

Abstract

Android and iPhone devices account for over 90% of all smartphones sold world-wide. Despite being very similar in functionality, current discourse and marketing campaigns suggest that key individual differences exist between users of these two devices; however, this has never been investigated empirically. This is surprising, as smartphones continue to gain momentum across a variety of research disciplines. In this paper we consider if individual differences exist between these two distinct groups. In comparison to Android users, we found that iPhone owners are more likely to be female, younger, and increasingly concerned about their smartphone being viewed as a status object. Key differences in personality were also observed with iPhone users displaying lower levels of honesty-humility and higher levels of emotionality. Following this analysis, we were also able to build and test a model that predicted smartphone ownership at above chance level based on these individual differences. In line with extended self theory, the type of smartphone owned provides some valuable information about its owner. These findings have implications for the increasing use of smartphones within research particularly for those working within *Computational Social Science* and *PsychoInformatics*, where data is typically collected from devices and applications running a single smartphone operating system.

Introduction

Nearly one in two adults own a smartphone and this increases to around two thirds in developed countries including the UK¹. Many people now spend over 5 hours a day on these devices and while data derived from smartphones directly has a great deal to offer researchers, the operating system itself may also provide useful information about the individual behind the screen². Two systems continue to dominate the marketplace, with iPhone and Android smartphones accounting for over 90% of all smartphones sold worldwide³. Both engage in extensive, but very different advertising campaigns⁴. As a result, considerable discourse surrounds these two operating systems. Current speculation suggests that iPhone users are better educated, more affluent and are more likely to be addicted to their smartphones than those who choose Android devices⁵. However, no empirical investigation has yet systematically considered the existence or accuracy of these claims. This is surprising because the current 50/50 market split provides an interesting divide in which to test how existing theoretical constructs that pertain to the self may also help explain how an individual aligns themselves with a specific smartphone operating system.

Theoretical Background

Extended Self Theory argues that the greater power and control a person exerts over an object, the more it becomes part of their self-identity⁶. In addition to spending long periods of time using these devices, individuals also have a large amount of control over their smartphones, which are highly customizable. Each owner has an almost unique library of downloaded applications, contacts, music and photographs. This personalization has already allowed for psychological inferences to be made about the end user and personality traits have previously been inferred from app use and phone usage patterns⁷⁻⁸.

Aspects of smartphone use can therefore be considered within the context of an extended self, which has recently been updated to account for changes caused by digital environments⁹. For example, music and videos have become dematerialized as they no longer exist as a physical row of CDs and DVDs, but can now be accessed anywhere in the world digitally via a cloud system. However, the smartphone as an object of hardware still provides a gateway to engaging with and sharing this digital content. Belk's original theory concerning possessions therefore remains highly pertinent when considering smartphones and other new digital devices that may help extend our self and the specific brand of smartphone may act as a marker for several individual characteristics. Other empirical evidence supports the notion that when a person wears an item of clothing, they embody its symbolic meaning⁹. Similarly, people who wear a watch identified themselves as more conscientious than those who do not and exhibited behaviours that were consistent with this personality trait¹¹. When applied to smartphone ownership, one might expect that a person will "embody" the semantics attached to each smartphone brand¹⁰.

Here we consider how theories of encloded cognition and the extended self can also be applied to help explain differences between individuals who use Android or iPhone devices^{6,10}. Hypotheses concerning specific differences should not be based on the current discourse for the simple fact that these are likely to have been derived from stereotypes, which are often inaccurate when compared to self-report measures¹²⁻¹³. Any subsequent hypotheses concerning markers of smartphone ownership should instead be considered in the context of brand personality¹⁴. Researchers in this domain have focused on how a purchase choice specifically allows an individual to express the self⁶. Specifically, the more congruity that exists between the human characteristics that describes an individual's genuine or perfect self and those that portray a brand, the greater preference for that brand¹⁵. This idea has

subsequently been developed further into a theoretical framework where multiple personality dimensions can be isolated for each brand. Demographic characteristics such as gender, class and age are also likely to influence brand preference¹⁴. Like personality, demographic characteristics may also be inferred from brand imagery or other brand associations. For example, Apple is frequently viewed as young and IBM is considered to be an older alternative¹⁴.

Hypotheses

While this research aims to understand if the smartphone a person owns provides any valuable information about the user, recent theoretical frameworks concerning brand personality and the effects of brand motivation on subsequent behaviour allow for clear hypotheses to be made between those who are likely to use an iPhone or Android smartphone device and we predicted that iPhone users will be will be younger, more extraverted and open in comparison to those who use Android devices¹⁶⁻¹⁷. In addition, we also expected that iPhone users would be more likely to place more value in the notion that smartphones should be viewed as high-status objects because Apple as a brand has been increasingly associated with wealth and luxury¹⁸.

Methods

Sampling and Participants

A total of 728 participants self-selected to take part and 576 individuals completed an online survey giving a final completion rate of 79.12%. 186 (32.2%) of these were men and 387 (67.1%) of these were women with 3 (0.5%) describing themselves as “*other*”. Ages ranged from 15 – 74 with a mean age of 29.05 ($SD = 13.107$). Data concerning current smartphone

ownership was also collected. In line with current market share, 312 (54.1%) participants owned an iPhone, 220 (38.1%) owned an Android, 22 (3.8%) owned a smartphone that ran Windows, 4 (0.6%) owned an “other” smartphone, 15 (2.6%) owned mobile phones that were not smartphones, and 3 (0.5%) did not own a mobile phone at all. Overall the sample comprised of 558 (97%) smartphone owners and 18 (3%) non-smartphone owners.

For the purposes of our analysis, only individual differences between iPhone and Android smartphone users were analyzed, who made up 92.3% of the overall sample. The sample used in this analysis was therefore reduced from 576 to 532 as data was only included from iPhone and Android users. In addition, 3 participants in this sample self-classified their gender as “*other*” and their data was also removed. This left 529 participants overall.

Procedure

The online survey provider Qualtrics was used to host the “*Smartphone Ownership and Personality Survey*”, and was accessed via a public link. This was advertised within the University’s subject pool, through posters around campus, on several social media sites, inside a local online & print newspaper and through letters to local organizations. The sample snowballed as this link was shared online. The first page of the survey described its content and purpose. This page also informed participants that they would be entered into a prize draw to win a £50 Amazon voucher. Each respondent was additionally given a random anonymous ID number that they could quote to the researcher if they wished to withdraw their data. Participants were asked if they consented to take part and participant rights were outlined. Those who did not consent were directed straight to a debrief. Throughout the whole survey, a bar appeared along the bottom of each page to show respondents their progress. Demographics such as *age*, *employment status* and *gender* were collected first.

Afterwards, participants were asked which smartphone they currently owned. Pictures were shown of Apple iPhones, Android Phones and Windows Phones to help participants identify their phone. The multiple choice question also included the options “*I don’t know*”, “*I don’t own a smartphone, but I own a mobile phone,*” and “*I don’t own a mobile phone of any type,*” to be inclusive to all phone and none phone owners. The length of time a participant had owned their current phone for was also collected. Respondents were then asked to select phones they had owned previously such a ‘*Blackberry smartphone*’ or ‘*A mobile phone which wasn’t a smartphone*’.

Materials

Participants completed a series of questionnaires. These included standardized measures of social economic status and personality via the MacArthur Ladder of Subjective Social Status and the HEXACO-60 respectively (table 1)¹⁹⁻²⁰. They were also asked to complete the *Avoidance of Similarity Scale (AS)* which was derived from a subscale within a Consumers Need For Uniqueness Scale. This directly taps into brand and product ownership preferences with a high score indicating that participants had a stronger desire to avoid products bought by the majority of the population²¹. Finally, participants completed an ‘*Attitudes Towards the Mobile Phone as a Status Object*’ (*ATMPSO*) scale²².

[insert Table I about here]

Results¹

Direct Comparisons

When analyzing gender differences there was a significant association between gender and the type of smartphone owned [$\chi^2(1) = 18.49, p < .001$] with female participants being 2.25 times more likely to own an iPhone than males. To generate scores for the rest of our analysis, average HEXACO, AS, ATMPSO scores were calculated for all participants alongside their raw *SES*, *Age* and *Time owned current phone (TOCP)* measures. This generated 11 scores per person for our subsequent analysis. Data was then split by smartphone owned in order to directly compare the two user groups. Results from a series of independent sample t-tests are presented in table II. In comparison to participants who owned an iPhone, Android users were older and displayed higher levels of *Honesty-Humility*, *Openness* and *Avoidance Similarity*. They also scored significantly lower in *Emotionality*, and felt that a smartphone is less of a *status object*.

[insert Table II about here]

Predictive Modelling

The results of several hierarchical binary logistic regression analysis showed that the variables *Gender* [$\chi^2(1) = 18.36, p < 0.001$], *Honesty-Humility* [$\chi^2(1) = 15.63, p < 0.001$], *ATMPSO* [$\chi^2(1) = 12.01, p < 0.01$] and *AS* [$\chi^2(1) = 5.39, p < 0.05$] provided significant chi square improvements when added to subsequent models (table III). These four variables also

¹ Abbreviations

SES – Social Economic Status, *AS* – Avoidance of Similarity, *ATMPSO* – Attitudes Towards Mobile Phone as Status Object, *TOCP* – Time Owned Current Phone

had significant beta values across all models in which they were included, and were therefore considered to be reliable predictors of smartphone ownership. *Age* did significantly increase the χ^2 value when added to the model [$\chi^2(1) = 14.10, p < 0.001$], however, in 7 out of 11 models in which *age* was included, its beta value failed to reach significance. In a similar manner, while *Extroversion* provided several significant beta values in some models, it did not increase χ^2 values significantly and was therefore not considered a reliable predictor [$\chi^2(1) = 4.46, p = 0.04$].

The variables *Emotionality*, *Openness to Experience*, *Conscientiousness*, *Agreeableness*, *SES* and *TOCP* did not add any significant value when predicting smartphone ownership as these variables did not improve χ^2 values. Notably, *Openness to experience*, *Conscientiousness*, *Agreeableness*, *SES* and *TOCP* did not increase the area under subsequent ROC curves (table III).

[insert Table III about here]

A final analysis tested the accuracy of model 5 (see table III). A further sample of 221 participants (52.9% male), with a mean age of 27.65 ($SD = 11.85$), were asked questions relating to the measures included in this model only. Responses were converted into scores that when summed, corresponded to the beta values of each variable. Dependent on the answer to each question, a value either was subtracted or added to a cumulative score. On completion, an overall positive score predicted that a person would own an iPhone, and a negative score predicted that a person would own an Android smartphone. Participants were provided with this prediction on completion, and were then asked to confirm if this was correct. From 200 participants who answered yes or no, the model performed at significantly above chance level (69%). This increased to 71.4% when participants, who reported that they had previously owned the predicted device, were also included ($n=210$).

Discussion

Here we demonstrate for the first time that an individual's choice of smartphone operating system can provide useful clues when it comes to predicting their personality and demographic characteristics. This confirms that the personalisation of a technological experience begins at the point of choosing between the iPhone or Android operating system and as personal devices, smartphones can be considered as an item that extends the self⁶. As predicted, iPhone users were younger and more open compared to those who use Android devices. Conversely, Android users consistently appear to demonstrate higher levels of *Honesty-Humility*. Higher levels of *Honesty-Humility* are associated with people who “avoid manipulating others for personal gain, feel little temptation to break rules, are uninterested in lavish wealth and luxuries, and feel no special entitlement to elevated social status”²³. iPhone users were also more likely to view their smartphone as a status object and less concerned about owning devices favored by the majority of the population.

Interestingly, *Gender* was the strongest predictor concerning smartphone ownership, as women were twice as likely to own iPhones than men. Recent research has demonstrated that men and women use their phones in different ways. For example, women make more phone calls, take more pictures, and send and receive more texts²⁴. On the other hand, men use their phones more for entertainment purposes as they play more games and watch more videos²⁴. However, this alone is unlikely to explain why women are more likely to choose an iPhone in comparison to men. While iPhone and Android devices have separate operating systems containing some unique features, the applications and functionality available have become remarkably similar. Future research however, may wish to specifically consider if people use iPhones and Android phones in unique ways. For example, if the type of applications downloaded (e.g. social, gaming etc.) differs between devices, gender may act as a reliable

mediator for subsequent behavior.

While participants' dispositions appear to generally match those promoted by the advertising campaigns for each smartphone user respectively, *Social Economic Status* did not vary between the smartphone groups, and therefore, iPhone users did not appear to be more affluent than Android users as previous findings have suggested⁵. It remains difficult however to disregard the idea that financial differences do not exist between smartphone users. For example, the way individuals choose to spend disposable income may still be indicative of smartphone ownership.

These results also raise additional issues as they pertain to psychological research methods. Much research within the field of *Computational Social Science* or *PsychoInformatics* often collects data from smartphone sensors and applications using a single smartphone operating system only²⁵⁻²⁸. However, as individual differences occur between users of different smartphone operating systems, the 'type' of people who use these devices may have driven findings from previous research. As a result, some conclusions may not generalise beyond that group of smartphone users. Consequently, any research that uses smartphones as a data collection tool in psychology should be aware of these individual differences and aim to collect data using both iPhone and Android smartphone applications where possible.

Limitations and Conclusion

Beyond demographic predictors (e.g. age and gender), the use of psychometric over behavioural measures could be viewed as a limitation. However, personality assessments have been shown to portray the core dispositions of a person, which subsequently have been used to predict behaviour in many situations²⁹. For example, an individual's level of

agreeableness has been found to predict the frequency and number of hours they will spend playing smartphone games³⁰. As a result, we would argue that the current models are informative of how smartphone users will behave in real life scenarios. A second limitation concerns how we determined ownership. It is possible that some participants in our sample did not choose the smartphone that they currently own. Some participants could have received the smartphone as a gift, and younger participants may have had a parent or guardian purchase the phone on their behalf. Of course, these participants may still “embody” the semantics attached with each smartphone brand, but future research would need to consider cause and effect. The decision to own a specific type of smartphone may be driven by some of the traits identified here in the first instance. Alternatively, a purchase may simply be motivated by a desire to become closer to their actual or ideal self by adopting a specific brand¹⁶.

In conclusion, demographic and personality differences can effectively differentiate Android and iPhone users. Smartphones continue to influence individual and group behaviour on a daily basis, and as ubiquitous devices are likely to provide an additional extension of the self^{6,9}. While smartphone research continues to gain momentum and become ever more complex, it is also important to consider that key information about a person can still be derived from something as simple as an individual’s smartphone operating system of choice.

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