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Communicating User Research Results

Laptop Use in College

Stakeholders

My stakeholders are laptop companies in general like Apple, Samsung, Dell, etc. I am preparing this information for this group of stakeholders because they would be interested to see what college students want in their electronic devices that they use during their college career, whether it is for school related purposes or for other purposes. Because these stakeholders design electronic products and college students are a huge consumer of these, the “design space” here is to design portable, user-friendly, efficient and powerful laptops that are within budget. By obtaining this information, they can improve on their current products or even develop new products for the future. All of these elements will be based on speculation since I did not come into direct contact with the stakeholders.

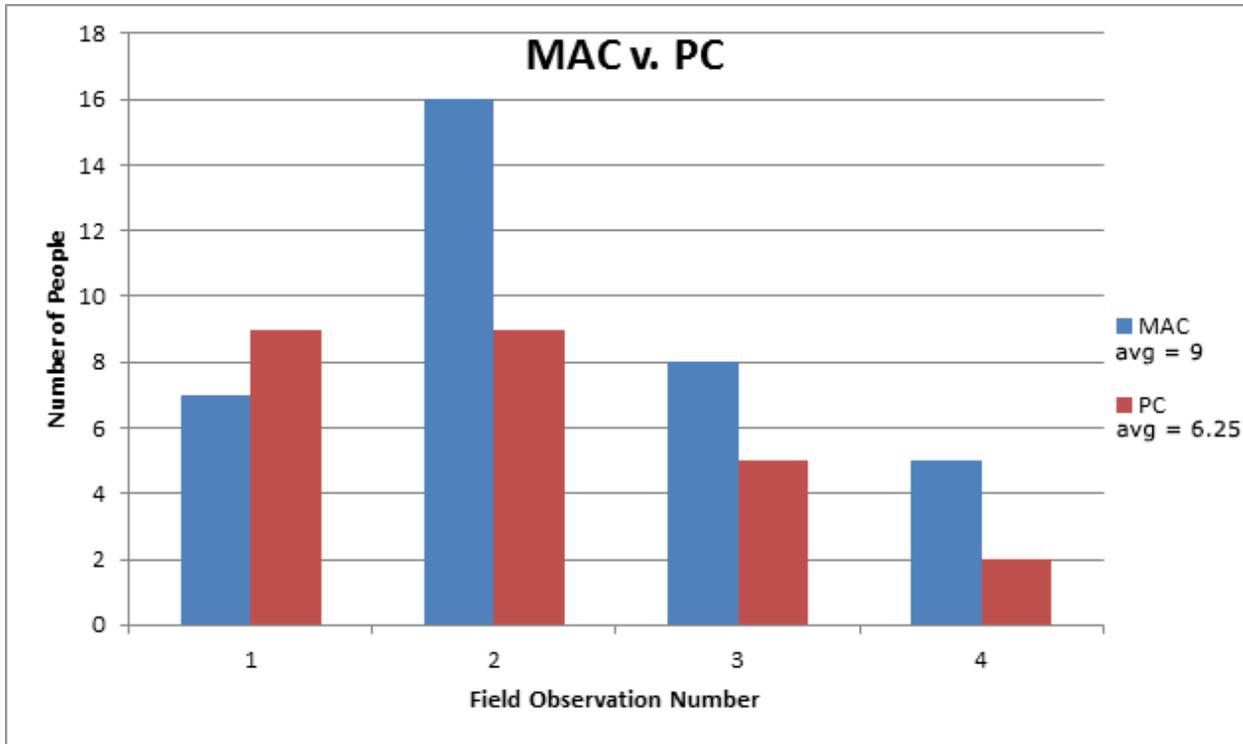
The most important information I gained through my observation and interview assignments in general was that tech savvy people get PCs, people into aesthetics and accessorizing get MACs, and major affects the laptop people own. From these I will draw my user profiles.

User Profiles

In my research, I narrowed in on college students here at the University of Washington. I obtained this user profile through my research by zoning in on students who use technology and more specifically, laptops, in their everyday college careers. I observed students at the Odegaard Undergraduate Library who were using their laptops to see how they accessorized their laptops and what they were using their laptops for. I interviewed students who own a laptop to see the characteristics they look for in a laptop, their personal opinions on different types of laptops, and to get to know their hobbies, majors, etc. to see if there were any patterns. The students at the UW who use electronic devices at the university have a unique user profile and then I separated this into two more specific user profiles – MAC users and PC users – each of which I base off of my research findings.

College students in general are trying to save money because of the expenses that come with attending a university. But although they are trying to save money, they want the best portable technology they can get for a good price. Nowadays, college is becoming more interactive with technology. Students bring their laptops to class, to study in various study spots outside of their home, and to get together with other people for group projects. Also, a lot of homework, quizzes, and even exams are being taken online now. In addition, college students are just getting into their area of study and each area of study could impacts which laptops they buy. Interviewee 1 said that in response to this that, “...if you’re a computer science major you would get windows. And if you were... a music major or producer you would probably choose a MAC.” However, college students also like to follow the trend. The current trend for laptops is MACs, the amount

of students who use MACs increased immensely compared to a couple years ago. You can see that in my observation assignment, I observed a slightly higher average for MAC users than PC users on any given day – 9 people versus 6.25 people. This is shown in the diagram below.



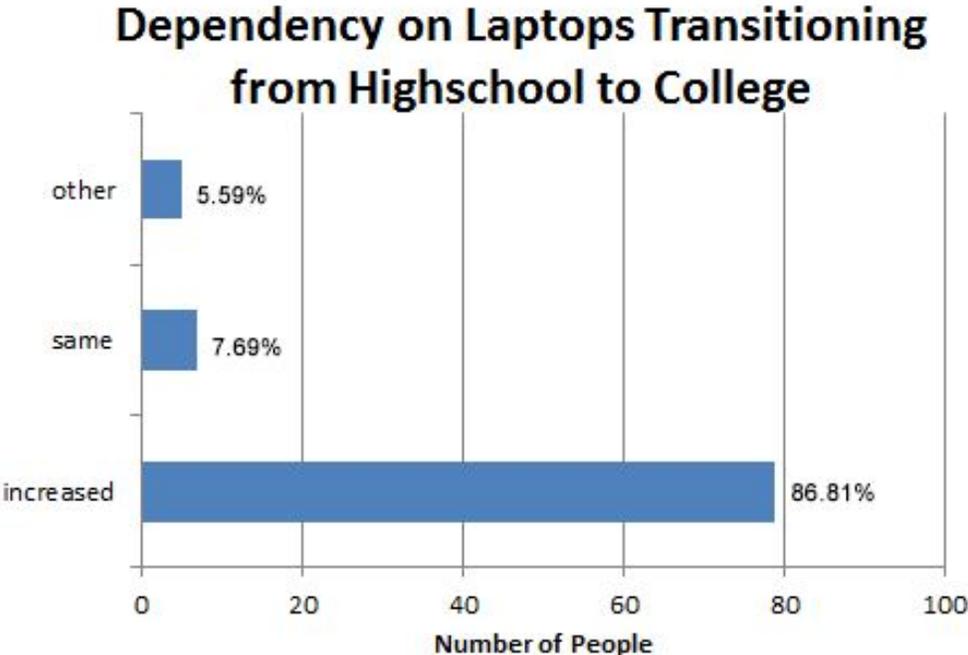
MAC users tend to care more about aesthetics as well as accessories. After conducting my interviews I saw that they are generally people who study film, design or just people who take aesthetics as a high factor in choosing a laptop. They accessorize their laptops with the vinyl décor especially made for MACs that are on average ten dollars apiece as well as keyboard covers and laptop covers. The second person I interviewed in my interview assignment said, “The only personalized laptops I’ve seen are the MAC books. I can’t really say I’ve seen any personalized non-MAC laptops.” I also saw a many instances of this through my observations.

PC users tend to do more research into laptops and find the best laptop they can get for the price. They look at what the price can provide in terms of power, battery life, efficiency, and size. PC users do not believe that MACs are worth their price. Interviewee 1 said that, “They’re overpriced for the performance they give.” These people tend to be computer science majors and engineering majors. These people do not have many choices when it comes to accessories therefore this leads them to put random stickers on their laptop covers – usually cheap stickers.

Design Opportunities

As a result of my research, there are a lot of opportunities for design. Laptop companies can see what the biggest appeal is for college students and then cater to their needs. In doing so, they can increase their sales. As shown in the diagram below, 86.81% of respondents indicated that there is a major increase in dependency of laptops after they transitioned from high school to college.

Because of this, we can see that a huge consumer of laptops is college students. Therefore, laptop companies should utilize the information in my research results to improve their design.



An area of design opportunities for PC laptops is its customizability. MACs have many outside businesses that create products to accessorize their laptops – vinyl décor, keyboard covers, laptop case covers, etc. PC companies however do not have these types of vendors. Therefore customizability in aesthetics can definitely be attributed to MACs and not PCs. This stands as a design opportunity for PC companies. They can design a way to make their laptops more customizable, therefore the gap between aesthetics in MACs and PCs will become narrower.

An area of design opportunity of MACs and a reason why a lot of people do not purchase MACs is its price. The price of MACs are good, however, because the user profile I researched are college students, the price may be a bit high. A design opportunity might be to create a new MAC laptop that is cheaper. This might mean not having as many capabilities; however I think that having a cheaper option will attract customers as well.

There are no outstanding ethics in relation to design opportunities. The only thing that could be a problem is that PC companies can take ideas from Apple and Apple can take ideas from PC companies as a result of the data collected. Each company can see what they can improve on based on what a different company is doing extremely well.

Reflection

In order to gain an even deeper understanding of the user profiles to contribute more effectively to design suggestions, there are a couple things I could change/add in my research. I can expand my research in order to gain insight from a larger population at the University of Washington and possibly even other universities in the United States. I could do this by conducting a large scale survey. By doing this I would make my research more representative of the whole population of interest. It would also make my research less biased and more reliable in making conclusions. For instance in my observations of people in Odegaard using MACs or PC, the average amount of people using MACs on a given day was 9 people and for PCs it was 6.25 people. This difference of 2.75 people is not enough to consider the evidence statistically significant. By obtaining a larger sample size I would be able to eliminate this problem.

Also, I would ask questions that would give me an in-depth understanding of their perspective on laptops. For example, I would ask them what they think the advantages and disadvantages are for both PC laptops and MACs. By doing this I can better suggest to companies ways to improve their design of their laptops. Therefore each company will see more comprehensively what they have covered and what they need to improve on. Because college students have an increasing need for laptops in order to do their school work, laptop companies should really target this group of people. With my improvements to my research, these companies will have the information to do so.