What Influences Young Adults' Decision to Adopt New Technology?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to discover who and/or what influenced young people, specifically when selecting a mobile phone. Studies by Paul Lazarsfeld, Everett Rodgers, Joel Best, and Peter Zollo were examined to gain a deep understanding of the behavior of influencers and other consumer groups. A survey was conducted to gather quantitative data about respondents' behaviors and what influenced them when they made purchasing decisions of mobile phone and other technology. The bulk of young adults identified themselves as members of the majority adopter category (54.2%). The influencers' category was the second largest group with 26.0% of respondents classifying themselves as such by telling that others respected their opinion and they were the least traditional. The innovators, those who identified themselves as venturesome, rebellious and the least traditional, consisted of 12.5% of the respondents. Laggards, traditionalists suspicious of change, made up the smallest portion (7.3%) of all respondents. When young people looked to purchase a new mobile phone, they were influenced mostly by friends, followed by family, salespeople and others. In terms of non-human information channels, they were most influenced by advertising, followed by technology blogs and traditional media.

I. Introduction

Bell-bottom jeans, Walkmans, Four Lokos, Crocs and iPods all share one commonality—each of them were trends on some level that were aided in the climb to their peak with the help of influencers. Researchers have for years attempted to pinpoint each phase that characterizes the behavior of a trend before, during, and after its climax. Paul Lazarsfeld (1983), Everett Rodgers (1983), Malcolm Gladwell (2000) and several others introduced feasible models that attempt to explain the rise and fall of a phenomenon, including the types of people who are most involved in kicking things off. The majority of researchers seem to agree that there is a key group of consumers that is responsible for the move of a product or service to a phenomenal innovation or trend status. Influencers, those credited with propelling an innovation into a trend, are the key group of people whom the following study sought to examine. Technology with a focus on trends in mobile phone innovation was the primary area of interest. Identifying those who were ahead of the curve and behind in current technology was important in being able to ultimately accomplish the larger mission of identifying those sources or persons key in influencing the influentials.

II. Literature Review

The chain that a trend climbs has varying levels depending on which researcher one decides to ask, whether it is Paul Lazarsfeld (1983), Everett Rodgers (1983), Joel Best (2006) or Peter Zollo (2004). A number of researchers have created their individual models of the types of people involved in an innovation's journey pre-trend, post-trend, and at the points in-between.

Two-Step Flow Model

The two-step flow model, developed by Paul Lazarsfeld, was the result of a move to discard the hypodermic needle model, in which "mass media had direct, immediate, and powerful effects on a mass audience," (Rodgers, 1983, p. 272). Lazarsfeld's study revealed two important pieces of information about the flow or diffusion of ideas. The first is that the transmitting of information typically happens from sources to opinion leaders. The second step is the expansion of influence from opinion leaders to potential followers (Rodgers, 1983, p. 273).

Diffusion of Innovations

Everett Rodgers' *Diffusion of Innovations* (1983) presents a number of valid points that are foundational in the process of discovering influencers among Generation Y consumers, including the establishment of adopter categories and Lazarsfeld's two-step flow model

All of the five categories of adoption in Rodgers' innovation model were created based on people's varying levels of innovativeness. Innovativeness is defined as a continuous variable that measures "the degree to which an individual or other units of adoption [are] relatively earlier in adopting new ideas" (Rodgers, 1983, p. 245).

Fueled by a venturesome nature that propels their eagerness to try new things, innovators are generally the first to adopt a concept. The innovator plays a major part in the diffusion process where the individual is a gatekeeper or one who has control over whether something is introduced in the social sphere. Innovators typically surround themselves with other innovators who seek to involve themselves in risky, rash and daring activities (Rodgers, 1983, p. 248).

Early adopters are the next group in embracing a new concept. This group has the most opinion leadership among all the categories. Early adopters are sought for advice or used as a point of reference for information about a new phenomenon by their peers. The early adopter is respected by peers for the insights he or she can provide to those seeking to decrease uncertainty about a new innovation (Rodgers, 1983, p. 249). The early adopters group also has the most opinion leadership among all five categories.

The third group, the early majority, adopts new trends slightly ahead of the average person. This group is characterized by the time they take to deliberate prior to adopting new concepts. A careful decision is made although not early enough to make them leaders but still far from the last group as it relates to embracing something new (Rodgers, 1983, p. 249).

The late majority is composed of people who adopt new developments a little while after the average person. When the late majority has adopted something, it is because all uncertainty has been cleared, thus the item is now a necessity and there is mounting peer pressure to embrace it. The decision to adopt something is reached after a great deal of caution, because anything this group uses must be deemed safe to adopt by influencers. The late majority is often referred to as the skeptics of all the adopter categories (Rodgers, 1983, p. 250).

The last group to adopt a new concept is the laggards. The past is a primary points of reference for laggards who are known as the traditional group. Before a laggard accepts a new phenomenon, it more than likely "may already have been superseded by another more recent idea that is already being used by the innovators," (Rodgers, 1983, p. 250).

Teens Trend Hierarchy

Teenage Research Unlimited, a company specializing in youth research and insights, developed a few primary categories that teens typically fall into. The president of the company noted, "Teens live in a hierarchical society … typically, trends are created or adopted by Edge teens or Influencers and then trickle down

to Conformers and finally Passives" (Zollo, 2004, p. 108).

Edge teens lead lives that are on the cutting edge of teen lifestyle and fashion trends, although they prefer not to be referred to as such. These teens are described as huge music lovers, particularly of hardcore and punk music. Edge teens' lifestyles lead them to engage in activities that are rebellious, contradictory, adventurous, experimental, and the least traditional (Zollo, 2004, p. 110).

Influencers are the most exclusive and ethnically diverse group of teens that others are the most likely to listen to when they speak. A day in the life of an influencer teen would include a significantly higher amount of shopping, being with a boyfriend/girlfriend, hanging out with friends and cruising in cars, in addition to taking pleasure in being the center of attention. Appearance is also overly important to these teens who create their own trends, whether it is what they wear or whom they associate themselves with, thus they have the look that others desire (Zollo, 2004, p. 111-112).

The majority, sometimes referred to as the "silent majority," is known as the conformers. These teens only embrace what has already gained a seal of approval from the cool teens; also known as the influencers, thus they gravitate toward adopting the latest styles, trends and behaviors. This group also consists of teens with lower confidence, self-esteem and social status than the other previously mentioned groups (Zollo, 2004, p. 113).

The final group, at the bottom of the hierarchical teen structure, is passives. Essentially, these teens are the polar opposites of the edge and influencer teens. Passives lack confidence and ambition, in addition to spending the least amount of time indulging in social activities, thus they are not fans of dancing or emerging music. But this group yearns to be popular and well liked and like their semi-counterparts, the conformers, they do not adopt trends until influencers approve them (Zollo, 2004, p. 114).

Illusion of Diffusion

Best, in his book *Flavor of the Month: Why Smart People Fall for Fads,* discussed the essential components surrounding whether a new innovation will enter either a phase of a mere fad or a long-term innovation (2006, p. 8). The illusion of diffusion was described as a mistake made by marketers and the media in which high expectations are placed on an innovation that, to the surprise of its forecasters, loses popularity almost as quickly as it gained it, thus becoming a fad (Best, 2006, p. 8 -12).

German sociologist, Georg Simmel, detailed what Best described as the trickle-down process that consists of "a hierarchy or ladder, on which those at the top try to differentiate themselves from the people on the rung below them by adopting new symbols of their higher status," (2006, p. 10). The ladder continues descending to the second tier who usually imitates their superiors by adopting the items they possess to distinguish themselves from the third tier (Best, 2006, p. 10 - 11). Once the third and final tier adopts something, it is no longer used by people with higher societal status as a distinguishing characteristic, thus perpetuating the cycle where the first rank is forced to seek out new ways to set themselves apart from others (Best, 2006, p. 10 - 11).

For an innovation to become a successful fad or trend with some length of longevity there are usually various people involved at the beginning level who aid the concept's launch. Best outlines three types of people including originators, promoters, and trendsetters. Originators are people who can be traced as the starting point for a new idea or concept (Best, 2006, p. 64). Promoters are responsible for "disseminating the innovation" (Best, 2006, p. 65). These people are described as having many different, yet similar roles in achieving the same task—from financial stakeholders to public relations specialists. Trendsetters are the inaugural group who embraces an innovation and is also known as early adopters or opinion leaders. Trendsetters are described "as exemplary, because they are viewed either as knowledgeable individuals or as social types that represent creativity, adventurousness or other social virtues that celebrate change," (Best, 2006, p. 68).

Spheres of Influence

The manner in which social interaction influences consumer purchasing decisions is of great importance when seeking to determine who or what influences people. Whenever there is a perceived risk involved in making a purchase, the average person usually seeks the opinion of others to reduce the degree of uncertainty. These social interactions happen with family members, opinion leaders and reference groups (Lamb, 2004, p. 156).

Family members

Family holds the strongest influence for most consumers because they generally help shape "values, attitudes, self-concept and buying behavior," and is marked by a process called socialization (Lamb, 2004, p. 160). The socialization process is a term used to explain the way parents and other elder figures pass cultural values and norms to children. Also in the socialization process, there are five phases in the order of the buying procedure: initiators, influencers, decision makers, purchasers and consumers. Family purchases also create dynamics where different people are involved in each role.

Opinion leaders

Opinion leaders are people who influence the masses. Curiosity leads opinion leaders to routinely be the first wave of people to try new products and services. The casual and inconspicuous nature associated with opinion leadership makes these leaders difficult for marketers to outright find, so marketers sometimes create opinion leaders. Forced opinion leaders for example have been cheerleaders on a local level when trying to reach teens, but on a national scale, celebrities are used when seeking to reach much larger audiences (Lamb, 2004, p. 159).

Research conducted by Katz and Lazersfeld suggested that one-third of opinion leaders have expertise to influence others in multiple categories, which is called polymorphism, or the ability to be an opinion leader in an assortment of areas (Rodgers, 1983, p. 288). Monomorphism is relayed the capacity to be an opinion leader in only one specific area (Rodgers, 1983, p. 288).

Reference groups

Reference groups are all groups—whether formal or informal—that a person is associated with that have the power to sway a person's purchasing behavior to some degree. Reference groups that directly influence consumers are primary and secondary membership groups. Primary groups are people you encounter regularly that can be informal or in-person, while secondary membership groups are typically more formal, yet less frequent face-to-face encounters. Reference groups that indirectly influence people are groups that people would ideally like to become a part of, aspirational reference groups, and groups that people would never want to be associated with, referred to as non-aspirational reference groups (Lamb, 2004, p. 158).

Characteristics and Types of Influencers

Malcolm Gladwell (2006), Ed Keller and Jon Berry (2003) as well as Andy Sernovitz (2006) each explicitly discuss the characteristics of influential characters beyond the mere mention of them in the hierarchy of influence models. Each researcher reveals a set of personality traits, habits and favorable tasks that are embodied as core attributes of influencers.

Three types of people that work in distinctive, yet similar ways to control word-of-mouth epidemics help influence the masses. Connectors, the first type, simply seem to know everyone, particularly a lot of people from various walks of life (Gladwell, 2000, p. 46-49). The second type, mavens, contains a wealth of knowledge about a number of products, prices and/or places. Mavens also like to spread their knowledge to help others anyway they can (Gladwell, 2000, p. 62-67). Salesmen, the final category, possess the skills vital to seal the deal or to persuade the unconvinced (Gladwell, 2000, p. 70).

Five traits that influentials possess are outlined in Keller and Berry's book, *The Influentials*:

1. "Being actively engaged in the community and many areas of life,"

2. "Have a broad network of connections,"

3. "Are looked to by others for their advice and insight,"

4. "Have active minds,"

5. "Trendsetters for the larger society," (2003, p. 64).

Standout attributes of influentials include being more opinionated, computer savvy and frugal than the average person, in addition to holding moderate/centrist views (Keller, 2003, p. 37). Influentials span a broad range of ages, household incomes and range of occupations (Keller, 2003, p. 39). The primary leisure activities that influentials indulge in typically include reading newspapers, books and magazines, in addition to listening to music, cooking and spending time on hobbies. These types of people are less likely to engage in passive activities like watching TV, sports or videos, as well as napping, going to the movies and playing video games (Keller, 2003, p. 43).

Influentials do not usually have the most of everything or the most expensive items, but these people

are more like "assiduous experimenters" who have a way of discovering important things before others (Keller, 2003, p. 64).   Some of those important products include personal computers, the Internet, ATMs, VCRs and mobile phones. Generally, influentials are usually three to five years ahead of the public when discovering new things (Keller, 2003, p. 65).

Influentials had a key role in developing the overall market for mobile phones since its inception a few decades ago. Influentials consistently owned cell phones at higher rates than the general public (Keller, 2003, p. 63).

Most successful products and services are fueled by some amount of marketing, whether traditional or nontraditional. One organic form of marketing that typically plays a role is word-of-mouth marketing. According to Sernovitz (2006), word-of-mouth marketing requires five elements, among which the most significant element is Talkers. Talkers are people who spread the message about a product or service enthusiastically to others and "sometimes they are called 'influencers' or 'evangelists'," (Sernovitz 2006, p. 22). "Talkers talk because they love to share great ideas and help their friends," (Sernovitz 2006, p. 22).   Talkers are fans, customers, bloggers, influencers, employees, hobbyists, professionals and even listeners in some cases. They are also different from and usually not trendsetters, celebrities or journalists (Sernovitz 2006, p. 71-75).

Segmentation Research

Understanding segmentation research was important to the study in order to identify influencers and others in the chain of diffusion. Conducting a segmentation research study is explained as the process of "identifying groups of people that respond differently to marketing," which also defines important differences between groups of people and can divulge unmet needs or give insights regarding how to approach certain dynamic groups of people differently for the same product or brand (Phillips, 2011).

Step one

To begin a segmentation study, a researcher's primary task is to "explore and define buying behavior." There are six areas that should be explored, which include: what they buy, how they buy, when they buy, what they spend, how often they spend and who are they (Phillips, 2011).

Step two

The secondary action required to complete a segmentation study is " to measure additional information that can provide insights as to why customers behave differently." Additional information includes gathering data about attitudes (lifestyles, interests, opinions, values), motivations, perceptions, intent and in-depth demographics (Phillips, 2011).   According to MarketVision Research (1998), other common areas that information can be gathered about include:

• Product usage or knowledge – frequency of use, brand loyalty, usage patterns, purchase volume and end-use.

• Decision process – shopping patterns, media use, buyer profile, decision-making unit, distribution channel and information search.

• Needs/product benefits – needs to be filled, expectations, satisfaction, product preference and perception of product.

• Adoption propensity – interest in new products, opinion leadership and likelihood of buying new products (1998, p. 4).

All of the key segmentation measures allow the chance for similarities among certain groups of people to surface.

Research Questions

After evaluating literature about influencers, a set of research questions was developed, both to challenge and to discover new information about young adult technology influencers.

The models developed by previous researchers outlined groups of people whom trends cycle through, from early adopters to laggards. This was an important element that needed to be used to separate the influencers from the latter. Thus, RQ1: Can influencers be identified and segmented according to the segments created by Rodgers' *Diffusions of Innovations* Theory and Peter Zollo?

After determining which part of the innovation cycle a person belongs to, the next question sought

to discover who influences the individual, whether a member of the influencer group or the majority. Hence, RQ2: Who (reference groups, opinion leaders, family members) or what influences each segment of young adults the most when making mobile phone and other technology purchasing decisions?

Like-minded people often have other things in common, whether it's habits or demographics. These other characteristics that influencers share are a secondary insight that could potentially add to the young adult influencers research. RQ3: What characteristics do young adult influencers share?

Rodgers (1983), Best (2006) and other researchers have developed various, but similar models for identifying the groups of people that innovations move between, but could there be an undiscovered group among young people when looking at the group of people innovations pass through? Consequently, RQ4: Is there an additional segment that Peter Zollo's or *Diffusions of Innovations* studies failed to identify?

The aforementioned questions guided the development of the survey questionnaire. The ultimate goal here was to discover technology influencers among young adults and what has a relative influence on them when making a technology purchasing decision.

This research tried to fit respondents into segments, then conducted a more in-depth analysis of one particular group, the influencers. The findings are based on quantitative research gathered from an online survey of young adults.

The survey was administered online using Survey Monkey's online survey tool. Respondents for the survey were solicited through multiple Facebook accounts belonging to other people in an attempt to gather a variety of people for the sample. The goal was to get at least 150 responses. The author used Facebook specifically to post status updates containing the link and a plea for help gathering voluntary responses, and reached an estimated 400 people via Facebook messages. College students and recent graduates were the primary targets for the survey, thus those who were randomly messaged were known to currently be attending college or recently finished college. In addition, there were also two ads placed on Elon University's E-Net, the online university news bulletin board, in the Student Center section: one under the General Tab and the other under the Volunteer Tab. The survey was intended to reach the target response number within one week's time, but was extended to allow responses for an additional week. Then, it was closed with 96 responses and an 83.3% total completion rate.

The survey began by asking a few forced choice questions, each of which directly correlated to one of the categories from Rodgers' diffusions of innovations theory (Innovators, Early Adopters, Early Majority, Late Majority and Laggards) or Peter Zollo's teen/type categories (the Edge, Influencers, Conformers and Passives Teens). The categories from the two models previously mentioned were collapsed into four, which combined two like categories, early majority and late majority, from the diffusions of innovations theory. The final four categories, in order of their place in the diffusion chain, were innovators, influencers, majority and laggards.

The survey also asked questions about participants' technology opinions and purchasing habits, specific to their current phones, as well as the most desired phone. Questions about mobile phone purchasing habits then led to questions about groups and organizations that respondents are involved with, in addition to family members and other references that may have influenced their mobile phone purchasing decision. The survey was comprised of a total of 27 questions, which included a few demographic questions.

Descriptive statistics were utilized to determine young people's technology purchasing habits and the spheres of influence on those habits. Then, survey takers were segmented according to their self-identified adopter category characteristics, which they chose at the beginning of the survey, and comparisons between the groups were made using cross tabulations.

III. Findings

Overview of All Responses

The bulk of young adults identify themselves as somewhat traditional and slightly skeptical of change (54.2%), thus making them members of the majority adopter category. The influencers' category was the second largest group with 26% of respondents classifying themselves as such by identifying that others respect their opinion and they are the least traditional. The innovators, those who identified themselves as venturesome, rebellious and the least traditional, consisted of 12.5% of the responses. Laggards, traditionalists

suspicious of change, made up the smallest portion (7.3%) of all young adult survey responses.

When young adults are in the market for a new mobile phone, slightly more than 70% either wait a few months until a new phone becomes a safe choice before purchasing it or are the last to purchase a recently released phone once it's no longer a new release.

The coolest phone according to young adults is the iPhone, which accounted for 58% of responses. The question that asked survey respondents what the coolest phone is allowed people to write in their personal choice. Droid phones were a distant second with 19% of respondents' votes. Blackberry phones reflected 11% of young adults' choice for the coolest phone taking third place. Evo(7%) and HTC(5%) followed thereafter.

Half of all new cell phone purchases were the result of being eligible for a device upgrade from a service provider, while 30% of new phone purchases were made because young adult consumers broke their previous phone. But who was actually making these purchases? Were young people themselves buying them or were they having someone make the purchase on their behalf? According to the data collected, 54% of young people were purchasing their own new mobile phone, while 38% were requesting that someone purchase the phone they desire for them.

The extent to which young consumers used their mobile phones was another subject of interest. The question that was posed to respondents was "how do you use your phone?" The response favored by most with 40% was one declaring that they "use most of its features and have downloaded a few applications beyond the standards that [they] deemed necessary." Thirty percent of respondents felt that they identified more with the following statement: "You use your phone for the basics … and from time to time use the other applications that were standard with the phone."

There are a variety of people, places and things influencing consumers' purchasing decisions. Friends were the most influential people for young adults when looking to purchase a new mobile phone, which received a 2.15 ratings average, the highest in this category. Family was a close second with 2.10 ratings average for the most influential people who aided young people in making a decision regarding a new mobile phone. Salespeople ranked third, with a 2.04 ratings average, while organizations, associations respondents are members of, were the least influential. Young people were also asked who were the most influential when making other technology purchases (e.g. digital camera, tablets, e-books). In this case, family and friends interestingly had almost even ratings averages with 2.64 and 2.63 averages respectively. Salespeople gained a higher influence ratings average (2.13) when young people were in the market to purchase technology besides a mobile phone, but was still ranked as three out of four (family, friends, salespeople and organizations).

There are so many other things besides people who influence consumers before buying a product. Young people were asked to rate how much specific online media, print media, social media and others influenced both their mobile phone choice and other technology choices.

Any form of advertising and technology blogs took the top spots as the most influential when making a mobile phone purchase or any other technology purchase. Advertising had the highest ratings average (2.34), with 49% of young adults rating it as either somewhat or very influential in their mobile phone decision. When making other technology purchases, advertising remained number one; the ratings average increased a little bit to an average of 2.61, with more than 60% stating that advertising was either somewhat or very influential.

The second most influential media was technology blogs, which received a 1.85 rating average when young consumers were considering a new mobile phone and a 1.95 rating average for all other technology purchases. A combined 31% of young people stated that technology blogs were either somewhat or very influential.

Traditional media, such as magazines, newspapers and radio, were three of the bottom five rating averages, thus having the least amount of influence among the twelve different types of media listed. The least influential media for young consumers making a cell phone decision were, in ascending order: personal online diary blogs (1.21), radio (1.26), newspapers (1.26), YouTube (1.29) and magazines (1.31). For all other technology purchases, the following medium was influential in ascending order of ratings averages: personal diary blogs (1.24), radio (1.28), newspapers (1.30), Twitter (1.33) and YouTube (1.38).

Overall, young people were a powerful group who influenced each other as well as those from other generations. Seventy-nine percent of young people said that they had directly influenced or encouraged

someone to purchase a specific product or brand of technology. As far as young people who are influencing people online were concerned, only 40% acknowledged that they had posted information on the Internet about technology in the past.

All respondents to this survey received some amount of a college education. People who majored in communications and social sciences represented the largest fields of study. The majority of survey respondents were females representing an overwhelming 90%. The primary age of the respondents was 20 to 23 years of age, which comprised more than 70% of respondents. Among the respondents, 60% declared they were members of the Democratic Party.

Adopter Category Specific Responses

The data was segmented according to the way respondents answered the first question, which had them select the set of characteristics that best described them. Each selection represents one of the four adjusted innovation adopter categories. The adopter categories were modeled after those from both Everett Rodgers (1983) and Peter Zollo (2004). The young adult adopter categories were developed like the following: 1. Innovators 2. Influencers 3. Majority 4. Laggards. Influencers' responses will be given an in-depth evaluation to discover trends specific to this younger set of influencers. The following is a snapshot of how young innovators, influencers, the majority and laggards responded to questions about technology habits as well as who or what has the power to persuade them.

Contrary to previous research, 50% of self-identified innovators declared that they were the last to purchase a recently released phone, usually once it's no longer a recent release. Young influencers (40%) stated that, when in the market for a new mobile phone, they wait a short while before purchasing it, while also evaluating other mobile phone options. Influencers were the most likely of all the adopter groups to have purchased their phone within the first six months of release, at a rate of 44%. The majority and laggards were much more likely to have purchased a new phone because they were due for an upgrade. Wanting something new or breaking a previous phone was a more common reason for getting a new phone among innovators (59%) and influencers (60%), although influencers were also more likely than any group to get a new phone because they wanted something new (24%).

The people that influence each of the adopter categories are the next set of insights that will be examined closely. Plans to make a new cell phone purchase or any other technology purchase will be compared and contrasted to determine to what degree each adopter category is influenced.

The influence that other people have on mobile phone purchases for all adopter categories will be discussed first. Innovators seemed to be influenced only partially by either family or friends, with 55% identifying that these people had no influence at all. Sixty-three percent of influencers felt that family was not at all influential, while they in turn felt that friends were more influential with 45% stating that friends were somewhat or most influential. The majority and laggards were overall more likely to find friends and family more influential than salespeople and organizations that they belong to in comparison to innovators and influencers. In contrast, innovators and influencers were more likely to find salespeople and organizations that they are associated with more influential than the majority and laggards.

When making other technology buying decisions, the amount of influence that people have on young people's buying decisions increased. Laggards recorded friends as more influential, a 3.0 ratings average, when comparing their responses to other adopter groups. Of all the adopter groups, influencers were more likely to believe that family members were the most influential with a 2.85 ratings average. Salespeople and organizations have the most influence on influencers, when comparing ratings to other adopter groups, a 2.25 rating average for salespeople and a 1.50 rating average for organizations.

The influence that the media has on young people's decisions within specific adopter categories, whether making mobile phone purchases or other technology purchases, is of enormous importance since we are exposed to so many messages every day. The influence that the media has on general technology purchases is greater than the influence it has on mobile phone purchases.

Interestingly, all adopter groups are influenced the most by advertisements when making mobile phone purchases. The influencer group was the most influenced by advertisements, capturing a 2.7 ratings average. In comparing how influential advertisements are across adopter segments, the innovators fell on the lower end of the ratings averages (2.09) for advertisements.

Facebook was the most influential with laggards when considering the purchase of a new mobile

phone (1.42 ratings average). Facebook fared the worst with innovators, documenting a 1.18 ratings average for the amount of influence that the social media network has on their mobile purchasing decision. Online news sites had a decent amount of influence among all adopter categories except the innovators, but the most influence was with influencers who at least felt that online news was somewhat influential at a rate of 40%. Technology blogs was another area that exhibited a fairly solid amount of influence with influencers, having the largest share of people (35%) attributing that technology blogs had at least somewhat of an influence on their purchasing decision.

The rate that young people across all categories are influencing others to purchase a particular product or brand offered interesting data. More than 80% of laggards and the majority stated that they had influenced others in making a particular technology purchase of a specific product or specific brand. Innovators and influencers, however, averaged about ten points less than the previous segments with about 70% declaring that they had influenced others to purchase a certain technology.

Among innovators, the iPhone took the largest piece of the pie with 37%, while Droid and Evo model phones shared the second spot with 25%, each, and Blackberry, 13%.

Influencers felt that Droid model phones (19%) were worthy as the second coolest phone after iPhone (52%), the Evo as the third accounted for 14%, followed by HTC(10% and Blackberry (5%).

The majority, the largest adopter category, agreed that the iPhone (66%) was the coolest phone at 66%), followed by Droid (16%), Blackberry (11%), HTC(5%), and Evo(2%).   Laggards were more likely to name Blackberry (28%) and Droid (29%) phones as cool although the bulk of them named the iPhone (43%) more than any other phone.

It's also interesting to note that the Evo received recognition among the innovators and influencers (a combined 39%), but virtually none (2%) among the other two groups. Since the Evo is considered one of the most advanced phones on the market, could this be the next coolest phone for young adults?

IV. Discussion

Young innovators, influencers, the majority and laggards for the most part seemed to confirm what past research about each specific category suggested, although there was some variance. New information was discovered mostly related to behavioral patterns, which were slightly different from what researchers had predicted. The study showed that influencers *could* be identified and segmented according to the adopter segmentation groups. However, while influencers typically stayed the course and proved themselves with each behavioral response, innovators and laggards created some unexpected trends.

Slightly more than half of innovators (54%) either use their phones for the basics or the bare minimum, which speaks volumes for a group that is supposed to be the least traditional and the most venturesome when it comes to trying new things. The sources of influence for innovators were also not consistent with what Rodgers said about this group. For example, innovators were the least likely to be influenced by most media. These well-connected innovators were also the least likely to post information online about technology. Additionally, one of the least likely groups to directly influence someone's buying decision were innovators. This could suggest that these self-declared innovators are perhaps not innovators in technology but in other genres, such as clothing or music.

Laggards, who are termed as being the most traditional of all adopter categories and typically suspicious of change, actually influence others more than past research has given them credit for when it comes to technology. This group of suspicious traditionalists was the most likely to have posted something online about technology over any other group. Young adult laggards were also the most likely adopter category to identify that they have directly influenced another person in the purchase of a specific brand or product. These findings certainly suggest that laggards are not just sitting back and letting other groups influence them, perhaps passing influence along to others, although whom they influenced is not particularly clear. Another possible explanation could be that, because laggards are so suspicious of change, when they find something new that earns their seal of approval they feel compelled to share it with others.

Influencers were most influenced by family members, when generally purchasing technology, and by friends, when specifically purchasing mobile phones. This could suggest that innovators rely on the opinion of their friends when looking for a new phone because friends are more likely to use their phones in the same

way as they do, whereas family members may include older adults who use their phones differently.   These family members, however, are likely more experienced or knowledgeable in other technology fields when it comes to televisions, computers, cameras, home printers, appliances and various other items.

When making purchasing decisions about mobile phones and other technologies, influencers are mostly influenced by advertising and technology blogs. Advertisements took the number one spot as far as the influence that the media have, proving that advertising was not completely irrelevant to young people. The type of advertising that influenced influencers the most offered potential for further research, whether it is television ads, outdoor ads, online ads or some other form of advertising. Technology blogs were a strong second for not only influencers, but all other adopter groups except laggards, whose second most influential media varied depending on whether they are in the market for a mobile phone or other technology. Larger technology blogs were often authored by reputable technology experts and had millions of unique visitors that translated into vast influence on most adopter categories including influencers.

Influencers decided that the iPhone was the coolest phone, although it was not a landslide decision, with only 52% of the vote. Droid phones accounted for 19% and the Evo phone consisted of 14% of influencers' opinions. Influencers also indicated that they waited a short while after the release of a phone before purchasing it, while also evaluating other options. This suggests that influencers were always on the hunt for the latest and greatest phone when they were in the market for one, but they did not lose all interest in one particular model just because a more recent release arrived. Demographically, influencers were more likely to be politically affiliated with the Democratic Party.

The way that the survey questions were composed did not help discover an additional adopter group, but more open-ended questions to describe respondents' behavior might have allowed for such a discovery. For the purpose of segmenting respondents into specific categories as planned by this research, it was best to keep personality and behavioral questions typical of each of the four groups, innovators, influencers, majority and laggards, within separate response choices for each question throughout this research.

Something that surfaced to challenge what previous research claimed is that the majority and laggards did influence others. Although they may not be influencers of the newest technology, perhaps they were influencers in determining what's current or of items that have become staples of society. The influence that Facebook has on laggards when making mobile phone decisions suggests that social media is what marketers should turn to when looking to create a lasting brand and product visibility. Advertising is what should be a top priority when looking to introduce a new product or brand to the marketplace, so that innovators and influencers can take the concept and spread it to the masses in the process to create a major innovation. Thus, the diffusion of innovations theory may need to be expanded or elaborated upon to include the differences in the communications sources that may be relevant to each adopter group at each phase of the diffusion process.

This study is limited to a non-random sample of young adults. Future research should use a random sample to see whether these results can be generalized to a larger population. In particular, since this study was comprised primarily of female respondents, it would be interesting to investigate the issues after adding an equivalent number of males.   In addition, because respondents were asked to self identify with one of the adopter categories through a forced-choice question. It is possible that respondents may not have accurately selected the characteristics that truly described their habits. Future research should take this into account and devise a lengthier set of adopter profile questions that can segment respondent characteristics. Adding qualitative interviews to the study may also help confirm these initial findings.

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