The Smart Users Behind Smartphones

Posted: 01/07/2013 4:38 pm

During this week's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, the industry's focus will be on smartphones, the electronic device with the most global-growth potential. Major manufacturers like Samsung and LG will roll out shiny new mobile phones, tablets and "phablets," which are large hybrid devices. But are smartphone users looking to buy the next "cool" gadget or are they more pragmatically minded these days, looking for devices with longer battery life, more memory capacity or WiFi capability?

The results of a recent survey by the Institute for Communication Technology Management (CTM) at the University of Southern California may surprise you.

The annual survey of 1,900 smartphone users in the United States showed that mundane activities like email and web browsing are more important to consumers than entertainment such as gaming. Some 91 percent of smartphone users reported that they send emails or texts at least occasionally, and 80 percent said they used their device to access the web for news, weather and search.

More than half of people surveyed gave pragmatic reasons for using wireless data services, among them, "They are useful" and "I can save time and get information quickly." Integrating their personal and work lives was not a pressing matter for these smartphone users, although the vast majority of them use their phones for both.

Usage of entertainment services such as music, video and games lagged considerably behind usage of wireless data services. While the number of mobile users of video services such as YouTube and Hulu have significantly grown, with YouTube estimating 25 percent of streams occurring through mobile, 60 percent of the surveyed smartphone users said they had never streamed TV or movies on their phones. Some 64 percent said they would prefer to watch video on a different platform, while 53 percent said that "the screen is too small."

People who use their phones to buy products, bank online or make restaurant reservations are not yet in the majority, and security is a big reason. Some 57 percent of the smartphone users surveyed felt strongly that their financial information might be vulnerable to interception.
In terms of usage of wireless data, 58 percent of users reported downloading one to five apps a month, more than might be expected given that nearly half of them said they had owned their phones for more than a year.

And although 38 percent of smartphone users report owning a tablet, they use it more for fun than daily activities, with 56 percent reporting that their smartphone better serves their communication needs than their tablet. That would clearly be the case when people are traveling or waiting in line for an event, but, surprisingly, more than half of the use occurs in the home. One explanation is that the smartphone is the ultimate "laziness aid," easier than going to the computer.

So, for those searching for the most exciting new smartphones at the Consumer Electronics Show, remember the high-tech launches of the Nokia Lumia 900 and Sony Xperia S a year ago. They were outsold in the millions by smartphones like Samsungs and Apples. The fact is, smartphone users are rather smart about how they use their phones.

Lucy Hood heads the Institute for Communication Technology Management (CTM) at the Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California. She is also the former president of Fox Mobile Entertainment, which she oversaw global mobile strategy.

This blog is part of a series produced by The Huffington Post on the International Consumer Electronics Show (CES 2013), the behemoth consumer-electronics trade show held annually in Las Vegas. To read other pieces in the series, click here. What are your thoughts on CES? We invite you to submit pieces of 500-850 words -- for possible publication in The Huffington Post -- to ces2013@huffingtonpost.com.

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lucy-hood/new-smartphones_b_2426900.html]