Chapter III

The Right of Interpretation:
Who Decides the Success of Picture Mail?

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Abstract

This chapter is an empirical research report describing the diffusion of mobile camera phones and picture mail services in Japan between the years 1997 and 2005, based on annual consumer surveys conducted by Ericsson Consumer & Enterprise Lab. A general framework based on sociocultural values and attitudes to telecom for describing the telecom market from a consumer perspective is presented. This framework is then used to put different consumer life stage segments in relation to each other in respect to product diffusion. The change over time of attitudes and behavior is described, and the conclusion is drawn that the product terminology spontaneously created by consumers themselves in order to relate to the product is an important step for mass market diffusion. Furthermore, the group of people who develop this terminology becomes a crucial catalyst for diffusion—and in the Japanese case presented here consists of female students.
The iPod’s Like a Can of Coca-Cola…

Apple Computer has been very successful in the increasingly crowded MP3-player market. There are technical differences, the iPod can play AAC (also known as MPEG-2 Part 7; it was designed as an improved-performance codec relative to MP3) format songs and is tightly integrated with the iTunes store, but our studies at Ericsson’s Consumer & Enterprise Lab (here referred to as ConsumerLab) indicate that very few people are even aware of technical differences, and that purchasing songs over iTunes is a minority activity. Instead softer issues come into play, such as design, image, and values connected to the product.

“At this point, the iPod’s like a can of Coca-Cola—it’s a given” says Beastie Boy Diamond in a Wired magazine interview (Steuer, 2004, p.187) and he is not alone in having made such statements. Instrumental in catapulting the iPod into the ranks of the ultimate of “cool” seems to be the fact that musicians and other users themselves were early in taking a liking to the product; and, most importantly, were quite vocal in advocating its superiority. The fact that Apple had no control over this spontaneous endorsement campaign made a big difference. There is even an example of a full-featured but totally unendorsed ad film that in a matter of days had been watched 37,000 times (Kahney, 2004).

One might venture to say that although Apple undoubtedly designed and marketed the iPod, it was actually the consumers themselves who decided what was important with it. This is exactly what “right of interpretation” in this chapter’s heading is referring to.

In the current media landscape, it may well be that the meaning or significance of the product as perceived by the consumer is increasingly likely to have been imparted on it by other consumers. In other words, Apple still owns the iPod product—but the market (i.e., the sum total of potential buyers of the product) has decided what its benefits are.

To explore this point, this chapter presents a case study from Japan, based on research carried out by ConsumerLab in the years 1997-2005. The focus will be on mobile phones equipped with cameras and the picture mail service (sending pictures via mobile phones), and on how the meaning of this service was indeed decided by the market itself.

Methodology and the MarketReality™ Monitor

The basis of the research at ConsumerLab is annual quantitative studies (1000-2000 respondents per study, adding up to around 12,000 respondents globally per
Attribute Priority Arrangement of Cancellations in the Life Insurance Using Rough Set
www.igi-global.com/article/attribute-priority-arrangement-of-cancellations-in-the-life-insurance-using-rough-set/213961?camid=4v1a

The Use of Social Media Among Public Relations Students in the UAE
www.igi-global.com/article/the-use-of-social-media-among-public-relations-students-in-the-uae/132511?camid=4v1a