Mobile phone feature preferences, customer satisfaction and repurchase intent among male users

Matti Haverila *

School of Business and Management, American University of Sharjah, University City, Sharjah 26666, United Arab Emirates

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that there is a plethora of research regarding the mobile phone feature preferences, there appears to be lack of research regarding the relationship between the feature preferences and their relationship between customer satisfaction and repurchase intent. Therefore the objective of this research is to investigate the mobile phone feature preferences among male respondents in Finland. In conjunction with this the conceptualization of the feature preferences is studied as well as their relationship to customer satisfaction and repurchase intent of the mobile phone. The results indicate that battery/talk time is the most important feature for the respondents. The respondents perceive there to be six logical factors among the feature preferences as follows: business functionality, support functions, aesthetics + design, parts + processes, solidity, and tones + games. The first three correlate with customer satisfaction, and only the business functionality factor correlates with repurchase intent. Finally the relationship between customer satisfaction and repurchase intent is investigated, and comparisons to similar studies are made. Limitations and managerial implications are discussed.

1. Introduction

The cell phone can be perceived to be a ubiquitous communication device. The recent statistics provided by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (2010) indicate that the mobile cellular subscriptions exceeded 5 billion worldwide early 2010. Finland has been one of the pioneers in the adaption of the mobile technology, and the penetration is currently above 1.41 mobile subscriptions per person. The mobile phone penetration in Australia on the other hand has been slightly lower exceeding 1.00 person in 2007 and being approximately 1.14 in 2009. The manufacturers of the cell phones have been adding more or less relevant features to the mobile phones since the introduction of the mobile phone to the consumer markets. These features include for example video, multimedia messaging, and GPS just to mention a few.

The previous research has investigated the mobile phone feature preferences in some detail. For example Işıklar and Buyuközkan (2007) proposed a multi-criteria decision making approach for the purpose of assessing mobile phones as regards to the user's feature preferences order among youth in Turkey. This approach, however, has not been validated with robust statistical methods, nor has been tested in other country settings. In addition Işıklar and Buyuközkan (2007) did not test the relationship between feature preferences and customer satisfaction and repurchase intent.

Economides and Grousopoulou (2009) also investigated the importance of a limited feature set, services and costs among young male and female users. Again the relationship between the feature preferences and customer satisfaction and repurchase intent was not investigated. Han et al. (2004) incorporated the user satisfaction into their study, but the relationship was studied with design (aesthetics) features, not with the features preferences per se. In addition repurchase intentions were not studied. Zhou and Nakamoto (2007) also investigated how the enhanced and unique features affect product preferences, and the moderating role of product familiarity in this relationship, but again the relationship with customer satisfaction and repurchase intent was not examined. Finally Goode et al. (2005) studied the relationship between customer satisfaction and key input factors like experience of product quality, level of service charges, level of call charges, and level of satisfaction with the service provider in the context of mobile phones. In conclusion there appears to be a plethora of research regarding the cell phone feature preferences on one hand, and customer satisfaction in the context of the mobile phones on the other, but research dealing directly with the relationship of mobile phone features preferences and customer satisfaction appears to be lacking.

As regards to comparing the feature preferences between males and females, there are a few studies, which have addressed this issue (Economides and Grousopoulou, 2009; Glasscock and Wogalter, 2006; Haverila, forthcoming; Işıklar and Buyuközkan, 2007). All of these studies found differences between the genders regarding the feature preferences. Regarding the use of communications

* Tel.: +971 6 515 5555; fax: +971 6 558 5065.
  E-mail addresses: matti.haverila@infacs.com, mhaverila@aus.edu

technology the previous research has discovered that the attitudes of males are more favorable towards the use of communications technology, and also that the use of computers is stereotypically perceived to be predominantly a male activity (Busch, 1995; Jackson et al., 2001; Jackson et al., 2008). The studies, which have compared customer satisfaction between genders, have indicated the gender might have an impact on customer satisfaction and particularly on the drivers of customer satisfaction (Bryant and Cha, 1996; Danaher, 1998; Mittal and Kamakura, 2001; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2010; Söderlund, 2002). For these reasons it was decided that the study will be conducted only from the point of view of male users of the mobile phone.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate what is the importance of the mobile phone feature preferences and also what is their relationship with customer satisfaction and repurchase intent among the young male users. Thus the research objectives are following. The first research objective is to investigate what is the order of importance of the feature preferences among the male users. The second research objective is to examine how do the male users conceptualize the feature preferences, and the third research objective is to study if there is a relationship between the conceptualized feature preference factors, and customer satisfaction and the repurchase intent of the mobile phone. The final and fourth research objective is to investigate the nature of the relationship between customer satisfaction and repurchase intent. These research questions are important to answer given the growing importance and changing role of mobile phones in the modern culture globally. There are many other things (e.g. the quality of the relationship between the customer and the retailer/manufacturer, and the social status (Martensen, 2007)) in play determining the ultimate customer satisfaction and the repurchase intent. This study concentrates, however, on the relationship of product feature preferences, and customer satisfaction and the repurchase intent only.

This research is organized as follows. After the introduction the theoretical aspects of mobile phone feature preferences, customer satisfaction and repurchase intent are discussed. This is followed by the methodology of the research, the data analysis, and discussion section, and finally future research possibilities, managerial implications as well as the limitations will be discussed.

2. Product feature preferences

2.1. Product feature preferences theory

The appeal of a product can be enhanced by adding features that the competition does not have yet (Glasscock and Wogalter, 2006; Goldenberg et al., 2003; Matzler et al., 1996). The features are sources of primary benefits received when the product is purchased (Yoon and Kijewski, 1997), and thus they have a positive impact on product evaluation (Mukherjee and Hoyer, 2001). This positive impact of adding new features to the product has been demonstrated to be a robust phenomenon interestingly even in situations when the new features are irrelevant (Carpenter et al., 1994), or possibly damaging (Meyers-Levy and Tybout, 1989). Users experience the positive impact of adding new features, however, with a diminishing degree so that features added to a relatively inferior product have a more positive impact on the product assessment than features added to a relatively superior product (Nowlis and Simonson, 1996).

Many studies have discovered that product features have an impact on the quality assessment of consumers (Clodfelter and Fowler, 2001; Mukherjee and Hoyer, 2001; Nowlis and Simonson, 1996; Shimp and Bearden, 1982; Yoon and Kijewski, 1997). The prior literature has indicated that consumers assess the quality and performance using both intrinsic and extrinsic product cues

in order to reduce the risk during pre-purchase behavior. Intrinsic cues are related to the physical characteristics or features of the product (Van den Heuvel et al., 2007). The change of the intrinsic characteristics means that the nature of the product will change. The extrinsic cues are also related to the product, but not part of the physical product itself. Examples of extrinsic cues include price, brand name, level of advertising (Clodfelter and Fowler, 2001), website quality (Wells et al., 2011), country of manufacture (Lambert, 1972), and warranty (Shimp and Bearden, 1982).

It is obvious that the extrinsic and intrinsic quality and performance cues are interrelated, and cannot be separated from each other (Lambert, 1972). Prior research has discovered, however, that under certain conditions intrinsic cues are more important than the extrinsic cues when consumers are assessing the quality of the product (Jacoby et al., 1971). In addition the prior research has discovered that extrinsic cues might not be able to diminish the uncertainty associated with whether an innovative product will perform the expected function (Shimp and Bearden, 1982). In addition Zeithaml (1971) also demonstrated that the intrinsic and extrinsic cues have an impact on the perceived quality and perceived value in addition to the actual quality as experienced by the consumers.

Finally it is not always obvious that adding new features will improve the product evaluation. Prior research has found out that adding new features might enhance product evaluations regarding low-complexity products, but the opposite might be the case for high-complexity products due to the negative learning-cost inferences related to the new features, and also that this can in fact persist even if the consumers are given explicit information about the new features (Mukherjee and Hoyer, 2001). Thus similarly to the study done by Wells et al. (2011) it can be claimed that while the intrinsic features of a mobile phone may be predictive of the quality of the mobile phone for technologically more sophisticated users, this might not be the case for less advanced users who then use the extrinsic features as quality cues (Rao and Monroe, 1988).

2.2. Mobile phone feature preferences

The technology and style (colors, design, size etc.) have developed immensely since the original mobile phone launch. In the beginning the voice features dominated while today the mobile phone includes multi-tasking features like camera, calendar, mp3 player etc. It is evident that the mobile phones are deeply rooted in every person's everyday life (Palen and Salzman, 2002), and enable undertaking of many tasks, which go way beyond the traditional communication (Lee, 2007).

A recent study by J.D. Power (Parsons, 2010) discovered that the key drivers of customer satisfaction are: Ease of operation, operating system (smart phones only), physical design, handset features, and battery functionality. The claim is that the "Voice of the Customer" can be heard by investigating mobile phone users' responses to these question categories. The analysis of the data enables the identification and quantification of the drivers of satisfaction (Parsons, 2010). Işıklar and Buyuközkan (2007) developed a multi-criteria decision making (MCDM) approach to evaluate the mobile phone options in respect to the users' preferences order. They first identified the most desirable features influencing the choice of the mobile phone, and then used these in two MCDM models for the evaluation procedure. At this stage the selection criteria was categorized into product and user-related criteria (Appendix). Secondly they determined the relative weights of the evaluation criteria, and then ranked the mobile phone alternatives in the third phase. Finally they used a case study to demonstrate the effectiveness of their method. Their approach was an *ex ante* approach (before the event) and thus they did not investigate or validate their approach in a *posteriori* situation (empirical), which