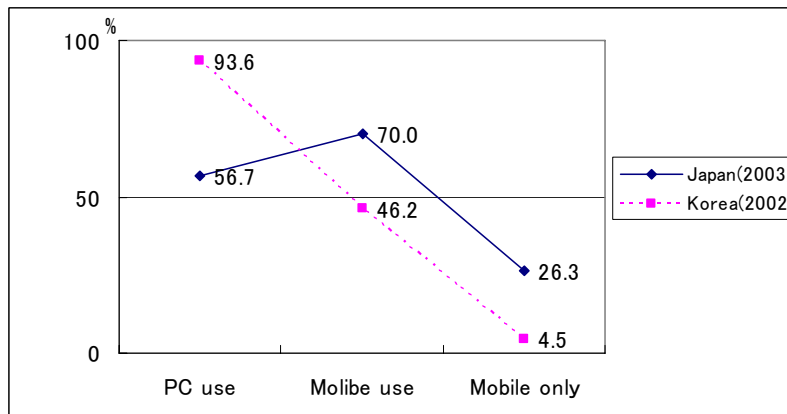


Fig.2 Rate of users of mobile/PC internet in Japan and Korea (Age of 12 to 29) [ Mobile communication research group, 2003]

Such tendency was salient especially for young people. The rate of PC internet users among Japanese people under the age of 30 is lower than that of Korean young people as Fig.2 shows. To the contrary, the rate of mobile internet use in Japan was higher than in Korea.

### **Japanese system of Mobile Internet**

To suggest the reason why in Japan mobile business is so successful, I will explain its business model briefly.

The most notable characteristic of mobile internet services in Japan is that the telecommunication carriers have their own official sites for their services for which they apply a unique paying system. The users of mobile internet services pay only for the amount of the information (i.e. packet charge) they received. It is not the content provider but the telecommunication company who collects the fees from the users.

Although the contents fees are paid to the content providers, the 10-12% of the earnings go to the collecting agency as commission. The content is uploaded exclusively to the carriers' official sites after being thoroughly examined. In this way the providers earn both attract and maintain their customers base more easily and, for the customers, innocent and less harmful contents are available.

Furthermore, Japanese customers have become accustomed to this charge system. Although the new limited packet charge system was introduced in 2003 and the charge has been discounted for several times, they still have to pay for a considerable

amount of cost to access Internet on mobile phone.

### Japanese preference for Mobile e-mail

There is another reason why PC internet use was surpassed by mobile internet in Japan. That is, the preference for Mobile e-mail of Japanese people.

The most relevant motif of Japanese people to use the mobile internet is e-mail. The mobile e-mail actually more used than talking on mobile phones and it is the most popular communication tool among Japanese young people. In using the mobile phone for personal communication, people obviously prefer e-mail to talking.

It is reported that the send/receive frequency of mobile e-mails is almost same in Japan and Korea, while the frequency of phone calling via the mobile is over ten times higher in Korea than in Japan. (Mobile communication research group, 2003)

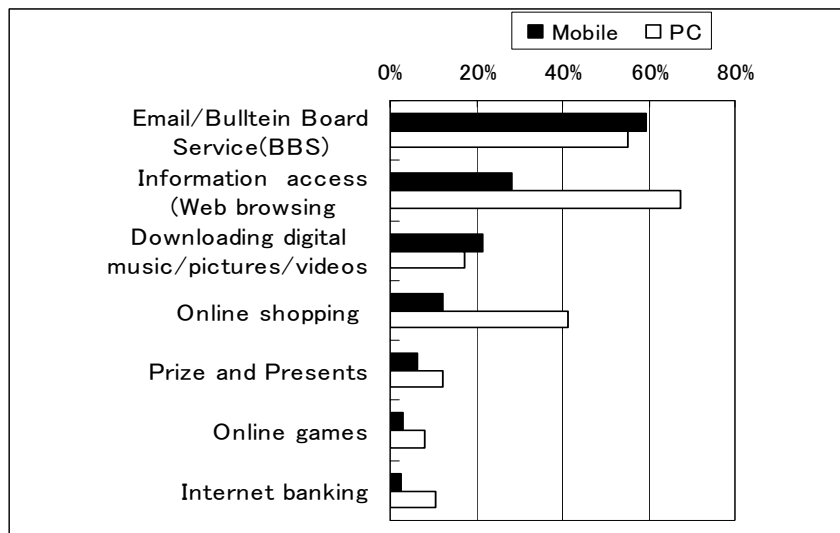


Fig.3 Rate of internet usage by purpose

As shown in Fig.3, the first purpose to use Internet on mobile phones is emailing or BBS overwhelmingly at about 60%. Second and third purposes are information access on web at 28% and downloading digital contents at 21%. Thus, it can be said that Japanese people use mobile internet intensively for communication rather than searching information. This trend has been accelerated by the new services on the internet such as Social Network Services (SNS).

### **Problems on mobile phone-centered use of Internet in Japan**

Now we turn to some problems of intensive use of mobile phones. It can be easily understood that the information seeking functions of the mobile internet are quite limited compared to those of PC Internet. As mentioned above, most people use mobile phones mainly for emailing, which means that the use of mobile Internet is highly limited to emailing in Japan.

Although the speed of access to Internet has been raised by the 3G mobile phone, it is much slower than that of PC Internet. The possibility of Internet use in Japan is restricted by the high cost and low data transmission of mobile phone protocol.

As a result of these limited uses, it is reported that people who use Internet only on mobile phones are less proficient in accessing information than people who use Internet on PC or both on PC and mobile phone. (Fig.4 Kimura, 2004)

These limitations seem to prevent Japanese people from using Internet for various purposes. Some limitations might be hindrances in terms of networking in Japanese society since many

people tend to accept these limitations posed by mobile phones .

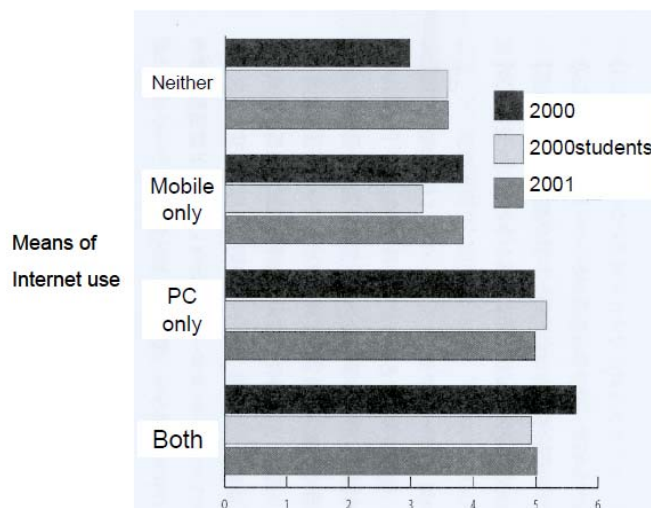


Fig.4 Rate of scores of information skill (means of total scores of following 5 scales)

- Seeking : "I like to search various information even if it is hard to find them."
- Collecting : " I have my own way to collect information."
- Choosing : " I can choose what I really need from many kinds of information."
- Communicating : " I can properly communicate to other people what is significant"
- Collaborating : "I like to create new things with other people through heated discussion."

As mentioned above, young people in Japan tend to depend intensively on mobile phones to access Internet.

Consequently, it is often anxiously said in Japan that these restrictions might trigger the downfall of Japanese society because especially young people tend to communicate each other not only with restricted information, but with less proficiency in associating together if they depend entirely on mobile phones (Matsuda, 2005).

### **Mobile as private sphere of Japanese people**

However, we note here that we cannot attribute these problems

exclusively to the fault of young people.

The reason why young people in Japan depend intensively on mobile phones is mainly because they have no other resources to use. For example, the rate of schools in Japan which enable their students to use internet in class is less than 50% and is going down now. Besides, many of them can use PCs at home, yet in many cases PCs are placed in the living room and shared with other family members and so they are reluctant to use PCs at home. They do not want to disclose what they are doing on the internet to other family members.

Relating to this point, the Japanese preference for mobile e-mail also can be considered from the communication style and traits of Japanese people such as diffidence and self-defense.

As for self-defense, many Japanese people try not to disclose their personal things to others and so they do not want their private phone calls to be heard by others.

Because of high diffusion rate of mobile phones in Japan, many types of information including e-mail are sent directly to users at any place and at anytime. It is sometimes considered rude to Japanese people to be spoken to when they are not anticipating it. So Japanese people are often concerned about being annoyed or annoying others with unanticipated phone calls. The preference for using e-mail makes it possible to avoid such things.

In addition to that, since Japanese people are very sensitive about their personal information, they are very cautious not to disclose their phone numbers so as not to receive messages

from anonymous persons. They feel easy in using mobile phones because many spam emails and spam text messages are filtered out by telecommunication carriers in advance.

Thus, in Japan, the use of mobile internet is closely connected with the user's private sphere.

**Simultaneous use as extension of private sphere**

On the other hand, the intensive media use of mobile phones has initiated another new and original media form in Japan.

Mobile phones are generally supposed to be used when we are away from home, such as in office, in school. However, many survey studies in Japan show that mobile phones are frequently used at homes as Fig.5 shows. Especially email on mobile phone is most frequently used.

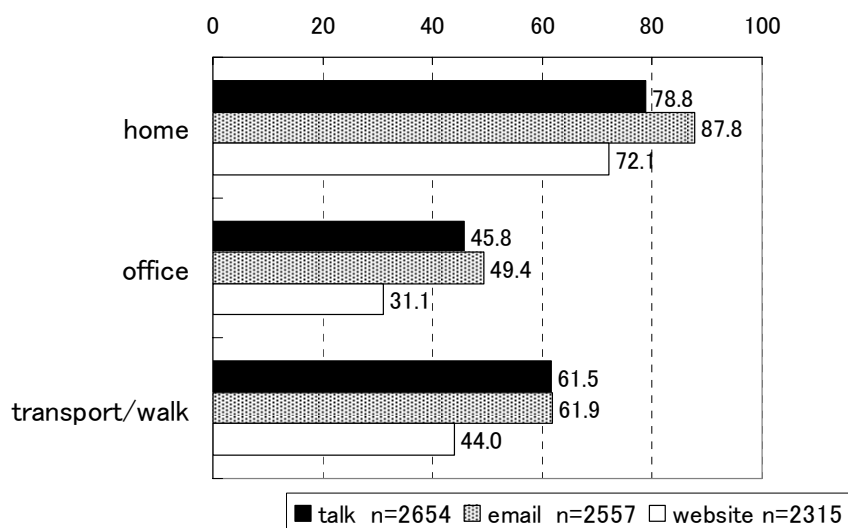


Fig 5. Places for mobile phone use [NTT Mobile Society Research Institute, 2006]

The transient use of mobile phone enables the 'simultaneous use' at home. Many people in Japan use various media at home



while using mobile phones. Such tendency is salient especially for young people. Above all, email is used a great deal along with other media. A prime example of this is use of the mobile phones while watching TV or surfing the internet as Fig.6 shows.

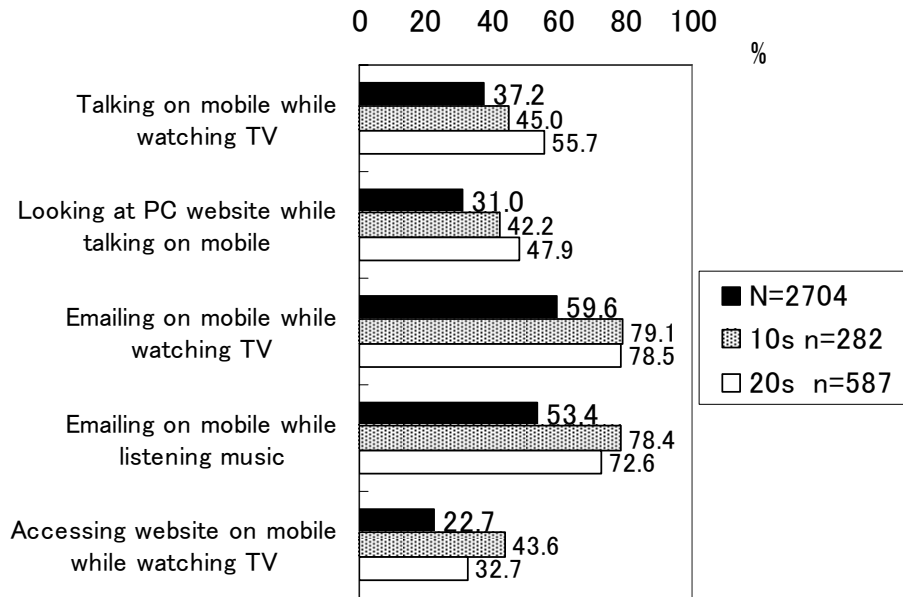


Fig 6. Simultaneous media uses of mobile phone

[NTT Mobile Society Research Institute, 2006]

Thus, it can be said that mobile phones brought about a new convergence of media use. This convergence may extend the user's private sphere into the multiplicity, because the mobile phone use is closely connected with the individuality of the user on one hand, and the mobile internet use itself is always open to the relationship with others on the other hand. According to this 'double bind' situation, the identity of the user is supposed to be multiple. For example, the people who often email on mobile phones while watching TV and listening music (i.e.

'simultaneous mobile users' ) tend to feel a kind of 'cognitive dissonance' (Festinger) that they would have missed the more useful information to consider after they have chosen something from others on a contract, shopping and so on (Fig.7).

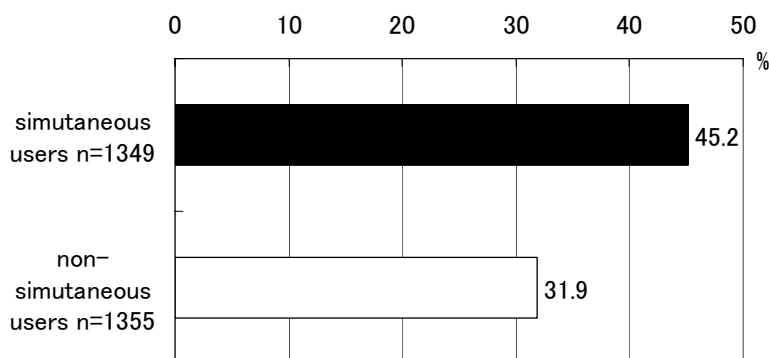


Fig.7 Rate of 'cognitive dissonance' by simutaneous/non-simutaneous mobile users

[NTT Mobile Society Research Institute, 2006, ]

### Conclusion

As mentioned above, particular social aspects in Japan has made the mobile phones into primary internet media.

However, the limitations of actual usage throw doubt on their possibilities in the future. It seems that these limitations are the result of compromise between the necessity for increasing penetration of the internet and the expected creative potential of the internet.

On the other hand, the intensive media use of mobile phones has initiated another new and original media form, which might bring about the multiplicity of identity of media users.

Considering the shifts of the internet trend to searching and arranging many kinds of information as the word 'Web2.0'

suggests, it is necessary to hold a new perspective such as the media convergence by users themselves.

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