

Rebel, geek or both?

What your smartphone says about you

■ By Charmaine N Clarke



Are you a rebel intent on trying something new and never ever becoming just another face in the crowd? Or are you today's newly-hip tech-savvy geek who can create magic with an android platform? Maybe you're more of a creative type who relies on the very latest gadget to express your every emotion. Listen to your smartphone; you'd be surprised what it says about you.

"Overall, no matter what phone you use it's increasingly an extension of your body. You do everything on it," says CEIBS Associate Professor of Marketing Jane Wang. She's done research, using psychological and economic principles, on how people know what they like and how the way they frame decisions affects the choices they make. Prof Wang was commenting on the findings from a very informal, far from scientific survey done last December by *TheLINK*. We polled staff (not including faculty) and MBA students to determine the most popular smartphone on our Shanghai Campus, and what our choice of phone says about us all. We got 101 replies: 29 from MBA students and 72 from staff. The results: the iPhone was most popular among both groups, followed by Xiaomi, Samsung, and Huawei.

So we've established that the iPhone dominates the smartphone market at CEIBS Shanghai, a reflection of

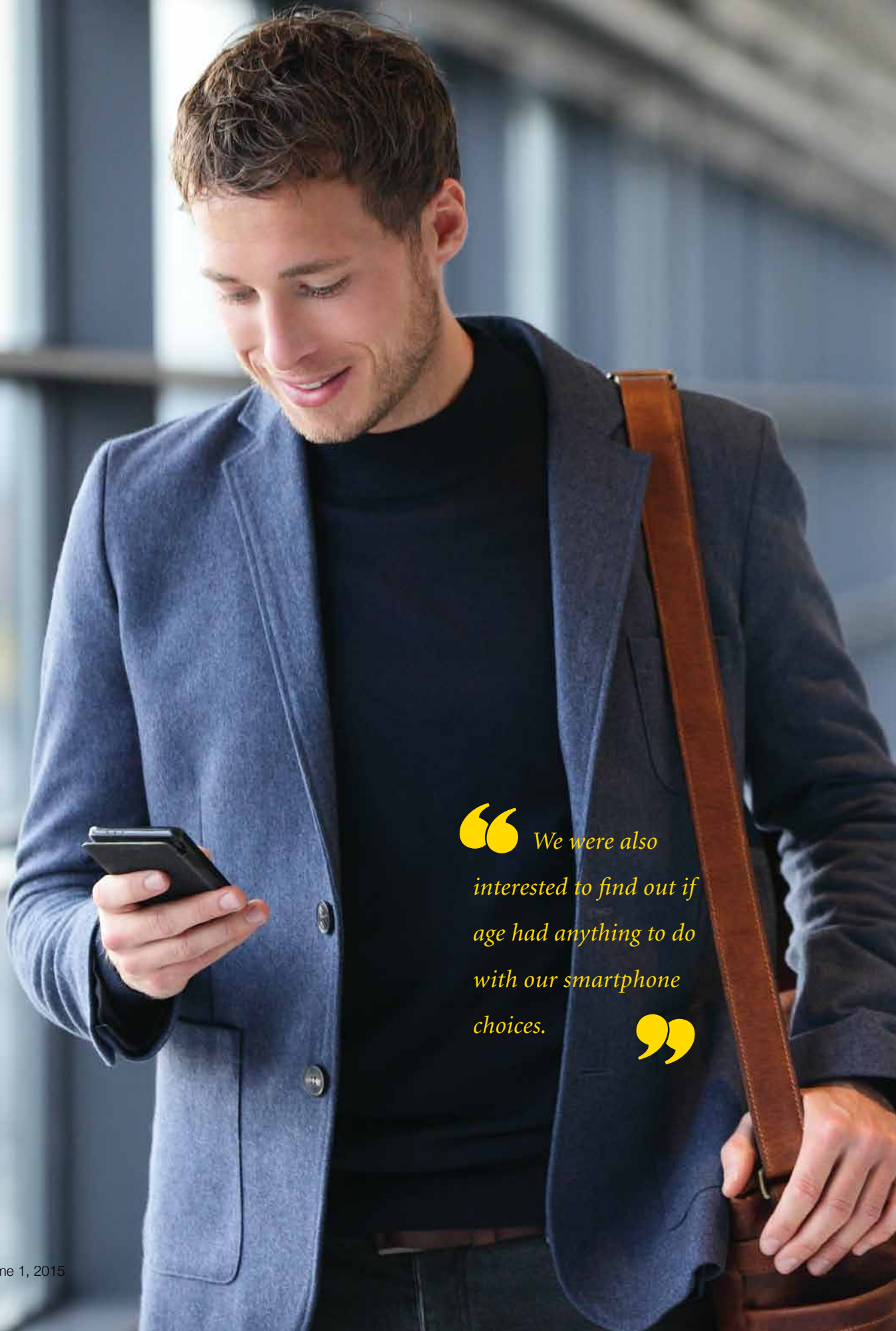
the wider Chinese society. Almost 59% of students have an iPhone while it's the phone now being used by almost 60% of the staff. But what does this say about us all? A part of it, according to Prof. Wang has to do with convenience. It's a lot easier to borrow a charger at work or in class if you use the same type of phone used by most of your colleagues. Another reason: we just want to fit in. "Using a phone in public is no longer seen as antisocial, it's part of the social phenomenon. So then we can infer that the influence of your friends' phone choice is becoming pretty powerful on your own choice of cell phone," says Prof Wang. But this need to fit in with the crowd is the opposite of how Apple branded itself in the beginning. "At the very beginning when they were building their brand, it was all about standing out, being creative. That creativity element is still there but now I'm not sure if it's more important for users to fit in or stand out... I think it's a little of both," she adds.

The Android-based Samsung was a distant third to the iPhone, used by 10.3% of students and 12.5% of staff. According to Prof Wang, these are the people who're what we used to call, in the old days, geeks. Today they're all the rage, the technologically sophisticated. They're not just smart, they're cool. "If you see the iPhone as an extension of the Apple brand, the iPhone is seen as more linked to innovation, inspiration, spontaneity,

fun-loving. The Android platform affords more flexibility to each user's personal configuration. But you need to be technically savvy enough to actually get the benefit of it. So a lot of people probably share the stereotypical idea of Android phone users being much geekier," explains Prof Wang. "And the geeks and nerds are the new hot thing now."

But what about those who own a Xiaomi, the upstart Chinese brand that stuck its toes in the US market this year by offering accessories, likely paving the way for its low-cost phones. These are the rebels, says Prof Wang. "Everybody around us has the iPhone 6 and iPhone 6 plus. But Xiaomi stands out as something different. What does this say about its users? It says: I'm experimental, I'm willing to give new ideas a try and I'm really leading the trend," she explains. For those of you who already have an iPhone but would prefer a Xiaomi, you likely see the Chinese brand as an underdog with a great coming-of-age story. "A lot of people mistook Xiaomi as an imitator of Apple. But if you look closely, they're not," says Prof Wang. "Those who have an Apple but would like a Xiaomi are people who care enough to learn about the company's history, who want to signal that they're willing to try different things, who want to stand out and maybe even be trend setters."

In fact those of you with lesser-globally-loved, tech-strong Chinese



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brand smartphones such as Xiaomi and Huawei are showing the rest of us that you want to make your own decisions. “Buying these brands is a strong signal of: I’m not willing to take anybody else’s words about what’s good, what’s cool, what’s most cutting edge. I want to see what these phones can do,” says Prof Wang. “And many of these phones, from my understanding, actually have a lot of advantages that might get overwhelmed in a very crowded market space.” Brands can benefit by incorporating feedback from these trendsetters into product improvements, she adds.

But once they buy these brands, do these ‘strong, decisive types’ regret their decision? From our poll, 12.8% of the men said they now have a Xiaomi and 17.9% of them listed it as their favourite brand. So the only regret there, it seems, is by those who don’t already have a Xiaomi. But the women tell a different story. While 16.1% of them said they now have a Xiaomi, only 14.5% of them said it’s their favourite brand. In terms of Huawei, while 10.3% of the men now use that brand, only 7.7% of them said it’s the one they like best. The women

who have a Huawei seem happy with their choice as the number is the same in both cases, 4.8%.

And what about the Korean brand Samsung? We found that 7.7% of the men now have a Samsung; but only 2.6% say that’s their favourite brand. Meanwhile, 14.5% of the women polled have a Samsung but only 6.5% said it was the one they like best.

When it comes to the iPhone, more men like it best (71.8%) than those who now have it (54.8%) and the number of women who have and want it is the same (62.9%). No buyers’ remorse there.

We were also interested to find out if age had anything to do with our smartphone choices. Not much, it turns out. The top three brands being used and also best liked by the 101 staff and students on our Shanghai Campus that participated in the survey are iPhone, Xiaomi and Samsung, in that order. This goes across all age groups. One surprise: among the 20-35 year olds, their second favourite brand was Nokia (10.5% vs the iPhone’s 68.4%). But none of them have one....



Prof Jane Wang



Prof Henry Moon



Prof Henrik Cronqvist

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Faculty phone choices

So we didn't poll all our faculty about their smartphone choices but here are a few comments:

“I have an iPhone. I've used iPhone for many, many years. I'm very scared of switching to an Android phone. Before I moved to Shanghai, every time I came back to visit my parents, I would rely on a Motorola Android-based smart phone. Couldn't use it, didn't know how to use it. It's sort of a shock switching between systems. So for me Apple is a safe choice.” – Associate Professor of Marketing Prof Jane Wang

“On one hand, one of the greatest businessmen I have met in my career is Mahesh Viswani. When he sits down to eat he lays down 3-4 different cell phones on the table which covers various parts of the globe in which he trades various commodities from frozen fish to cars.

I happened to be having dinner with him several years ago the night of [a terrorist attack on a hotel in Mumbai]. He instantly became like one of those 1950s telephone switchboard operators as he fielded dozens upon dozens of calls from all over the world. Amazingly, several people called who were directly connected to what was happening in that area and I remember at least two individuals had friends or family staying at the hotel.

On the other hand, I still don't carry a cell phone and I might be the last person I know that refuses to use them. I do have a ten-year-old modal that my wife keeps and I use on occasion when demanded to. Otherwise, they bother me.

I was recently in the US and was walking in a mall. I sat down in a rest area and looked around. The number of people staring into their little cell phones and texting meaningless messages was so glaring and absurd to me, I thought I was in some futuristic cartoon.” – Professor of Organisational Behaviour Henry Moon

“Ahead of seeing the poll results, my thoughts as a behavioural economist are:

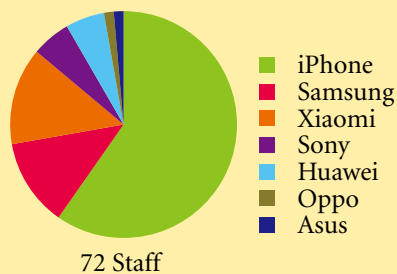
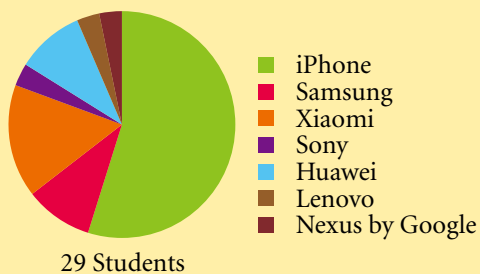
- Cost matters: higher earners may choose pricier brands. (But this point is the least interesting because it's quite obvious.)
- Familiarity is a very powerful heuristic. Swedish people overinvest in Swedish stocks in their portfolios, French people in French stocks, etc. And it cannot be explained only by barriers to invest elsewhere. My prediction is that Chinese-made phones are more popular among Chinese faculty/staff.
- Genetic or environmental reasons: the more frugal may choose an inexpensive phone even if they can afford a fancy/pricy one. This I base on my value/growth investment paper, where we find that those who have a relatively economically tougher upbringing may be more value oriented, i.e., less fancy phone in this context.
- The trend seeking effect: Some are natural trend seekers and must get the iPhone 6 immediately, others don't care.

I have the Nexus 5.” – Professor of Finance Henrik Cronqvist

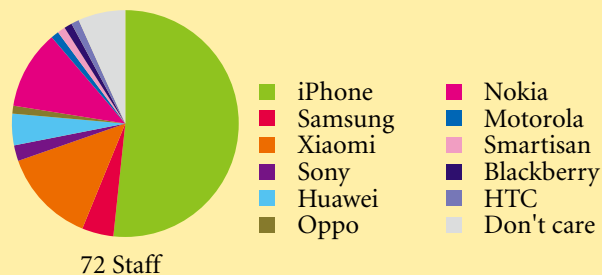
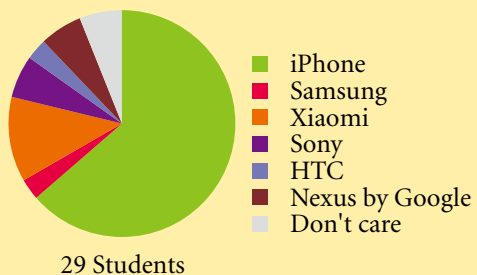
Smartphone Poll Results

1. BY CATEGORY (students/staff)

Current cell phone brand

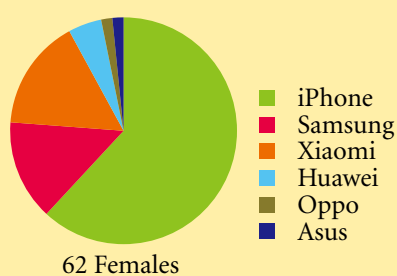
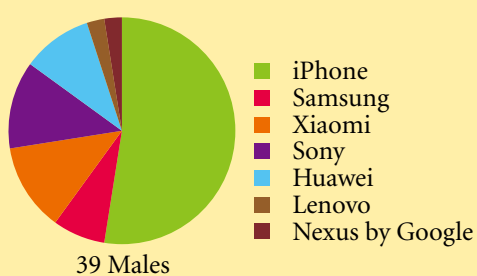


Favourite phone brand

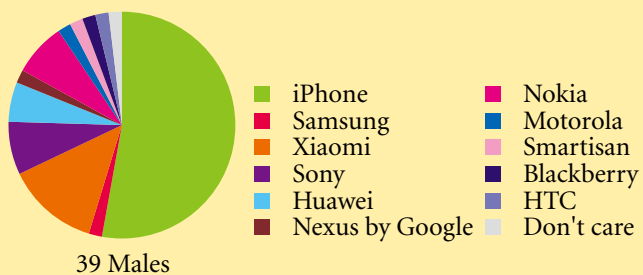


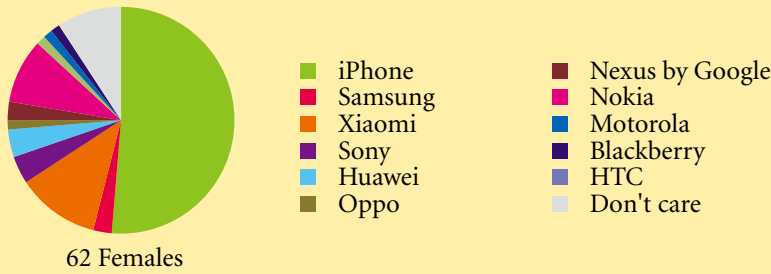
2. BY GENDER

Current cell phone brand



Favourite phone brand



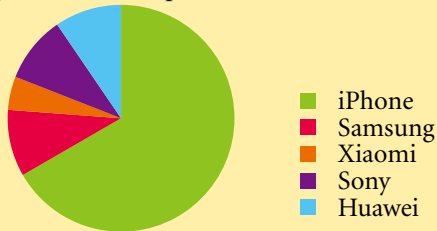


3. BY AGE

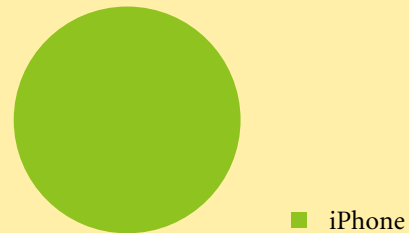
Current cell phone brand



Age: 20-35 (76 respondents)

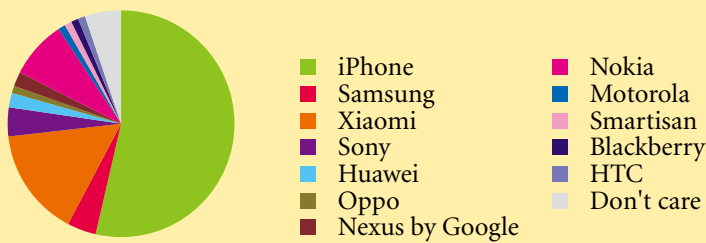


Age: 35-45 (22 respondents)

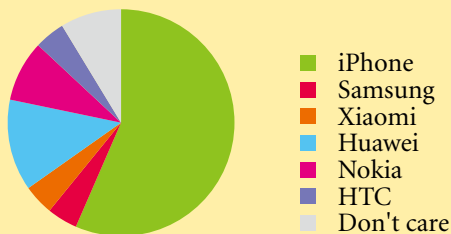


Age: 46-60 (3 respondents)

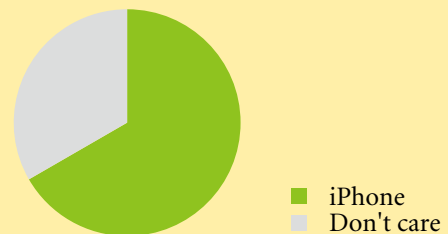
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