Unveiling the Key Influencers in Smartphone Purchase Decisions

Nabin Kumar Rana

Abstract
In this study, the objective was to delve deep into the determinants that sway consumer’s smartphone purchasing choices in Butwal, Sub-Metropolitan City. Analyzing the role of societal influences, intrinsic product characteristics, and the perceived brand reputation, the study delineates the fundamental considerations guiding consumers in the selection of smartphones. In the rapidly expanding smartphone market of Butwal, Sub-Metropolitan City, understanding the consumer’s criteria for smartphone selection and the most prominent influencer in their decisions is of utmost importance. The research relied heavily on primary data, garnered from 385 smartphone users within Butwal, Sub-Metropolitan City, through a meticulously crafted questionnaire, leveraging a convenience sampling strategy. To pinpoint the critical factors affecting customer’s smartphone buying tendencies, a combination of descriptive analysis, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis were employed, thus facilitating a robust process of inference. In this investigative journey, the nuances of product features, societal influences, and brand perception stood as independent variables, critically analyzed for their bearing on smartphone purchasing decisions. Correlation studies manifested a strong linkage between the dependent variable - the consumer’s buying decision, and all the outlined independent variables. Furthermore, the regression analysis highlighted the profound influence of brand perception, product attributes, and societal factors on the consumer buying trajectory. This study not only paves the way for insightful managerial and academic discourse but also stands as a beacon for scholars seeking theoretical directions in this domain. Moreover, the findings encapsulated in this study could forge a path for the creation of adept marketing stratagems in the realm of smartphones.

Keywords: Brand Reputation, Buying Choice, Product Specifications, Digital Handset, Social Variables

I. Introduction
Navigating the complex labyrinth of consumer decision-making has become a progressively intricate endeavor in the modern marketplace. As articulated by Gogoi (2013), the propensity to purchase is nuanced, sculpted not only by internal elements such as personal beliefs and attitudes but also external inducements that punctuate the shopping journey. Elements like pricing strategies and the perceived value and quality of a product stand as potent determinants in steering
the likelihood of a purchase. Embarking upon a comprehensive analysis within the backdrop of Butwal, Sub-Metropolitan City Smartphone market, this study pledges to bring fresh insights into the convoluted consumer buying decisions. Anchoring the analysis is the famed Lim et al. (1975) model, which meticulously dissects the consumer’s journey into five pivotal steps: identifying a problem, gathering information, evaluating alternatives, culminating in the buying decision, and reflecting post-purchase – a pathway that sometimes mirrors the phenomena of impulsive buying. Echoing the sentiments of Kotler (2003) and Dodds (1991), the research acknowledges the profound impact of personal attitudes and unexpected events on purchasing intentions. Moreover, the six-pronged pathway to purchasing conceptualized by Kotler & Armstrong (2010), which covers stages from awareness to acquisition, further underscores the criticality of understanding purchase intentions in the grand scheme of consumer behavior. Zeithaml (1988) offers a nuanced approach to quantifying purchase likelihood, introducing terms that quantify varying degrees of purchase intentions. Set to pioneer a new dimension in consumer behavior analysis, this research is primed to introduce a novel model attuned to the unique characteristics of the Butwal, Sub-Metropolitan Cities market, scrutinizing the interplay between brand image, societal influences, and product characteristics in shaping Smartphone purchase decisions. Recognizing the intrinsic complexity embedded in consumer behavior, which often manifests as a puzzle for individuals and organizations alike, this study stands as a beacon in the ongoing quest to unravel the mysteries of consumer choices, especially pertaining to Smartphone acquisitions in Butwal, Sub-Metropolitan City. By synthesizing these scholarly insights, the study not only hopes to illuminate the theoretical canvas of consumer behavior but also furnish marketing professionals with the tools to craft astute and culturally resonant strategies in Butwal, Sub-Metropolitan City’s Smartphone sector, echoing the emphasis on behavioral consistency highlighted by Warsaw & Davis (1985) and the significance of purchase intention noted by Kotler & Armstrong (2010).

II. Literature Review

Brand Image

In recent research endeavors, significant attention has been given to unraveling the intricate ties between brand image and consumer purchase decisions in the Smartphone sector. Nguyen et al. (2020) embarked on a significant study in Hochiminh City, unearthing the profound influences of brand imagery, personal lifestyles, and personalities on buying decisions concerning Smartphones. Parallelly, Yusuf (2021) undertook an analysis in South Tangerang City, confirming the potent role of brand imagery and product innovation in steering Smartphone purchase decisions. Dolich (1969) articulated that brand image is a cardinal factor that not only fosters positive brand attitudes and increased product involvement but also directly amplifies purchase intentions within the Smartphone domain. Reinforcing this notion, Biel (1992) highlighted the propensity of individuals to gravitate towards products endowed with a robust brand image, hence fostering a favorable cycle of consumer buying behavior and bolstering brand equity. Diving deeper into the concept of brand image, it emerges as a mental depiction an individual harbors regarding a product, encompassing all associations and beliefs linked with the brand in question (Aaker,
1991; Kotler, 1988). Despite its non-material nature, a brand’s image, as noted by Kotler (2003) manages to wield a significant influence, facilitating strong connections between consumers and the brand (Keller, 2003), and significantly swaying purchasing decisions (Dolich, 1969). Johnson and Puto (1987) further underscored the monumental impact of brand image on crafting brand equity, thereby shaping consumer buying patterns.

In the continuous quest to decode the complex relationship between brand image and purchase intentions, numerous studies have exhibited a consistent narrative. Rizwan et al. (2012) pinpointed a robust correlation between these two facets, a sentiment echoed by Shah et al. (2012) and substantiated by Tariq et al. (2013), all highlighting the significant linkage between brand image and the likelihood of making a purchase. Furthermore, studies by Wu (2007) and Srinivasan & Till (2002) have accentuated the pivotal role of every facet of brand image in enhancing purchase intentions, establishing it as a vital asset that helps associate quality and specific knowledge constructs with the brand. Additional corroborations come from Lay et al. (2013) and Wollenberg & Thuong (2014), who affirmed the paramount significance of brand image in dictating consumer behaviors concerning mobile phones.

H1: Brand image has a significant favorable influence on consumer purchase decisions in Smartphone buying.

Product Features

In recent investigations into the determinants guiding Smartphone acquisition and repeat purchase decisions, Fauzi and Ali (2021) identified a substantial positive influence of pricing and product quality on these choices. Recognizing that factors such as screen dimension, display quality, ease of transportation, and robust user interfaces significantly captivate the youth demographic, the necessity of integrated features like Bluetooth and stable internet connectivity in mobile phones cannot be overlooked. This accentuates the critical role of features, which encompass both hardware and software attributes in fulfilling consumer desires through functionality and utilization, as delineated by Lay-Yee et al. (2013). The physical aspects, including the form, mass, and external aesthetics, encapsulate the hardware of a Smartphone. Concurrently, the software encompasses various facets including operational platforms and memory capacities which fuel the device’s functionalities. Sujata et al. (2016) in their research underscored the profound influence of attributes like hardware specs and technological advancements on the purchasing decisions of young academic cohorts, considering diverse parameters such as image technology and economic factors. In parallel, Guleria and Parmar (2015) sought to unravel the elements that mold consumer preferences in the usage of Smartphones. Their findings underscored a dominant influence of processing velocity and user-friendliness, followed by technological necessities and app features. Similarly, Uddin et al. (2014) explored the multifaceted aspects that steer customer choices in mobile phone acquisitions, highlighting the significance of physical attributes alongside functionalities like camera quality and Bluetooth connectivity. Their analysis delineated five critical factors including cost-effectiveness, compatibility, security measures, societal impacts, and user advancements, which notably dictate Smartphone purchase intentions.
Further echoing this sentiment, Mokhlis and Yadi (2012) spotlighted the pivotal role of Smartphone features in directing consumer choices, emphasizing the weightage given to attributes like aesthetics and functional capabilities during the purchasing process. Delving into the academic community’s purchasing tendencies, Rahim et al. (2016) investigated the interrelations between brand perception, social impacts, and product concessions in influencing Smartphone acquisition intentions among Malaysian students. Meanwhile, Ayodele et al. (2016) illustrated the heightened inclination of young individuals in Nigeria’s Anambra State towards aesthetic appeal and functionality in Smartphone selection, a notion corroborated by Russell (2012) who quantified a higher preference for software (33%) over hardware (17.6%) attributes in Smartphone purchases.

H2: Product features significantly impact consumer purchase decisions in Smartphone buying.

Social Factors

Santosa (2021) investigated the role of cultural, social, and personal elements in influencing buying decisions, identifying a notable impact of cultural aspects, but not personal and social elements, on purchase choices. Meanwhile, Wong (2019) discerned a vital connection between brand awareness and buying intentions in Hong Kong’s Smartphone market, alongside the role of social influences, albeit price wasn’t a critical determinant. Drawing on advice and viewpoints from reference groups, inclusive of family and friends, consumers shape their brand preferences, a concept emphasized by Kotler & Armstrong (2010). This social influence is rooted in the diverse perspectives brought forth by these groups, including individuals with expertise in certain domains. Studies highlight the profound impact of family on the choice of high-end products (Farzana, 2012), with 35.6% of a Malaysian sample indicating community trends as a key factor in Smartphone purchases (Osman, 2012). Further research demonstrates a direct link between social influences and Smartphone usage amongst students, with celebrities holding a higher sway compared to parents (De Run et al., 2010; Ding et al., 2011; Suki & Suki, 2013). The digital era, marked by platforms like Facebook and Twitter, facilitates the exchange of user reviews and feedback on Smartphones, significantly influencing consumer decisions (Anam, 2014; Ibrahim et al., 2014; Lim et al., 2012). Adding to this narrative, Armstrong & Kotler (2007) underscore the potential of social factors to mold consumer behavior, with individuals often seeking testimonials from acquaintances before settling on a Smartphone choice. Echoing the findings of a study by Osman (2012), a notable percentage of respondents favored community trends in their buying decisions. These preferences are often shaped through consultations with close circles including friends and family, as stated by Perreau (2014).

Kotler & Armstrong (2010) note that consumers frequently align their choices with the preferences of their reference groups, which comprise family and peers. These groups play a pivotal role in forming an individual’s beliefs and identity, a theory supported by Hair et al. (2007). Moreover, distinct brands resonate differently with various reference groups, as pointed out by Chaipornmetta (2010) and Sakpichaisakul (2012), thereby influencing consumer attitudes and behaviors in the dynamic market landscape.
H3: Social factors significantly impact consumer purchase decisions in Smartphone buying.
In this investigation, the independent variables identified are brand image, product characteristics, and social factors, while the dependent variable is the influence these elements wield on customer buying choices. To orchestrate the study in a structured manner, a conceptual framework has been formulated, grounded in the analysis of the existing literature pertaining to purchasing decisions.

III. Research Methods
The research methodology delineates the utilized research design type, detailing the population and sample alongside the sampling method and data origins, encompassing data acquisition protocols and analytical tools to unearth the correlation between purchasing choices and their influences. This analysis adopts a deductive stance grounded in an objectivist ontological structure complemented by a positivist epistemology, utilizing both descriptive and causal research designs.

Within the confines of Butwal, Sub-Metropolitan City, the study scrutinizes the determinants influencing Smartphone purchase selections, encapsulating brand perception, product attributes, and societal influences. The research focuses on the resident Butwal, Sub-Metropolitan City populace as its sample frame, with the precise sample size being determined through a proficient sampling technique. Primary sources served as the data repository for this investigation, procuring pertinent data on retention factors through a structured questionnaire format. The questionnaire employed a six-point Likert scale to obtain core data, ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement, represented numerically from 1 to 6. A total of 385 individuals participated in the study.

To delineate the stances of various factors, descriptive statistics were employed, supplemented by correlation analysis to delve into the relationships between the influencing elements and purchasing decisions. Regression analysis further facilitated the examination of the extent to which these factors influence consumer buying choices. The structured questionnaires catered to gathering insights on brand image, product characteristics, societal influences, and buying decisions.

Conceptual Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Product Features</td>
<td>Purchase Decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Image</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Factors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure: Conceptual Framework
Data Reliability
To gauge the stability of the study, a Cronbach’s alpha analysis was undertaken, aligning with the guideline proposed by Hair et al. (2006) which stipulates that a Cronbach’s alpha value exceeding 0.7 denotes satisfactory reliability. As delineated in Table 1, the outcomes of this particular analysis affirm that the alpha values for all evaluated components surpass the 0.7 threshold. Consequently, this validates the reliability and accuracy of the 16 incorporated items in assessing reliability.

Table 1
Reliability Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latent variables</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand Image</td>
<td>0.785</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product Features</td>
<td>0.765</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social factors</td>
<td>0.788</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase decision</td>
<td>0.858</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IV. Results
In this portion, the gathered data is illustrated and scrutinized. Various analytical methods such as descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis were implemented. Table 2 elucidates the attributes and the interconnection between the dependent and independent variables.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Insights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>BI</th>
<th>PF</th>
<th>SF</th>
<th>PD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BI</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.410**</td>
<td>.489**</td>
<td>.565**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PF</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SF</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.489**</td>
<td>.325**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.565**</td>
<td>.515**</td>
<td>.565**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2tailed)
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

In this research, the behavioral intention scale functioned as a metric to rate various factors, indicating strong agreement with a score of 1, neutrality with a score of 3, and strong disagreement with a score of 5. According to the descriptive statistics delineated in Table 2, several elements influence consumer choices when purchasing smartphones in Butwal, Sub-Metropolitan City. The analytical outcomes illustrated mean scores exceeding the neutral benchmark of 3 for variables like customer purchasing choices (3.80), brand perception (4.28), product characteristics (3.88), and societal influences (4.65), implying a predominant tendency towards agreement or strong agreement with the factors impacting smartphone purchases. The dataset showcased uniform and minute standard deviations varying between 0.65 and 0.88, suggesting the data’s substantial relevance for prospective analyses. Consequently, it can be inferred that the Butwal, Sub-
Metropolitan Cities clientele acknowledges the significant influence of societal aspects, product characteristics, and brand imagery on their smartphone purchasing decisions. Further, Table 2 encapsulates the correlation matrix, indicating a positive correlation between brand imagery and consumer buying choices for smartphones ($r=0.565$, $p<0.05$), between product attributes and buying decisions ($r=0.515$, $p<0.05$), and between societal factors and purchase resolutions ($r=0.565$, $p<0.05$). The cohesive and minor standard deviations, ranging from 0.65 to 0.88, underline the significant role of data variability in achieving the research goals. Thus, it stands confirmed that societal aspects, product characteristics, and brand imagery hold substantial sway over the smartphone purchasing decisions of consumers in the Butwal, Sub-Metropolitan City market.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constants</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>.250</td>
<td>6.56</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BI</td>
<td>.220</td>
<td>.135</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PF</td>
<td>.250</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>3.164</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SF</td>
<td>.280</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td>3.589</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R^2 = 0.554$ $F (3,390) = 92.151$, $p < 0.05$

In this investigation, $R^2$ is utilized as a barometer, gauging the proportion of variability in Smartphone acquisition decisions that can be attributed to the independent factors: brand image, product attributes, and societal influences. Remarkably, these factors are responsible for a significant 55.4% share of the fluctuations observed in the decisions concerning Smartphone purchases, leaving a gap of 44.6% to be illuminated by other potential influences. The data set snugly aligns with the predictive model, as evidenced by a substantial F-statistic value ($F (3, 381) = 85.141$) and a p-value below 0.05.

Delving into Table 3, a multifaceted regression analysis unfolds the considerable sway held by brand image on the Smartphone buying inclinations of the Butwal, Sub-Metropolitan City populace, underscored by a $\beta_1$ value of 0.220 and a p-value below 0.05, thereby giving credence to the first hypothesis (H1). In a similar vein, product attributes emerge as potent influencers on the Smartphone purchasing preferences in Butwal, Sub-Metropolitan City, marked by a $\beta_2$ coefficient of 0.250 and a p-value less than 0.05, consequently upholding the second hypothesis (H2). Moreover, at a 5% significance threshold, societal factors ($\beta_3 = 0.280$, $p <0.05$) notably shape the Smartphone buying decisions in Butwal, Sub-Metropolitan City, leading to an affirmative nod to the third hypothesis (H3), as corroborated by the results of this study.
V. Discussion
The investigation casts a spotlight on the nuanced dynamics between societal influences, brand recognition, and product specifications in steering Butwal, Sub-Metropolitan City consumers’ preferences, particularly in the realm of smartphone acquisitions. It underscores the cardinal role that a brand’s stature holds in shaping the purchasing preferences, a viewpoint corroborated by earlier studies by Dolich (1969) and Rizwana et al. (2012), thereby validating the first hypothesis (H1) concerning the consumers’ inclination to weigh the brand’s reputation heavily during their smartphone selection process. Furthermore, it has been discerned that the attributes of a product hold significant sway in determining consumer choices in Butwal, Sub-Metropolitan City’s smartphone market, a standpoint that aligns with the second hypothesis (H2). This notion finds backing in the scholarly contributions of Guleria (2015) and Sujata et al. (2016), who underscored the pivotal role product characteristics play in modulating consumer tendencies.

In addition, the influence of social factors emerges as a potent force driving the smartphone purchasing choices, echoing the insights gained from the works of Farzana (2012) and Ding et al. (2011). These studies underlined the pronounced influence exerted by reference circles, encompassing friends and family, in guiding smartphone acquisitions, thereby offering a solid foundation to uphold the third hypothesis (H3).

VI. Conclusion
In light of the correlation analysis findings, a notable link emerges between buying choices and core variables including brand perception, the attributes of the product, and societal influences. The subsequent regression analysis further delineates how brand identity, intrinsic product features, and external social dynamics considerably shape the cellphone buying tendencies in Butwal, Sub-Metropolitan City. Hence, it stands affirmed that in the Butwal, Sub-Metropolitan City marketplace, choices pertaining to smartphone acquisitions are critically steered by the interplay of the perceived brand prestige, the functionalities of the product, and the guidance from close-knit community groups - thereby substantiating the widely accepted theory regarding the pivotal role these facets hold in guiding consumer purchase trajectories.

VII. Implications
This research is significant both in academic discussions and practical managerial applications, offering potential avenues of fresh theoretical exploration regarding the determinants affecting smartphone buying decisions. It distinctly highlights that the decision to purchase a smartphone is heavily swayed by the brand’s image, the features it offers, and the prevailing societal influences. These revelations are not just academically enriching but can serve as a powerful tool for marketing professionals to sculpt effective strategies, giving them an edge in a fiercely competitive market. Consequently, the insights gained can aid in the meticulous crafting of marketing mix strategies, potentially spearheading an increase in sales figures in the cutthroat environment of the smartphone industry. By shedding light on the factors influencing consumer choices, the study can facilitate businesses in honing their approaches to align with consumer preferences. It suggests an imperative for companies to foster innovation and adapt varied marketing tactics to broaden their sales horizon, considering the diverse and expanding brand preferences of consumers.
Moreover, by emphasizing the need to focus on societal factors, product characteristics, and brand image, it encourages companies to refine strategies to enhance consumer engagement and purchase propensity. The findings serve as a robust foundation for future research, aiming to delve deeper into understanding consumer purchasing patterns and fostering strategies that can elevate sales by understanding the nuances impacting consumer buying behavior, thereby serving as a springboard for more extensive future research in this realm.
Reference


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