

What Do Consumers Want? It Depends How They Feel

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Consumers who have tried to choose exactly the right type of mobile phone, game console or fitness device for their particular needs understand how difficult the process can be. Think of all the factors that go into the decision: How easy is it to personalize? Will the primary use be a camera, navigation device or communicator? How convenient are the icons, input commands and gesture controls?

However, when people buy their most expensive mobile device—a new car—they usually have fewer choices in the cockpit. Designers and engineers need to ensure that the cockpit displays and human-machine interaction (HMI) in your vehicle are built to accommodate individual needs. For this reason, Visteon regularly probes consumer attitudes and preferences in product clinics across the globe, to elicit feedback on what they desire at a particular time in a given geography.

Through research, we learn not only how well a system functions but also how operating that system makes the user feel. We are interested in why people react differently to similar products, which helps us determine strengths and weaknesses.

Wanted: Simple and Intuitive Controls

Consumers often value safety as most important when ranking vehicle technology, followed by controls that are simple to use and intuitive. Ultimately, they judge vehicle technologies based on what they know and like from the consumer electronics marketplace. In other words, consumers always compare what is in their cockpit to what is in

their pocket.

But what people in one country may perceive as simple or intuitive often is far different from the perceptions of people in other nations. For example, Visteon studies have found:

- Americans seek an intuitive experience like displays with brightly colored buttons, text-based controls with icons for reference, an overview layout of all available options, and a large interactive touch screen for interactive control.
- Consumers in China, on the other hand, prefer neutral colors on the screen and icon-based controls with text for reference.
- In France, Germany and other European Union countries, consumers desire a master controller over touch screens and focused task content on the display, with minimal and muted colors.

Lessons from Consumer Research

Visteon incorporates these results when designing cockpit displays and controls, considering both the intuitive nature of the design and its practical benefits to consumers.

Following are the top five lessons from recent research studies:

Expectations change dynamically. Expectations are formed from the overall consumer environment – particularly consumer electronics. Drivers expect a gesture-activated HMI will compare similarly to their gaming consoles at home. These expectations vary by geography and by the state of consumer electronics.

Consider the user experience holistically. Look at the entire experience – not only what the driver touches but what he or she feels when touching it, along with expectations of craftsmanship. The user experience always combines the practical with the emotional.

The user experience is front- and back-end related. While the front end is the HMI – what the consumer sees and interacts with – the back end must be capable of supporting the experience the consumer anticipates. Systems must deliver simple and intuitive operations.

User experience foundations are global, but must incorporate regional differences. Around the world, all consumers want safety, simplicity and intuitive controls, but they define these aspects differently. Flexibility must be considered when developing global platforms.

Measuring the user experience is subjective. We can objectively measure interaction times and usability. Yet,

how the system makes the consumer feel depends on his or her expectations and background. Therefore, a good deal of subjective research must be conducted with consumers, using pictures and other techniques, to discover common threads that may trigger the desired response.

Ideally, every product should be checked against consumer expectations for safety, ease of use, reliability, intuitive operation and its customization for each user's individual concept of what it should be and do. Since those expectations can change as quickly as technology, it's important to fully understand and stay ahead of trends.

Judy Blessing brings 17 years of research experience to her manager position in market and trends research. Her in-depth knowledge of all research methodologies allow her to apply the proper testing and analysis to showcase Visteon's automotive intellect to external customers and industry affiliates, Judy holds a German University Diploma degree in marketing/ market research