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How people discover, use, and stay engaged with apps

New research by Google

In today's mobile-first world, apps and mobile sites are essential to connect with consumers. To help marketers make the most of these channels, Google partnered with lpsos to survey smartphone users. We wanted to understand the journey that app users take: from discovery, to download, to frequency of use, to the factors that inspire loyalty—or abandonment.

This report shares insight into how people find, use, and engage with apps so that advertisers can design the most effective mobile strategies.

Methodology

FORMAT	15-minute online questionnaire
POPULATION	Smartphone users in the U.S., aged 16–64. Quotas set on enumera data per vertical for age, gender, education, and internet usage freq
SAMPLE SIZE	N=999
MARKET	U.S.
DATE	October 2016

Google Research

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Key Findings

Friends help, but price matters.

Friends and family are the top way people find out about new apps, but they are less influential when it comes time to install. At that moment, price is the most important factor, followed by privacy and security. In fact, half of smartphone users have never paid for an app.



Apps help most with specific tasks.

Apps and mobile sites serve different purposes. Apps are more commonly used for doing specific tasks like playing games, staying organized, and tracking physical activity, while mobile sites are used most for browsing and exploring.



For consumers, there's not a more valuable attribute in an app than ease of use and navigation. This is nearly twice as important as anything else an app can offer.

Memory is a dealbreaker.

Taking up too much phone memory is the #1 app-related issue that leads consumers to uninstall an app. However, most people will give your app another shot if changes are made.

To discover new apps, people turn to those they trust: friends and family

Top methods of app discovery

- **51%** My friends/family are using them
- **48%** By browsing app stores
- **34%** Recommended to me in the app store
- **33%** Saw an ad while using another app
- 32% I read about them online
- **32%** I see them shared on social networks
- **31%** Saw an ad while browsing the web
- 26% Saw an ad on TV
- **21%** Through search engines
- 20% Saw an ad on YouTube



Base: 999

Q32. How do you typically find out about new smartphone apps? Q33. And have you found out about an app in any of these ways?

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When deciding whether to install an app, price and privacy are the most important factors

Top motivating factors among those who search in app stores Extremely important/very important



Base: Searches for apps on phone's app store (n=795)

Q38. When searching for apps in your smartphone's app store, how important are the following factors when making a decision about which app(s) to download?

Speaking of price, half of people have never paid to download an app

For those who have, desired content is what motivated the purchase



50% Have paid to download an app

50% Have never paid to download an app



Top reasons for paying for apps

- It had the content I wanted 45% It offered features/functionality unavailable on free alternatives 35% 33% I want an app that is ad-free There were no free alternatives 31%
 - The app had good reviews

Base: 999 *Median

Q22. What is the most you have ever paid for an app? Please enter amount to the nearest whole number.

Base: Have paid to download an app (n=493)

Q23. Why have you chosen to pay for apps over other free alternatives?

Of all the apps people have installed, more than half are used regularly

On average, users have **35 apps** installed on their smartphone

Number of apps currently installed



And **52% of those apps** are used at least weekly

Frequency of app use



Base: 999

Q14. How many apps are installed on your smartphone (including any that were already installed when you bought it)? Q15. Roughly what percentage of the apps are installed on your smartphone do you use? Base: Has apps installed on smartphone (n=999)

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App or mobile site? Depends on the task

Among those who have performed activity in the past 30 days



App usage

Base: Have performed activity on smartphone in past 30 days and randomly selected to answer Q5. Have you used a mobile website or an app for each of these in the last 30 days?



The apps they love most are easy to use and navigate

What users find most valuable about their favorite apps



- They're easy to use and navigate 61%
- There's always new things to explore 34%
- I've personalized them so I get the best experience 29%
- There's a large range of things to explore 28%
- I receive useful notifications from them 26%
- The products feel more relevant to me than other apps 24%
- I like the way they look 23%
- They're from a brand or company I use a lot in the real world 19%
- The app is more convenient than calling or going to the branch/store 17%
- They have good discounts or offers 16%

Offering a wide range of features and personalization options is also key to building app preference

Preferred features for smartphone apps

Prefer

No preference

Do not prefer

66%		29%	5%
62 %		29%	9%
58%		36%	6%
58%		31%	11%
41%	36%		23%
38%	36%		26%
35%	33%		32%
33%	40%		27%
24%	27%		49%
18%	29%		53%

Has a wide range of features
Stores my preferences to make future activities easier
Specializes in a small number of features that I use free
Requires sign in for secure access
Uses my current location to provide relevant local inform
Stores personal information for a more personalized ex
Is linked to my social networks
Is free to download but has ads within the app
Stores my credit card/billing information to make future
Charges a fee to download but is ad-free

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If they provide value, push notifications aren't a turnoff

85% find notifications on mobile useful

Most useful notifications

- Purchase being shipped/delivered 42%
- Upcoming reservation or appointment reminder 35%
- 35% New discount or offer
- Upgrade to the app itself (e.g., new feature added) 34%
- 32% Price reduction for a product I'm following
- Purchase/transaction status update 30%
- 25% Loyalty points update
- 22% New product or service available
- 20% Reminder of a booking/purchase in progress
- Recommendation of a product/service 15%
- 10% Friend or family member purchasing an item
- None of the above 7%



Base: 999

Q29. Apps or websites can give you notifications on your phone to tell you about a new update, message, or event, for example. What sort of notifications do you find useful?

Remember this: People stop using apps when they're not useful or take up too much memory

Personal reasons for abandoning an app



App-related reasons for abandonment



Base: 999 Q40. Have you stopped using apps on your smartphone for any of the reasons below? Select all that apply. Q41. And have you stopped using apps on your smartphone for any of these reasons?

- **27%** I was receiving too many notifications from it

The good news: Most people will reconsider using an app if it's improved (and trimmed down in size)

91% would consider using the app again, if changes were made

Reasons to re-engage



- The app uses less memory 43%
- 36% The app was redesigned for easier use
- 32% The app uses less mobile data
- 29% New features added
- 17% Exclusive or bonus offers or products
- 13% Family or friends start using it
- 13% Discount on next purchase
 - Being linked to the app in a relevant situation online
 - Nothing would make me start using the app(s) again
- None of the above 18%

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