

Cultural Implications of Smart Phone Use

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We interviewed smart phone users from four different **age cohorts**: Generation Y, Generation X, Baby Boomers and the Grey Market. We also included a Hispanic subject to represent the largest U.S. **ethnic subculture**. We hypothesized that members of the different age cohorts and different subcultures should exhibit varied understandings and interpretations of **norms, practices** and **values**, given a different set of experiences, and predicted that we would each have varied responses to our discussion guide questions. What we came to recognize is that, thanks to **diffusion of innovation**, smart phone use is so prevalent in the culture that smart phone users have developed such distinct **norms, practices** and **values** across current boundaries that it is possible to attribute them to a new Smart phone Subculture.

Our Generation Y and our Baby Boomer subjects both indicated very similar **norms for conduct** in terms of their own phone use and how others view phone use. One uses her phone to escape uncomfortable social situations. Both recognize and describe the “unwritten rule” that you should not bother someone who is on the phone, which can be a reason to keep the phone out or put it away, depending on the level of interaction desired with others.

Rituals, repeated practices with symbolic meaning, were the most consistent across all groups, indicating that Smart phones are no longer just an accessory or a tool for users, but are used to demarcate rituals such as beginning the day and ending the workday, and have redefined the **rules** of interpersonal communication. Smart phones have thus become a **ritual artifact**. Smart phones have redefined how our subjects live, patterned their behavior and created meaning in their lives. Both the Generation Y and X subjects use their phone during exerciserituals, and every single one of the subjects remarked that the first thing they do every morning is to check their smart phone. Each subject also indicated that they check their smart phone approximately 3 - 4 times per hour. Finally, there were distinct patterns of use across age cohorts: checking texts, emails and social media upon first waking; placing calls mid-morning; using the phone for communication via email during the work day; and then after work integrating it into their leisure

activities or using it as the leisure activity. This need to feel constantly connected to large networks of acquaintances suggests a departure from the historically significant American **value** of individualism for members of the Smart phone Subculture, and a shift toward valuing collectively created meaning and a more integrated culture. Possibly the increased contact and shared meaning made possible by Smart phones is starting to homogenize **values** that were previously more polarized along subcultures and age cohorts.

Our subjects truly value their smart phones not just for what they can do, but also for what they represent. But they all don't necessarily agree. When asked, "What does owning a smart phone say about a person?" three out of four subjects, all Caucasian, agreed that it showed a person had an interest in technology and innovation. One subject even described a smart phone owner as being "current." Those same subjects also described people who own flip phones as being "old," and "resistant to change." Our oldest subject, a 65-year-old Caucasian male, even went as far as to say flip phone owners are "uneducated" while smart phone users are "young, tech savvy and upwardly mobile." It's also no coincidence when asked to describe themselves in three words, they used similar language such as "modern," "gregarious," and "outgoing," showcasing strong **self-brand congruence**.

However, our youngest subject, a Hispanic female, did not share the same perspective as our Caucasian subjects. She described smart phone owners as being "dependent" on their smart phones and even said people who don't have smart phones may actually be *more* productive because they have found ways to live without them. While it is surprising that our Generation Y subject, the one most-likely to be a digital native, described a contrasting **stereotype** of smart phone ownership, it is not surprising when we look at the totality of her responses. And while the other subjects used bold language when describing themselves, our youngest subject used the words "trustworthy," "dependable," and "loyal"; three words that mirror the values of the Hispanic subculture.

Our subjects demonstrated a great amount of respect for the Motorola brand when they recognized its connection to innovation and success, **values** intrinsic to American culture. For example, "I didn't know any of that stuff. I knew they created the Droid. I didn't know they had anything to do with NASA, didn't know they had a new Droid phone that lasted 48 hours, didn't know they had anything to do with the radio for WWII. I bet a lot of people don't know that either." The one caveat is that they view the brand as more of a relic rather than as cutting edge.

The **myths** surrounding Motorola as being the first "All-American Innovator" seemed to have been forgotten. The brand focuses on giving consumers the power of choice rather than reminding consumers of the brand's American heritage. In order to make the brand more compelling, it may benefit Motorola to look at strategies to reinforce **mythic stories** employed by American carmakers such as Ford or GM. A more potent mission

that tells a **mythic story** about the brand's significance to innovations could re-establish Motorola as a revolutionary trailblazer, rather than a relic.

There did not seem to be any widely-recognized **myths** surrounding the origin of the smart phone or the Motorola brand. After reading the piece regarding the brand's history, the Baby Boomer did recognize Motorola as the "Godfather of Communication." This user also referred to the brand as "nostalgic." We thought following questions would trigger an open mind to switching to a Motorola phone. However, three out of four subjects still viewed the brand as a dated, historical icon that at one point was cutting edge, but now stands for the opposite of innovation. Our Hispanic Generation Y user, however, saw the longer battery life as enabling her role as a working mother while still supporting her strong family values, and was ready to switch immediately. This lends insight into how Motorola can better position specific products to target the **values** of subcultures outside of, or a part of, the Smart phone Subculture to which all of the subjects belong.

Nearly all of those surveyed understood what Motorola once stood for, but the brand as perceived no longer matched their core set of **values**. Subjects valued innovations such as a large amount of app offerings, increased battery life, cutting edge screen quality and increased cellular range. While Motorola might be fresh in the consumers' minds when it comes to **metaphysical myths**, Apple uses **Sociological myths** of superior innovation to foster sales in the modern day.

Smart phone users we interviewed all stressed that they view their phones as their connection to their family, friends, job and customers. Their relationships with their phones reflect their most vital relationships in their lives. Motorola has been connected to product innovations that have changed history and impacted American lives for decades - from keeping our brave soldiers connected on the battlefield, to keeping our brave astronauts connected a world away; from creating the first phone that could keep us connected anywhere to creating the computer chip that powered the first Apple computer used everywhere. Building on this **origin myth**, Motorola has an opportunity to develop a **mythical brand** to highlight its history of innovation, and to introduce new innovations that are destined to change history too: the first smart phone with a 48-hour battery life, the Moto Voice touch-free assistant, face recognition, the highest resolution screen on the market and more. It's not about highlighting choice or creating a new connection; it's about telling a story about how Motorola has been connecting us all along, and how they will continue to do so in the future...and the future starts now. We suggest that Motorola consider this tagline for the campaign:

Look at us now. Motorola.