

Loyalty to smartphone brand increases with greater use of digital content

LONDON, UK: Nearly one in five consumers, who own both an iPad and an iPhone, say switching smartphone is more difficult than changing bank accounts. A simple, integrated user experience driving consumers' brand loyalty to their smartphone and they are less likely to switch brands than more applications and services they use on the device, new research from GfK finds.



GfK's report on UX and loyalty in the digital ecosystem was undertaken across nine countries - Brazil, China, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, Spain, UK and the US - and examined consumers' barriers to switching smartphone types and the impact of their attitudes towards the overall user experience.

Nearly one in five (19%) of consumers that own both an iPad and an iPhone believe that changing types of smartphone is more difficult than changing bank accounts or gas or electricity providers.

As consumers build digital ecosystems and their own world of content on handsets, the study shows that their loyalty to their smartphone brand increases with the number of apps and services they use. The research reveals that the tipping point for loyalty is when a consumer uses seven or more services on their device.

Consumers in the US are the most likely to use seven or more services (61%), followed closely by China (56%) and Brazil (53%). In comparison to this, European countries use fewer services on their smartphone. France and Italy (46%), Germany (45%), Spain (43%) and the UK (42%).

Three key pillars to user experience

The research also examines the impact of three core areas when it comes to consumers' user experience: simplicity of use, integration of features and access to content. Simplicity is key and 72% of smartphone users say they find it easy to access their device's applications and navigate the menu system. Therefore, moving from a smartphone that they are familiar with is the biggest challenge to switching devices. In fact, the research reveals that the main barriers to switching all relate to user experience:

- 33% of respondents cited disrupting their current smartphone set-up (i.e. the apps and features I use)
- 29% - having to learn how to use another type of smartphone;
- 28% - having to move their content (music, video, books, apps) from one type of smartphone to another.

As smartphones become more advanced, creating a smooth and high quality user experience is a complex task, but despite this, 71% of smartphone customers believe the services and features on their devices

work seamlessly with each other. The more services a consumer uses on a device, the more tightly integrated they feel the features and functions are, indicating that well executed service and hardware integration are having a positive effect on consumer loyalty.

Consumers that build a library of media and content are demanding access to all of their digital content, irrespective of the device they are using. Almost three-quarters (72%) of smartphone owners think it is important to access the content such as music, books and apps on any internet enabled device, such as smartphones, tablets and TVs. This figure increases to 80% and becomes even more important to consumers that own all three devices; a tablet, smartphone and PC.

Western Europe demand simplicity; Chinese prefer access

In relation to user experience, the countries that were surveyed rated different levels of importance on the three core areas of simplicity, integration and access. Consumers in Western Europe place greater emphasis on simplicity than either integration or access to services. For example, in Germany 84% of consumers believe that ease of use is the most important factor and place less importance on accessing content on numerous devices (64%). By contrast, Chinese consumers place greatest importance on access, with 92% stressing the need to access content across all devices.

Ryan Garner at GfK Business & Technology said: "The barriers to switching smartphones show the importance of the age-old mindset, 'if it ain't broke don't fix it.' This mindset has only hardened with the growth of connected devices and rapidly improving user experiences, while cross device accessibility of content is also delivering great benefits to consumers. Those who are satisfied with their current set-up will be difficult to tempt to a new platform and the more services they use, the greater a consumer's loyalty to brand."

He continued: "The smartphone providers that create harmonious user experiences will be able to increase consumer loyalty, as consumers find it more trouble than it's worth to switch their digital life on their smartphone - as well as increasingly on tablets too. In a competitive market, brands that invest in user experience will yield great results. Those in dominant market positions, who create amazing user experiences, are potentially in the strongest position, and will be the most difficult to challenge in terms of capturing market share."

About the survey

The GfK report on UX and loyalty in the digital ecosystem research was conducted by GfK Business & Technology. It includes the opinions of 4257 smartphone owners in nine countries who were interviewed between 17-28 October 2011 using online interviewing techniques appropriate to the country.

Source: GfK Business & Technology