Understanding toward Mobile Phone Case Evaluative Criteria among U.S. Millennials

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Personality and other personal traits play a critical role in major selection for college students. Studies have found that student's pattern of interests and individual personality were very strong predictors of a student's major choice (Allen & Robbins, 2008). Based on past research, it seems that college major choice can be a valuable factor to be studied to understand contemporary millennial consumers. One of the distinctive characteristics of Millennials is their early and frequent exposure to technology (Bolton et al., 2013). Millennials are also known for their powerful aggregate spending and heavy usage of mobile devices and services. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of personal traits of college students with different majors on the selection of a mobile phone case based on certain attribute.

More specifically, individual traits and mobile innovativeness of Millennials were studied to predict their choice of mobile phone case's attributes, such as appearance/design, brand/logo, functionality/durability, expression of individuality, and expression of one's interest. In this study, self-monitoring tendency, fashion involvement, and proclivity to experiment with appearance were examined as individual traits and mobile dependency was examined as mobile innovativeness to understand college students with different majors. More specifically, this research attempts to answer three research questions including: How personal traits such as self-monitoring, fashion involvement, and experimenting with appearance differ between fashion major and non-fashion major students? How does mobile dependency differ between fashion and non-fashion majors? And how do fashion major students evaluate product attributes of mobile phone cases differently comparing to non-fashion major students?

We collected 373 usable responses from college-aged consumers who reported existing subscriptions to mobile services on their devices at a Midwestern university. Researchers utilized both online and paper questionnaire to collect the quantitative data. To measure the degree of self-monitoring, we adopted 12 items from O'Cass (2000a). To measure fashion involvement, we adopted seven items from O'Cass (2000b). To measure proclivity to experiment with appearance, we adopted eight items developed by Gurel and Gurel (1979). We operationalized the mobile dependency as the individual's perception regarding the compatibility of and frequencies of using a mobile device on a daily basis for a wide variety of activities. To measure mobile dependency, the researchers created five items including "I heavily depend on my mobile device on a daily bases," and "I frequently use my mobile device for any activity." Principal factor analysis revealed that self-monitoring had two distinctive factors as suggested by O'Cass (2000a), Sensitivity and Ability. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale from 1 being "*strongly disagree*," to 5 being "*strongly agree".*

We employed independent sample *t*-test analyses to compare the mean differences on self-monitoring tendency, fashion involvement, and proclivity to experiment with appearance between fashion and non-fashion majors. *T*-tests revealed that fashion major students exhibited

significantly higher mean scores on both Sensitivity and Ability dimensions of self-monitoring tendency, compared to non-fashion major students ($Mean_{\_fashion} = 3.99$ vs. $Mean_{\_non\text{-}fashion} = 3.73$; $Mean_{\_fashion} = 4.01$ vs. $Mean_{\_non\text{-}fashion} = 3.71$, $p < .001$, respectively). The significant mean differences between fashion and non-fashion major students were found on fashion involvement ($Mean_{\_fashion} = 4.58$ vs. $Mean_{\_non\text{-}fashion} = 2.98$, $p < .001$) as well as proclivity to experiment with appearance ($Mean_{\_fashion} = 4.13$ vs. $Mean_{\_non\text{-}fashion} = 2.79$, $p < .001$). Regarding mobile device dependency, fashion major students again exhibited a higher mean score than non-fashion major students did ($Mean_{\_fashion} = 4.33$ vs. $Mean_{\_non\text{-}fashion} = 4.28$, $p < .05$).

Regarding the importance of product evaluative attributes regarding mobile devices, functionality of the mobile phone cases was ranked as the most crucial attribute to both fashion and non-fashion major students ($Mean_{\_fashion} = 4.41$ vs. $Mean_{\_non\text{-}fashion} = 4.40$), followed by appearance/design ($Mean_{\_fashion} = 4.36$ vs. $Mean_{\_non\text{-}fashion} = 3.80$), expression of one's individuality ($Mean_{\_fashion} = 3.95$ vs. $Mean_{\_non\text{-}fashion} = 3.15$), and expression of one's interests ($Mean_{\_fashion} = 3.82$ vs. $Mean_{\_non\text{-}fashion} = 3.18$). Both fashion and non-fashion major students considered the brand/logo of the mobile phone case is neither important nor unimportant (rated close to neutral, 2.98 and 2.87, respectively). Fashion major students exhibited significantly higher mean scores on appearance/design, expression of one's individuality, and expression of one's interests, compared to counterparts (all *p*s < .001), while the mean differences on neither functionality nor brand/logo was significant.

Findings suggest that college students' majors do actually predict their personal traits, mobile dependency, and importance of a mobile phone case's attributes. Students who chose fashion as their college major exhibited higher mean scores on self-monitoring tendency, fashion involvement, proclivity to experiment with appearance, and mobile dependency, compared to the non-fashion major students. Product developers of mobile phone cases and mobile retail industry may use these findings to customize their marketing strategies geared toward the different college majors in order to effectively promote their new mobile devices and phone cases.

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