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Are touchscreens the most important feature of smartphones?

June 2, 2011 -- 4:36pm ET | By [Mike Dano](#)

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Editor's Corner:

Sales of smartphones are rapidly overtaking those of feature phones. [According to comScore](#), almost 30 percent of Americans now carry smartphones. And that number is set to skyrocket--Peter Chou, the CEO of smartphone maker HTC, recently [predicted](#) that smartphones will outsell feature phones by year-end.



Mike Dano

So what are all those new smartphone shoppers looking for in their devices? Nielsen recently provided to *FierceWireless* the results of the firm's latest survey of cell phone shoppers' top criteria for feature phone and smartphone purchases.

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Sue Marek, Editor in Chief
Mike Dano, Managing Editor

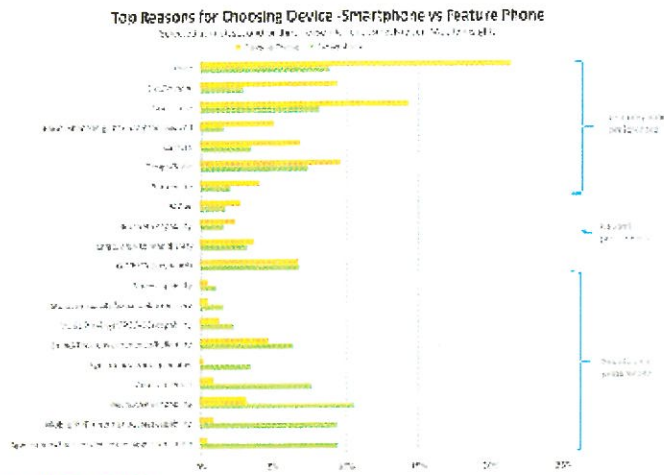
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The results show that feature phone shoppers are looking for one thing: Cheap phones. Price ranked as the far and away the most important element of feature phone selection, outranking factors including battery life and brand. And I don't think this is surprising: Feature phones have become a commodity, and they're all about the same.

Interestingly, for feature phones the next most important factor is ease of use, which is a vague and difficult to define characteristic that I'm guessing prospective buyers would have a hard time discerning while shopping for feature phones in Wal-Mart or Best Buy. The third most important characteristic for feature phones is design, which means that Americans shopping for feature phones are really looking for cheap phones that look good.

Now, switching to smartphones, the results become more interesting--and less straightforward. If you look hard, you can see that touchscreen capability ranks as the most important factor in a smartphone. But that's not really a surprise since most modern smartphones feature touchscreens (except for a few BlackBerrys, but Research In Motion has more problems than just a lack of touchscreens.) The second most important characteristic of smartphones is a tossup among Internet access, apps, access to email, design, ease of use and price. I think the conclusion to draw from this is that smartphone users want a lot of different things out of their device, which means that smartphone vendors will need to cover all their bases to be successful in the smartphone market.

There are a few more items worth pointing out: Users, at least for now, don't care about video capability. That either means they don't expect to use it or they just don't know what it involves. But for those smartphone vendors attempting to differentiate via large screens and TV and movie services, these findings should give them pause. Another item worth noting is the high score for Qwerty phones from both feature phone and smartphone buyers. I think this is an indication that there's a good market for phones with keyboards, despite Apple's clear aversion to the feature.

Finally, I'm surprised battery life didn't rank higher, considering all the effort smartphone makers have put into making sure their devices can power through a user's day. This finding either means that shoppers simply expect good battery life and therefore don't rank it highly, or they're content with a poor battery if they can get all the other stuff (I'm leaning toward

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the former).

I'd love to see how 3-D imagery ranks in next year's Nielsen surveys. --[Mike](#)

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Posted by Samir Shah | *June 7, 2011 - 10:28am*

If video is not important, why is Samsung's phones with Super AMOLED and Super AMOLED Plus are faring consistently better? Yes, I know Samsung makes very very very good phones but not doing video on Samsung's screens are selling them short. Are people just looking at better pictures and better icons on Samsung?

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Posted by Brendan McKenna | *June 8, 2011 - 5:10am*

I'm surprised that GPS/ navigation features are not included. Did they rank at all or was the question just not asked?

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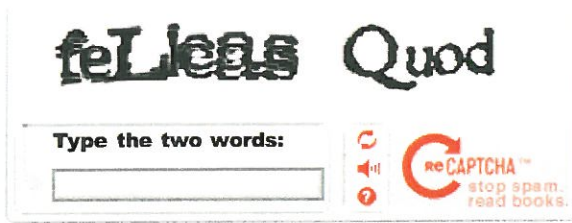
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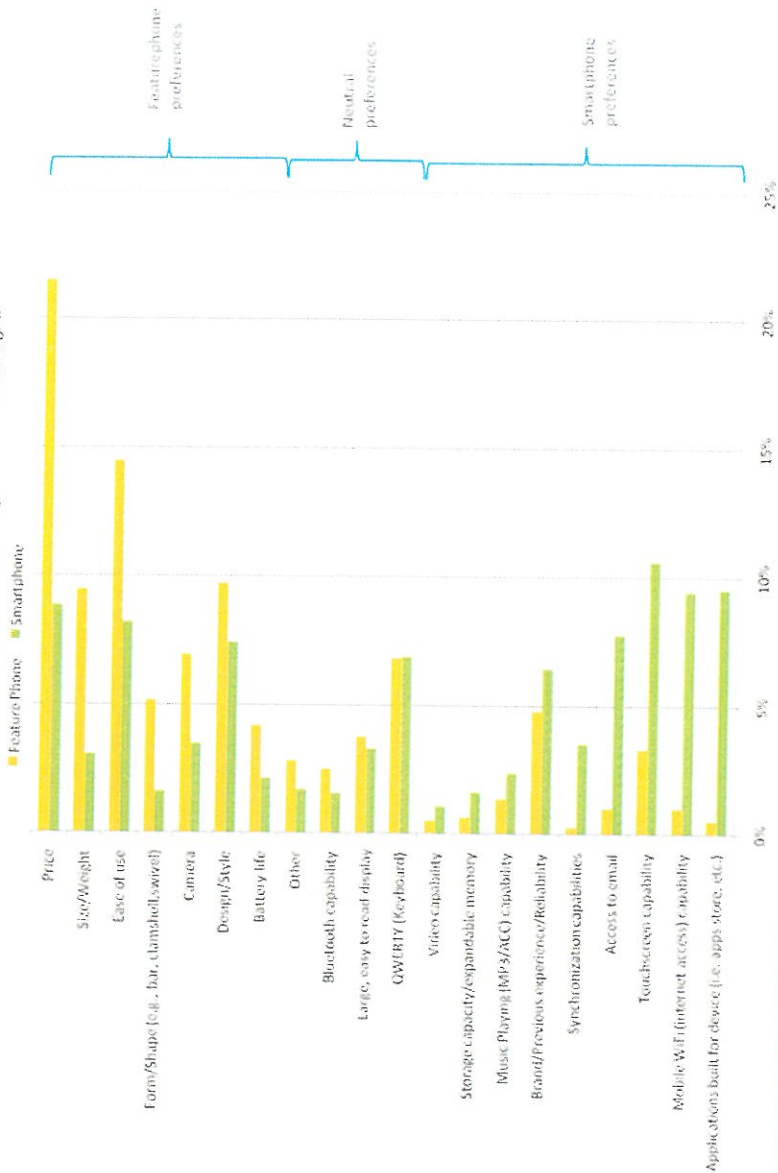
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Nielsen: Top Reasons for Choosing Device - Smartphone vs. Feature Phone



Top Reasons for Choosing Device - Smartphone vs Feature Phone

Selected as first, second or third reason for choosing, Nielsen Mobile Insights



What were the top 3 reasons for selecting your current cell phone?

Comments

Posted by Anonymous | June 7, 2011 - 2:09pm

Your graph appears to be right on target with regard to the required functionality of the smart vs feature. Thank you

reply

Posted by Ravi C. Krishnan | June 7, 2011 - 2:41pm

One obvious interpretation of Nielsen data
Some 60% of Smartphone users say :
Let me
interact {Touchscreen (11%) and Keyboard (7%)} easily (8%}
with my favorite apps (9%) including email (8%) by accessing the internet (9%), but let me do it at
a low enough price (9%).
Great user interface for my content at a low price. Why not?

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