Interactivity in Branded Mobile Apps: A Conceptual Framework

Eunice Kim

Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Advertising
College of Communication
The University of Texas at Austin
Phone: 571-205-4810
Email: eunicekim@utexas.edu

Direct/Interactive Marketing Research Summit 2012 Las Vegas, NV
October 13-14, 2012
Interactivity in Branded Mobile Apps: A Conceptual Framework

ABSTRACT

The increasing growth of smartphone apps has prompted marketers and advertisers to take advantage of mobile app technology. As a result, branded mobile apps are created as a brand communication channel to reach out to their current and prospective consumers. In order to derive maximum benefits from branded apps, companies and brands need to ensure that the app interface in which the consumers interact with is user-friendly. According to Harris Interactive survey (2010), branded app users consider usability and user experiences more important than brand name alone. In this sense, app designs that improve the usability of a branded app could contribute to supporting the brand’s promise and building relationships with the users (Weevers 2011).

Despite the importance of mobile app usability, empirical research on the effects of branded app features is limited. Previous research has examined the value of website interactivity in improving Web usability (e.g., Ghose and Dou 1998). The potential of interactivity includes sense of entertainment and satisfaction (Rafaeli 1988) and engagement (Schaffer and Hannafin 1986). Therefore, the primary goal of this study is to (a) conceptualize interactivity in the context of mobile app environment and (b) explore how a branded app’s interactivity influences its effectiveness. Building on literature on interactivity (e.g., Lui and Shrum 2002; McMillan and Hwang 2002), the study identifies key dimensions of interactivity within mobile apps.

Steuer’s (1992) three dimensions of interactivity are central to the concept of interactivity appeared in the literature. First, speed of response is essential to online media to create a synchronous and interactive user experience (Lui and Shrum 2002; Lui 2003). Second dimension of interactivity, range, has a similar meaning as the dimension of choice (e.g., Ha and James 1998). As a result of choice availability, an individual may feel empowered by being able to choose from several different alternatives (Pavlik 1998) and minimize effort in achieving a task (Ha and James 1998). Finally, mapping refers to a medium’s ability to let the users to control the environment, and the degree of interactivity depends on whether the user can control the flow of information (Shih 1998).

Based on such conceptualization, this study suggests six dimensions as critical to interactivity of mobile apps—speed, choice, personalization, navigational control, communication, and entertainment. The first four constructs (i.e., speed, choice, personalization, and navigational control) are drawn from the range and control dimensions of interactivity (Steuer 1992) and applied to the context of mobile apps. The communication construct is conceptualized based on the function of feedback (Ha and James 1998) and transaction facilitation (Song and Zinkhan 2008). The last one is added from the interactivity literature on Web environment and mobile advertisement (i.e., playfulness) (e.g., Gao, Rau, and Salvendy 2010; Lee et al. 2004). A conceptual framework of interactivity within mobile apps is presented in Figure 1.
Figure 1.
Conceptual Framework of Interactivity
Selected References


