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# CONSUMER PERCEPTION OF HIGH-TECH BRANDS AND RELATED PRODUCTS: THE CASE OF THE ICONIC APPLE

## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The paper examines the opinions and attitudes of young adults as the target audience towards a high-tech brand on several specific levels. The goal of research is to investigate and explore the perception of both Apple product users and non-users related to the Apple brand, brand loyalty, purchase intention, recommendation intention, and other aspects.

**Methodology:** The research instrument was created for the purpose of this research and was partially based on several prior studies with different standpoints. The online questionnaire consists of 22 items and was carried out in 2019. Parametric and nonparametric statistical tests were used for testing the difference between sample segments.

**Results:** The results indicate that the Apple brand has a generally positive image among the respondents. The majority of the respondents use or have used at least one Apple product. Apple users are generally loyal to the brand and willing to recommend Apple products to their friends and family. Users primarily recall Apple as a top-of-mind (first-mention) high-quality smartphone brand. In contrast, non-consumers tend to recall different brand names when thinking about high-end smartphones but also suggest that a brand name is an important factor in the consumer decision-making process.

**Conclusion:** Collected data and related analysis provide insight into (non)consumer perception of the Apple brand and Apple products in the Croatian market accentuating the main consumer attitudes and brand perception related to a high-tech brand.

**Keywords:** Brand perception, brand personality, consumer attitudes, Apple, Croatian market

## 1. Introduction

Many companies strive to create a combination of products, services and environments based on holistic consideration of consumer experience (Machado

et al., 2014; Diller et al., 2005). Global markets are becoming highly saturated and “turbulently dynamic” but some brands possess the ability to stand out and are often preferred by users over other brands (Gehani, 2016). Apple was founded in 1976 by Steve

Jobs, Steve Wozniak and Ronald Wayne, and has had a rich and influential history (Isaacson, 2013). Apple Inc. has launched some of the most revolutionary products in modern high technology, such as iMac, iTunes, and the notable smartphone - iPhone. In addition to the significance of Apple products, the company has put a lot of effort into attending to their customers, online and offline presence, user experience, safety, and loyalty of their users. In combination with great marketing communication, Apple's inventions have made them one of the largest brands in the world. Regardless of the source used, Apple is most commonly listed among the top companies. Because of their history related to the introduction of new (and expectedly revolutionary) devices, new product launches usually instigate curiosity on a global level. In combination with massive advertising campaigns and a loyal fan base of customers, this kind of hype made their business endeavors quite successful. According to Bhasin (2019), Apple is one of the greatest brands in the ICT industry in terms of generated revenue as well as its brand ranking. Apple is also the number 1 brand in the market positioning of smartphones, tablets, and laptops. In 2019, Apple's total assets accounted for US\$ 309.5 billion and there is only Amazon with greater total assets worth (Handley, 2019).

What is quite unique to Apple Inc. is the synergy between provided hardware and software, a specific ecosystem. Investment in the brand image and various related marketing activities of Apple Inc. is at a high level and continuously increasing. Interestingly enough, Apple does not have a strong brand awareness competitor, but in terms of device market share, Apple has strong competitors for every single device. For example, Apple iPad is facing serious competition from Android tablets, the iPhone's biggest rivals are Samsung and Huawei, while MacBooks have stiff competition from Dell (Farooq, 2019). Platforms like iTunes are facing competition from Spotify, Apple Books competes with Amazon, and AppleTV is an underdog on the market. Samsung Smartwatch is a rival for Apple Watch and part of the Android ecosystem in an attempt to compete with the Apple ecosystem (Graziano, 2017).

The research focus of this paper is set on perceptions and attitudes towards a high-tech brand and its products. The examined perception is related to the strategies and approaches that modern companies use to maximize the potential of the digital environment in the brand-building process. Apple

Inc. is used as a benchmark because of its strong brand awareness and a high level of consumer loyalty, but also because Apple is one of the market leaders in ICT development with a functional synergy between offline and online approaches in marketing. Based on the idea that Apple Inc. usually targets upscale or premium market segments, it is both interesting and beneficial to examine (non) consumer perception on the Croatian market with considerably lower purchasing power compared to developed countries in Europe and the world. The paper examines the opinions and attitudes towards Apple on several specific levels, i.e. Apple as a company, Apple as an (iconic) brand, and related to specific Apple products. The research aims to answer several research questions:

- What is the top-of-mind brand in the high-quality smartphone category?
- What is the top-of-mind brand in the high-quality computer/laptop category?
- What is the perceived importance of the brand name when purchasing a smartphone, computer or tablet?
- What is the perceived amount of time needed for making a decision when purchasing a smartphone, computer or tablet?
- How popular are Apple products measured by the number of current and past users and non-users?
- What is the perceived quality of Apple products?
- What is recommendation likelihood of Apple products?
- What is planned purchase likelihood of Apple products?
- What is the perceived market position of Apple and its products?

## 2. Theoretical background

Literature review suggests numerous scientific-based as well as professional reflections and interpretations of the Apple brand with various brand elements explored, tested, and analyzed. In contrast with the traditional view of brand-building as a result of corporate identity, legacy and stakeholder interactions, Gehani (2016) argued that the corporate brand values are "more closely correlated with the firms' dynamic innovative capability" as opposed to their legacy or identity. However, perceived innovation

and quality may be a harder goal to achieve than delivering actual innovation and quality (Aaker, 2004).

Great public interest in the Apple brand and Apple products, sometimes even described as “Apple frenzy”, may be related to a successful incorporation of “a qualia product into consumer identities” (Niu, 2019). The author describes the “qualia” concept as “taste-emphasizing”, or “in every sense connected with the consumer’s positive emotions and pleasant feelings”. Fitzsimons et al. (2008) examined the translation of social priming effects to the consumer brand context via several experiments. Interestingly enough, their experiments supported the theory of brand priming effects on behavior and suggested that participants “responded to brands by behaving in line with the brand’s characteristics” with no detectable awareness of the influence. Consumer perception of brands and related opinions, as well as behavior, is a highly complex area subject to additional research exploration, both at macro and micro levels. Several research aspects and various standpoints are discussed in the following subsections, mainly exploring those consumer related research efforts where the Apple brand was at the center of research.

### *2.1 Brand perception and personality*

Vilčeková and Štarchoň (2017) focused on the main characteristic of selected global brands and explored their archetypes related to brand image and brand perception of Slovak consumers. Based on the conducted research, consumers perceive the Apple brand as innovative and inspiring. Machado et al. (2014) focused on the relationship between “experiential marketing and brand advocacy” through brand loyalty, based on Apple consumers. Their study showed that Apple’s experiential marketing efforts affect brand loyalty among their users. Moreover, consumers displayed a higher tendency toward becoming brand advocates as the feeling of loyalty increased. Pinson and Brosdahl (2014) studied the three antecedent elements of Apple’s brand loyalty (brand identification, brand personality congruence and reputation) using the theoretical foundations of social identity. The results confirmed that Apple brand identity and brand personality congruence is positively related to Apple brand loyalty. In addition, Ranjbarian et al. (2013) argued that product involvement and brand congruity affect an emotional connection with the brand. Baxter et al. (2018) conducted an experiment and showed that the exposure to a specific brand

color as opposed to a generic color influenced brand personality perceptions. Furthermore, the authors suggested that personality connected to an iconic brand can be “created by brand managers, learned by consumers, and leveraged by other brands”. Namely, exposure to a recognized brand color, such as “Apple grey”, influences brand personality perception of an unknown brand.

Several authors explored consumer perception and brand ethical perception of purchase intentions (Tu et al., 2018; Javed et al., 2019). Javed et al. (2019) studied purchase intentions related to ethical perceptions of Chinese consumers and concluded that ethical perceptions of consumers, in fact, “translate into purchase intentions”, at both the corporate and the product brand level. In addition, even the country of origin may be related to purchase intention in some specific mobile phone markets (Yunus & Rashid, 2016). A quite unique study by Phillips-Melancon and Dalakas (2014) explored negative consequences of brand identification and found that brand identification with the Apple brand was positively related to “pleasure at the misfortune” (in German, Schadenfreude) towards a competing company.

### *2.2 Brand logo and exposure*

Biricik (2006) explored the role of logo design in creating brand emotion based on the semiotic theory and suggested that “a well-designed emotional logo becomes a visual shorthand for the meanings attached to it”. This emotional connection influences consumers to be receptive to the brand message and consequently build brand loyalty through positive brand attributes or associations. Some studies focus on logo recall and recognition related to the impact of brand exposure and brand perception. Iancu and Iancu (2017) argued that, contrary to the expectations, many user attributes such as gender, device ownership, and emotional attachment to the brand, are not significant variables for determining the level of Apple logo recall and recognition. Noble et al. (2013) explored logo related brand metaphors including the Apple logo. Their study analyzed the interactions of several applications of “brand metaphor (linguistic, visual, and symbolic)” and the forms those metaphors can take (“human, animal, or nonmetaphoric”) in affecting outcomes such as brand vividness, brand differentiation, and consumer preference.

### 2.3 Product perception and attitudes

Considering the complexity of brand perception, it is also important to explore and understand the different types and categories of digital devices as very specific products which create equally specific markets. One of the most competitive digital device markets is the smartphone market. Furthermore, modern wearable devices such as smartwatches may be perceived as both mono- and multifunctional, but also as a fashion product (Nieroda et al., 2018) and this idea may be applied to many other high-tech brand products.

A number of studies focused specifically on a single Apple product, a popular smartphone – iPhone. Tu et al. (2018) explored the “meaning and scope” of perceived value on the Taiwanese smartphone market. The authors suggested five key factors based on respondent experience with the device: “recognition, brand advantage, service quality, usage period and perceived price”. Interestingly enough, they continued to conclude that recognition and brand advantage are factors influencing purchase motivation, and perceived price is an influential factor in purchase intention. A similar conclusion can be drawn from a study conducted in Indonesia (Amron, 2018). The author argued that brand image, device design, device features, and price have a positive influence on purchasing intentions in the smartphone market, while the strongest influence related to the price variable. A similar study suggested that device price, features, brand name and social influence affect purchase intention of mobile devices among the university students in Bangladesh (Rakib, 2019). Furthermore, Ndadziyira (2017) explored the dimensions that influence mobile phone brand preferences among the students in South Africa and found that brand popularity, prices, product attributes, social influences, and marketing communications all affect brand preferences. A similar study showed that brand image, brand personality and brand awareness have a significant influence on consumer purchase intention of Apples’ smartphone (Wijaya, 2013).

In contrast to the previous studies, Bhalla and Jain (2018) argued that physical attributes and technical capabilities of the smartphone influence purchasing intention the most. Furthermore, Jacques (2013) explored the effect of brand equity on price premium of the Apples’ popular smartphone by using 5 dimensions: perceived quality, brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand association, and uniqueness. The author concluded that uniqueness influences the price premium the most, but brand loyalty has

no significant influence on the price premium. Kho et al. (2018) studied the relationship between the antecedent elements (features, brand, price, social influence and advertising) and purchase intention towards smartphones among young consumers. Based on the conducted study, the three elements that were found to be related to purchase intention are brand, social influence and advertising, while features and price were, in fact, not.

Wong et al. (2019) examined product consumption value and cognitive benefits related to retail services and their influence on brand commitment and the “switching behavior” of consumers in the smartphone market. Petruzzellis (2010) analyzed consumer behavior of mobile phone users in order to explore the consumption style and the motivation behind the purchase process through a number of dimensions. The author suggests that brand attitudes relate positively to consumer purchase intention of specific mobile phones. An interesting study focused on exploring the effect of vertical brand extensions on consumer perception of both luxury and functional brands of smartphones in the South African mobile phone market utilizing Apple as a luxury brand and Samsung as a functional brand. The same study also explored the effect of vertical brand extensions on four customer-brand relationship constructs: brand attachment, brand trust, brand commitment, and brand identification (Muroyiwa et al., 2017).

### 3. Methodology and findings

The primary goal of research was to investigate and explore the perception of Apple product consumers and non-consumers (or users and non-users) related to the Apple brand, brand loyalty, purchase intention, recommendation intention, and several other aspects. The research instrument was created for the purpose of this research and was partially based on several prior studies with different standpoints (Ndadziyira, 2017; Machado et al., 2014; Petruzzellis, 2010; Muroyiwa et al., 2017). An online questionnaire was constructed using the SurveyGizmo platform. The survey consists of 22 items and was carried out in August and September of 2019 after preliminary pilot testing and minor adjustments. The respondents were recruited using convenience sampling, utilizing social media platforms, and additional digital communication channels. An online survey with a total sample of 233 respondents from Croatia was conducted, out of which 184 responses were valid and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods,

while 49 responses were omitted from the analysis due to partial, missing, or otherwise unusable data.

This study focused on young and middle-aged segments, with the following distribution of age groups: 20 years and younger - 6.0%, 21-40 years - 70.7%, and 41 years and older - 23.4%. The age range of respondents is between 14 and 64 years, with the mean value  $\bar{x}=31.26$  ( $SD=11.74$ ). A large majority of respondents are female (70.1%) and the remaining 29.9% are male respondents. Exactly one half (50.0%) of respondents are employed, additional 41.8% are students, while 3.8% of respondents are unemployed. Almost the entire sample (98.4%) is based in continental Croatia (in nine different counties). These sample characteristics suggest several important research limitations which will be addressed later, in the separate section of the paper. Furthermore, two survey items were used to understand to what extent respondents are familiar with the recent ICT trends and how experienced they are in terms of ICT usage. Both items were recorded on a self-reporting 5-point scale. The majority of respondents (38.0%) perceive themselves as somewhat familiar, and additional 32.1% as very familiar, while 17.9% are slightly familiar with the recent ICT trends. The scale end-points (1 - not at all familiar and 5 - extremely familiar) recorded the same percentage (6%). On the other hand, 45.7% of respondents perceive themselves as very experienced and additional 22.3% as extremely experienced ICT users, while only 0.5% suggest that they are not experienced at all and 2.7% are slightly experienced.

### 3.1 Research results

At the beginning of the survey, respondents were asked to recall the first brand name that comes to their mind when thinking about high-quality smartphones and (separately) computers/laptops (i.e. the top-of-mind or first-mentioned brand name). Several respondents suggested more than one brand name but due to the nature and description of the survey item, only the first mentioned response was analyzed. The two most popular brand names in the smartphone category with the most frequently recorded first-mentioned answers were Apple and Samsung. Apple was recorded in 45.7% of responses (a combined percentage of the brand name and associated products such as iPhone), while Samsung stood at 40.8%, followed by Huawei at 9.8% and other brand names (3.8%). A more diverse number of brand names were recalled in the computer/laptop category. Apple was once again the most popular one (35.9%), followed by HP (18.5%), Lenovo (9.8%), Acer (9.2%), Dell (8.7%), and others. When

considering a purchase of a smartphone, computer or tablet, based on the respondent self-reporting item, it seems that the brand name is clearly important: over half of respondents (53.3%) rated it very important (item 4 on a 5-point scale) and additional 9.8% rated it as most important.

For further analysis, it is important to distinguish the three user segments regarding the ownership of Apple products: 38.6% are current users, 24.5% are former users (with previous usage experience) and the remaining 37.0% are non-users.

Among the current and former Apple product users, the most popular one in terms of current or prior device ownership was predominantly Apple's smartphone - iPhone (92.1%), followed by iPad (32.5%), Mac/MacBook (29.8%), AppleWatch (7.0%) and other devices (6.1%). The majority of users (43.0%) have used Apple products for over 4 years and 21.1% between 2 and 4 years, which suggests that almost two-thirds of users remain loyal to the brand even considering the competition on the given market. When rating the quality of the products used in comparison to the related price, users generally rate Apple products positively, i.e. 46.5% indicate very good quality and 29.8% excellent quality, while additional 14.0% suggest a moderate quality level (rated on a 5-point scale). In other words, over three-quarters of users perceive a product's quality as very good or excellent. Regarding the likelihood of Apple product recommendation, Apple devices recorded an NPS score of 16, suggesting a rather moderate position in comparison with the global ratings (Tim, 2018; Denning, 2011). Current and former users of Apple products were also asked to state their level of agreement with the following statement: I had a negative experience related to the Apple brand, which was resolved with a positive outcome. Interestingly enough, almost 40% of users did not agree with the statement (i.e. 20.2% strongly disagree and 19.3% disagree), and additional 39.5% had a neutral opinion (neither agree nor disagree). These opinions are generally in contrast with the previously described ones (generally positive perceptions), which might imply the existence of a still unexplored area and a possible guideline for future research.

Slightly over 40% of the total sample suggest that they will consider Apple products for their next purchase of a smartphone or a computer, while almost one third of respondents (32.1%) are sure they will not. However, only 17.4% say that they are willing to pay the "premium" price for a new Apple device compared to their competitors. This might



suggest several alternative purchasing options such as mobile plan subscriptions, the older generation, and second-hand devices. Over two-thirds of respondents (68.0%) think that Apple has a positive influence on their competitors (57.1 mostly positive and 10.9% totally positive), while there is a quarter of respondents (24.5%) with a neutral opinion (rated on a 5-point scale).

The sample segment of former users was asked to state their level of agreement with the following statement: I had a negative experience related to the Apple brand, which made me buy a competitor's product. Almost 40% of former users agree to some extent (i.e. 18.6% strongly agree and 20.9% agree) with the statement and additional 27.9% have a neutral viewpoint (neither agree nor disagree).

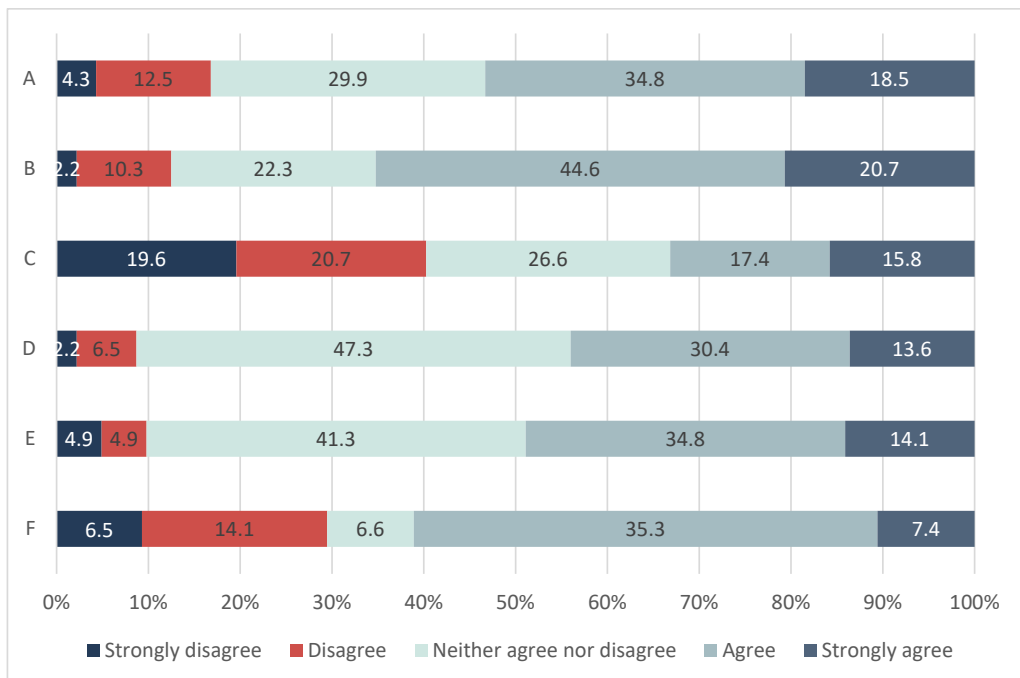
The total sample of respondents suggested the level of agreement with the following six statements:

- A: Apple is a market leader in most markets they are present in.
- B: Apple will have a positive impact on technology development in the future.

- C: I prefer most of Apple products compared to its competitors.
- D: The beliefs that the Apple brand strives to match their behavior.
- E: Apple treats their customers in a satisfactory manner.
- F: The attention of the Apple brand in the public is justified.

The respondents tend to agree with statements A, B, and F, i.e. over 50% of them agree with these statements to some extent (53.26%, 65.22%, and 52.72%, respectively). Respondents were generally undecided about statements D and E, with high percentages of those who neither agree nor disagree (47.3% and 41.3%, respectively), whereas only a minority of respondents expressed disagreement. Statement C recorded somewhat evenly distributed responses between the elements on a 5-point scale with a slightly larger percentage of those who disagree. A detailed overview is available in the following figure.

Figure 1 Level of agreement with the statements (the total sample)



Source: Authors' research

Interestingly enough, over two-thirds of respondents (68.0%) feel that the Apple brand has a positive influence on their competitors (57.1% mostly positive and additional 10.9% totally positive), while about a quarter of respondents (24.5%) suggest a neutral viewpoint. Based on several variables analyzed, the data suggest a generally positive perception of the Apple brand among the respondents.

In the next section, in order to explore possible differences between the two segments, the sample is split into two segments: Apple product users (comprised of current and former users) and non-users. In order to compare several variables between the segments, 5-point scale items were treated as scale measures while considering all the challenges implied by such an approach.

When asked to recall the top-of-mind brand name when thinking about high-quality smartphones, the user segment primarily mentioned Apple (61.2%) and then Samsung (28.4%), while non-users reported the opposite, i.e. Samsung as the most popular one (61.8%), followed by Apple (19.1%). The observed difference is statistically significant, tested with the chi-square test ( $\chi^2=30.738$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). When asked the same question regarding a high-quality computer/laptop, users predominantly recall the Apple brand (42.2%), followed by HP (17.2%), Acer (8.6%), Asus (8.6%), Dell (7.8%) and others. On the other hand, non-users again put Apple at the top (25.8%), but the distribution among other brands is more dispersed, i.e. HP (20.6%), Lenovo (16.2%), Acer (10.3%), Dell (10.3%) and others. The observed difference is statistically significant, tested with the chi-square test ( $\chi^2=14.040$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p=0.029$ ).

When considering a purchase of a smartphone, computer, or tablet, the brand name is clearly an important element for both users and non-users, even though the brand name is even more important for users than for non-users. Based on a 5-point scale, users recorded a higher mean value ( $x=3.2$ ,  $SD=0.90$ ) compared to non-users ( $x=3.43$ ,  $SD=0.74$ ). The observed difference is statistically significant, tested with the t-test ( $t=2.308$ ,  $df=182$ ,  $p=0.022$ ). More than half of users (56.0%) suggest that they will consider Apple products for their next purchase of a smartphone or a computer, as many as a quarter (25.0%) are sure they will not and the remaining 19.0% are not sure. In contrast, 44.4% of non-users will not

consider Apple products for their next purchase, 39.7% are not sure and only 6.2% will consider these products, which is generally in line with the segment description. The observed difference is statistically significant, tested with the chi-square test ( $\chi^2=28.300$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). However, both users and non-users perceive the influence of the Apple brand on its competitors as a positive one. The influence was measured on a 5-point scale ranging from totally negative (1) to totally positive (5). The difference in the mean scores of users and non-users tested with the t-test is not statistically significant ( $x=3.78$ ,  $SD=0.79$ , and  $x=3.60$ ,  $SD=0.69$  respectively).

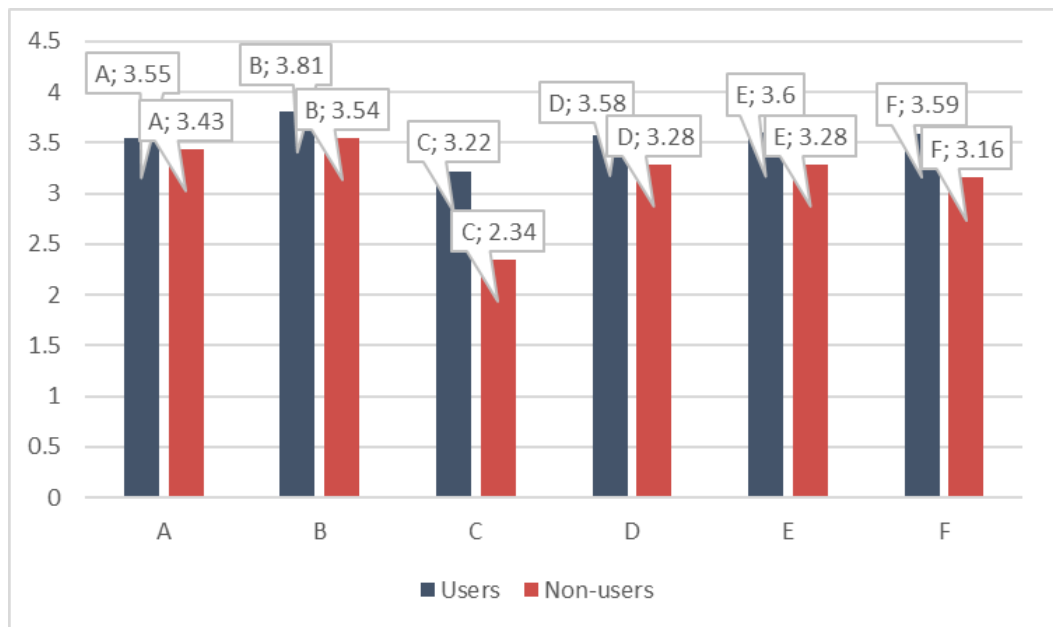
The levels of agreement with the aforementioned six statements (A to F) related to both users and non-users are illustrated in the next section (statements were measured on a 5-point scale). Both users and non-users tend to agree with statements A and B to the same extent as no statistical significance of the difference in their mean scores was recorded. As expected, the biggest difference in the level of agreement was recorded for statement C (I prefer most of Apple products compared to their competitors.). Users tend to agree with the statement ( $x=3.22$ ,  $SD=1.38$ ), while non-users do not ( $x=2.34$ ,  $SD=1.06$ ). The observed difference is statistically significant, tested with the t-test ( $t=4.831$ ,  $df=169.212$ ,  $p<0.001$ ; equal variances not assumed based on Levene's test).

Users and non-users suggested a similar viewpoint regarding the next 3 statements. Both segments tend to agree with statements D, E and F, but the level of agreement expressed by users is somewhat higher. The observed differences in the mean scores between users and non-users are statistically significant, tested with the t-test:

- D: users ( $x=3.58$ ,  $SD=0.98$ ); non-users ( $x=3.28$ ,  $SD=0.67$ );  $t=2.452$ ,  $df=177.694$ ,  $p=0.015$ , equal variances not assumed based on Levene's test;
- E: users ( $x=3.60$ ,  $SD=1.07$ ); non-users ( $x=3.28$ ,  $SD=0.71$ );  $t=2.466$ ,  $df=179.225$ ,  $p=0.015$ , equal variances not assumed based on Levene's test;
- F: users ( $x=3.59$ ,  $SD=1.18$ ); non-users ( $x=3.16$ ,  $SD=0.99$ );  $t=2.497$ ,  $df=182$ ,  $p=0.013$ .

A detailed overview is available in the following figure.

**Figure 2 Mean scores by the statements (users and non-users)**



Source: Authors' research

Finally, there are several significant differences between the user and non-user segments based on the collected data. Users primarily recall Apple as a top-of-mind (first-mention) high-quality smartphone brand, while non-users indicate Samsung. When considering a purchase of a smartphone, computer, or tablet, the brand name is suggested as an important element for both segments, but it is more important for users than for non-users. In addition, users are more likely to consider Apple products in their next purchase of a smartphone or a computer. Considering the level of agreement with the statements tested, both segments have a generally positive perception of the Apple brand, but a higher level was recorded among users. The biggest difference in the level of agreement was recorded for the statement referring to the preference of Apple products in comparison with their competitors.

### 3.2 Research limitations and future research guidelines

Research limitations predominantly relate to the sample size, distribution, and sampling techniques. Several sample characteristics such as age, sex, occupation status and location may have influenced

the potential level of generalization and should be taken into consideration in the process of drawing conclusions. Future research efforts devoted to this topic should include a more adequate sampling distribution regarding respondent gender, age, place of residence, and preferably other socio-demographic characteristics. The sample recruitment techniques used pose some risks regarding the collected data quality and other sampling options should be explored. Furthermore, self-reporting survey items should be reconsidered due to potential respondent subjectivity or bias. In addition, researchers may focus on a more diversified number of brands and products, expanding the target audience and/or exploring a specific brand element not only related to high-tech brands and products. A variety of brands and industries may serve as a starting point for comparison studies.

## 4. Conclusion

Apple Inc. is not just one of the leaders from a technological aspect, but one of the leaders from the aspects of communication, providing services and development of modern marketing. The com-



pany created one of the greatest brands in the ICT industry in terms of its revenue generated as well as its brand ranking. What is quite unique to Apple Inc. is the synergy between provided hardware and software, a specific ecosystem. Apple created an ecosystem of successful products with plenty of devices, software solutions, and accessories to make life easier; however, leaving the ecosystem might be somewhat harder. There are numerous scientific-based and professional reflections and interpretations of the Apple brand with various brand elements explored, tested, and analyzed. Brand perception and related opinions, as well as behavior, is a highly complex area subject to additional research, both on macro and micro levels.

The primary goal of conducted research was to investigate and explore the perception of Apple product consumers and non-consumers (or users and non-users) related to the Apple brand, brand loyalty, purchase intention, recommendation intention, and several other related aspects. Research results indicate that the Apple brand has a generally positive image among the respondents. Apple Inc. puts a lot of effort into brand awareness and recognition, as Apple users are generally loyal to the brand and willing to recommend Apple products to their friends and family. Most re-

spondents have used at least one Apple product, with the iPhone being predominantly the most popular one. Apple products tend to be quite expensive for most of the respondents, which implies several possible purchasing options such as mobile plan subscriptions, older generation devices, and second-hand devices. In contrast, non-consumers tend to recall different brand names when thinking about high-end smartphones but also suggest that the brand name is an important factor in the purchase decision-making process. However, non-consumers will generally not consider Apple products in their future purchases and tend to have a more neutral brand-related perception. In addition, users are more likely to consider Apple products in their next purchase of a smartphone or a computer. As to the level of agreement with the statements tested, both segments have a generally positive perception of the Apple brand, but as expected, a higher level was recorded among users. Collected data and related analysis provide some insight into consumer and non-consumer perception of the Apple brand and Apple products on the Croatian market accentuating the main consumer attitudes and brand perception. Future research efforts may focus on brand perception and related opinions of additional brands, products, markets and comparison studies.

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