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Abstract

Understanding Buying Behavior among the Smartphone Users in Nepal

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Smartphones have seamlessly integrated into daily life for the people of Nepal, making their importance undeniable. However, the country's reliance on imports for smartphone consumption underscores the need to understand user preferences better. This paper investigates the buying behavior of smartphone users in Nepal, based on a sample of 235 randomly selected individuals from Banepa Municipality. Utilizing a five-point Likert scale, we collected valuable insights from the participants. The results reveal that user behavior is significantly influenced by reviews and recommendations, along with the specific features of smartphones. Conversely, product, price, place (distribution), and promotion attributes appear to have little effect on purchase decisions. Ultimately, when it comes to smartphones, features are paramount. Therefore, effective marketing strategies should emphasize key aspects such as speed, performance, battery life, camera capabilities, aesthetic design, and exchange options to attract Nepalese users.

SMARTPHONE CONSUMPTION IN Nepal has seen significant growth over the past decade, driven by increasing internet penetration, the availability of affordable smartphones, and the rise of digital services. With the expansion of 4G networks and more affordable data plans, internet usage has surged, making smartphones a necessity for staying connected. The data from the Department of Customs of Nepal shows that more than 990 thousand sets of smartphones are seen imported from different nations during the first five months of fiscal year

Keywords

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Communication is a crucial aspect of corporate life, with cell phones becoming a reliable and effective means of communication (Uddin et al., 2014). Smartphones are a rapidly growing form of communication, offering instant connections and information access (Chan, 2015). Mobile culture is influenced by three key trends: communication services like voice, text, and pictures, wireless internet services like browsing, corporate access, and email, and various media services like movies, games, and music (Hansen, 2003). Smartphones provide numerous benefits to society, such as immediate calls, SMS, work scheduling, GPS, internet access, entertainment, application downloads, data storage, and even legal assistance (Ling et al., 2001). Most people worldwide have widely adopted smartphones, making them indispensable to their everyday lives. Joshi and Mathur (2023) revealed that product features, affordability, brand reputation, convenience, and trust all influence the smartphone industry. Vishesh et al. (2018) indicated that speed and performance, brand and advertising, and finally recommendations and reviews had the greatest beneficial effects on determining the buying behavior of smartphones.

In context to Nepal, Humagai (2022) revealed that variables like, promotional campaign, price, after-sales service, mobile attributes, brand name, family and friend influenced influence on the buying behavior of smart phones among the Nepalese consumers. Similarly, the paper also found no significant relationship between gender, occupation, income level, and marital status, but a significant relationship between education level and age for mobile purchase decisions. Similarly, Tiwari (2024) on consumer buying smartphones in Butwal City, the study found a positive correlation between formativeness, creditability, entertainment, and incentives in advertising, that increased purchase intention, while credible advertisements and entertaining ones led to increased intention. More research is needed on the factors influencing smartphone purchasing decisions in Nepal. Hence, this study tries to find out the factors affecting consumer buying behavior for smart phones in Nepal.

Review of Literature

Theoretical Review

Buying Behavior

Marketing identifies and satisfies the needs of target customers. Marketers must understand how customers select, buy, use and dispose of products. They must know the behavior of their customers.

Human behavior is a very complex process. No two customers always behave in the same way. Marketers must understand why customers behave as they do. Buyer behavior influences customer's willingness to buy. Buyer behavior is concerned with the activities of customers. It involves decisions by buyers. They can be consumers or organizations (Agrawal, 2016).

Consumer Buying Behavior

A marketer is always interested in knowing how consumers respond to various marketing stimuli-products, price, place and promotion and another stimulus, i.e. buyer's environment-

economic, technological, political and cultural. The marketer studies the relationship between marketing stimuli and consumer response. These stimuli pass through the buyer's box which produces the buyers' responses.

Consumer buying behavior refers to the decision-making processes and actions of consumers when they purchase goods or services. Understanding this behavior is essential for businesses to align their products, marketing strategies, and customer engagement effectively. The buyer is considered a black box, because his mind cannot be imagined, as to his buying decision. The buying decision depends on his attitude, preferences, findings, etc. (Pillai et al., 2012). Modern consumer behavior is shaped by several key trends, with digital influence playing a pivotal role. Wahdiniawati et al. (2024) found that perceived usefulness, particularly timesaving, significantly influences both interest and trust. Trust mediates the relationship between perceived usefulness and interest, highlighting the complexity of factors influencing online shopping behavior. The study suggests enhancing perceived usefulness and trust through improved service quality, customer engagement, and transparency in return policies. Additionally, sustainability has become a major driver of consumer preferences. At the same time, Baviskar et al. (2024) examined consumer behavior toward sustainable product choices, focusing on visual trends and environmental impact awareness. Despite a preference for sustainable products, non-reusable plastics remain popular. The findings highlighted the need for education and practical measures to promote sustainable choices. Casaca and Miguel (2024) revealed that personalization is transforming modern marketing strategies, enhancing customer satisfaction, engagement, retention, and trust, thereby reshaping business connections with customers.

Empirical Review

Boby Joseph and Khannal (2011) studied Nepali teenagers' buying behavior towards mobile phones, comparing urban, semirural, and rural areas. The study concluded that factors such as brand choice, information source, decision-making factors, financial sources, and product satisfaction levels influenced the buying behavior of smartphones.

Mini (2019) revealed that changing consumer buying preferences and resulting changes in smartphone behavior are influencing middle-aged consumers' preference for internet browsing as the most popular feature in smartphones, with advertisements playing a significant role in this decision.

Maliha et al. (2020) found that regulatory focus influences consumer behavior in purchasing smartphones, controlling perception, rationale, and lifestyle. Quality of a product is the most important factor, followed by price, brand and product uniqueness, camera function, and operating system. Sales promotions are less important for those interested in trying different brands of mobile devices.

Fulzele and Chirde (2022) revealed that some people are influenced to buy smartphones from the advice of their relatives or friends or by seeing many offers/discounts and least people are influenced by advertisements.

Rai et al. (2023) conducted a study on smartphone purchasing behavior, focusing on device qualities, social factors, pricing, and brand image. The results showed that product

pricing, social variables, and brand image significantly influence consumer behavior, while product attributes did not significantly impact consumer behavior. The study highlights the importance of understanding these factors in smartphone purchasing decisions.

Boutaleb (2024) in his study on smartphone buying in Arar province, Saudi Arabia, found that personal, external, and gender characteristics account for 41.7 percent of the variance in purchasing decisions. These variables, along with gender, significantly influence smartphone purchasing behavior. Personal characteristics have a stronger influence on the decision to buy a smartphone.

Methodology

The paper concerns the consumer buying behavior for smartphones. Hence, the paper has taken opinions from the potential consumers of smartphones. To obtain the research objectives, the paper follows a descriptive as well as a casual comparative research design. About 15,000 people own a smartphone at Banepa Municipality as per the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) as of the year end of 2021. Among them 235 smartphone users and consumers were selected randomly from Banepa Municipality as a sample for the paper. A convenience sampling technique is followed in the paper. The required data for the paper was collected through field visit. Potential respondents were reached to get their opinions.

The paper has used the questionnaire used in the paper of Vishesh et al. (2018). The constructs used in the paper of Vishesh et al. (2018) have been followed to develop the questionnaire for the study. A five-points Likert scale is used to measure the buying behavior of the Nepalese smartphones' consumers in Nepal. A scale of '1' to '5' was used to measure the buying behavior of smartphone users where '1' is indicated for 'least important' and '5' for 'most important'. Correlation coefficient is a statistical measure that describes the strength and direction of a relationship between two variables.

The paper has adopted Cronbach's alpha to determine the reliability of the instrument used for the survey. Hence, the following outcome was seen after the reliability test:

Table 1

Reliability Result

Constructs	Initial Items	Items Dropped	Alpha Value
Reviews and Recommendations	4	2	0.342
Marketing Attributes+	18	10	0.732
Features*	16	12	0.778
Buyer's Behavior	6	4	0.546

Note. *Features include features 1: Speed and Performance, Features 2: Battery, Features 3: Camera, Features 4: Design and Color, and Features 5: Exchange Possibility. +A new construct, namely, marketing attributes is developed to enhance the reliability by adjoining price advantage, physical dimension, brand and advertisement, and finally availability.

Table 1 shows the construct ‘reviews and recommendations;’ and is seen as unacceptable, the alpha values are seen quite below the threshold of 0.7.

Results and Discussion

This section covers the analysis of the data collected from the respondents and a discussion of the results.

Respondents’ Profile

The table below illustrates the summary of the respondents’ profile:

Table 2

Respondents’ Profile

Sex	Responses	Age Group	Responses	Education	Responses	Occupation	Responses
Male	117 (50.0)	Below 20	9 (3.8)	Illiterate	19 (8.0)	Self-employed	52 (22.0)
Female	118 (50.0)	21-30	99 (42.1)	SEE	19 (8.0)	Teacher	9 (4.0)
		31-40	80 (34.0)	SLC	61 (26.0)	Students	103 (44.0)
		41 and above	47 (20.0)	Bachelor	71 (30.0)	Business	19 (8.0)
				Master	61 (26.0)	Housewife	5 (2.0)
				PhD	4 (2.0)	Government Job	14 (6.0)
						Intern	14 (6.0)
						Agriculture	5 (2.0)
						Army	5 (2.0)
						Unemployed	5 (2.0)
						Retired	5 (2.0)
Total							235

Note. Field Survey, 2024.

An equal number of both genders are seen within respondents. The predominance of younger age groups and students suggests a study that may cater to or reflect the preferences of a younger demographics. The majority have formal education beyond secondary school, which may influence their perspectives and preferences. A mix of occupational backgrounds provides a broad understanding of societal perspectives, but the study is dominated by students and self-employed individuals.

Opinions on Reviews and Recommendations

The table below illustrates the opinion on the reviews and recommendations while buying smartphones:

Table 3*Opinions on Reviews and Recommendations*

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness
The recommendations of my friends/relatives for any phone makes me favorably disposed towards buying that phone.	3.91	0.98	-0.51
The review ratings given for any phone model affect my purchase decision.	3.72	1.04	-0.21
Overall Average	3.82		

Note. Field Survey, 2024.

Table 3 shows that consumers generally agree the recommendations from their social circle significantly in their buying decisions. Review ratings also play an important role in purchase decisions, though slightly less than personal recommendations. The overall mean of 3.82 suggests that both personal recommendations and review ratings are influential factors, with recommendations carrying slightly more weight. Both opinions are negatively skewed.

Opinions on Marketing Attributes

The table below illustrates the opinion on the marketing attributes, i.e. price advantage, physical dimension, brand and advertisement, and availability while buying smartphones:

Table 4*Opinions on Marketing Attributes*

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness
Price Advantages			
Free Internet data bundled with a new phone purchase will influence my buying decision favorably towards that phone.	3.45	0.94	+0.28
While choosing to buy on a phone, the availability of a flexible price plan (interest free EMIs etc.) affects my choice.	3.00	0.90	+0.68
Average Price Advantages (A)	3.22		
Physical Dimension			
The thickness of the phone doesn't matter to me when making a buying decision.	3.55	1.11	-0.03
I would prefer to buy a large-screen phone, where I can see the pictures and videos clearly.	3.47	1.10	+0.04
Average for Physical Dimension (B)	3.51		
Brand and Advertisement			
The popularity of the brand is an important factor for me when deciding to purchase a mobile phone.	3.79	1.04	-0.44
More often I see the Ads of a particular brand/phone, more favorably I am predisposed towards that brand/phone.	3.61	1.01	-0.11
Average for Brand and Advertisement (C)	3.70		
Availability			
I would prefer to buy a phone from a store that sells multiple brands so that I can make a choice between them (Multi Brand Outlets: MBO).	3.86	0.99	-0.20
If a particular brand's service center is close to me, it influences my buying decision favorably towards that phone.	3.86	1.06	-0.34
Average for Availability (D)	3.86		
Overall Average (A+B+C+D/4)	3.57		

Note. Field Survey, 2024.

Table 4 shows that an overall average of 3.57 points for marketing factors indicate a moderate level of agreement across all factors, with availability having the highest impact and price advantages the lowest. Price advantages moderately influence purchasing decisions, with slightly more importance given to flexible payment plans. Physical dimensions like screen size and thickness are relatively important, but opinions are diverse. The popularity of the brand and advertisement frequency significantly affect consumer behavior, with branding being slightly more influential. Availability factors, such as multi-brand outlets and proximity of service centers, are the most influential in purchasing decisions. In general, respondents value convenience (availability) and brand reputation over price considerations. Preferences are diverse, particularly regarding physical dimensions, which may depend on individual user needs. Advertisement effectiveness and brand popularity are critical for influencing consumer attitudes but rank slightly below availability.

Opinions on Features

The opinions on features are summated opinions on speed, battery, camera performance, design and color, and finally exchange possibilities. The table below illustrates the opinions on features on smartphones:

Table 5

Opinions on Features

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness
I would prefer a phone, which gets me better pictures clicked.	3.90	1.04	-0.30
I would prefer a phone that will not hang while performing multiple operations.	3.85	1.04	-0.37
Fast battery charging capability in a phone influences my buying decision towards that phone.	3.77	1.07	-0.24
Availability of an attractive exchange offer for my old phone while purchasing a new mobile phone influences my buying decision favorably towards that phone.	3.53	1.06	0.01
Overall Average	3.76		

Note. Field Survey, 2024.

Table 5 indicates a strong agreement that consumers prioritize a phone with better picture quality. Consumers strongly value a phone's ability to handle multiple operations without lagging. The fast charging capability is an important factor, though slightly less than picture quality or multitasking. A moderate preference for exchange offers, making it the least influential among these factors. The overall mean of 3.76 indicates that technical features (picture quality, multitasking, fast charging) significantly influence purchase decisions, while promotional aspects like exchange offers are somewhat less impactful. One of the opinions, skewness is 0.01, being close to zero, shows a symmetrical distribution of responses.

Opinions on Buyer's Behavior

The table below illustrates opinions on the buyer's behavior of smartphones among Nepalese customers:

Table 6*Opinions on Buyer's Behavior*

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness
I got better convenience value.	3.91	1.06	-0.42
I achieved emotional value.	3.52	1.08	0.08
Overall Average	3.71		

Note. Field Survey, 2024.

Table 6 shows a strong agreement that consumers feel they derive convenience value from their purchasing decisions. Similarly, another opinion indicates a moderate level of agreement that purchases provide emotional value, though it is less influential compared to convenience. The overall mean of 3.71 suggests that convenience value plays a stronger role than emotional value in influencing consumer behavior. One of the skewness values, i.e. 0.08, reflects a nearly symmetrical distribution of responses.

The matrix below illustrates the correlation coefficients among the selected variables for the paper.

Table 7*Correlation Matrix*

Constructs	Review and Recommendations	Features	Marketing Attributes	Buyer's Behavior
Review and Recommendations	1			
Features	+0.515** (0.000)	1		
Marketing Attributes	+0.366** (0.000)	+0.465** (0.000)	1	
Buyer's Behavior	+0.432** (0.000)	+0.491** (0.000)	+0.123 (0.060)	1

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 7 represents the correlation matrix for constructs related to buyer's behavior, review and recommendations, features, and marketing attributes.

‘Review and recommendations’ are seen having a positive correlation with features (+0.515**) and marketing factors (+0.366**). A moderate positive relationship with buyer's behavior (+0.432**), indicating that reviews and recommendations significantly influence buyer's decisions.

Features: have a strong positive correlation with ‘review and recommendations’ (+0.515**) and buyer's behavior (+0.491**). A moderate positive relationship with marketing attributes (+0.465**), suggesting that features of a product are influenced by marketing strategies.

Marketing attributes have a significant correlation with features (+0.465**) and ‘review and recommendations’ (+0.366**). There is a weak and non-significant correlation with buyer's behavior (+0.123, $p = 0.060$), indicating that while marketing factors are important, their direct

impact on buyer behavior might be less pronounced.

Buyer's behavior has the strongest correlation with features (+0.491**) and 'review and recommendations' (+0.432**). Similarly, there is a weak correlation with marketing attributes (+0.123, $p = 0.060$), showing that buyers prioritize product features and reviews over marketing efforts.

Features and 'reviews and recommendations' are the most critical factors influencing buyer behavior. Marketing attributes have limited direct influence on buyer behavior but are moderately connected to features and reviews, indirectly affecting decision-making. Strategies focusing on improving product features and leveraging positive reviews and recommendations may yield better consumer responses than purely increasing marketing efforts.

Summary of Regression Analysis

As Table 1 shows low reliability for the 'reviews and recommendations' factors, the respective variable is dropped from further analysis. The summary of the regression results has been illustrated below:

Table 8

Summary of Regression Analysis

Model	Beta	T-statistics	p-value	VIF
(Constant)	2.426	5.916	0.000	
Marketing Attributes	-0.267	-2.090	0.038	1.275
Features	+0.596	8.637	0.000	1.275
R-Square	0.255			
F-Statistics	39.65			
	(0.000)			
DW Statistics	1.863			

Note. Predictors: Marketing attributes, features; Dependent variable: Buyer's behavior.

R-Square (0.255) indicates that 25.5% of the variance in smartphone buying behavior is explained by the independent variables. Similarly, adjusted R-Square (0.248) showing a slightly lower but still meaningful explanatory power. F-Statistics (39.65, $p < 0.001$) indicates that the overall model is statistically significant.

The coefficient (-0.267) suggests that an increase in marketing attributes decreases the dependent variable by 0.267 units, holding other variables constant. The T-statistics (-2.090) indicates the significance of this variable, with a p-value of 0.038 (< 0.05), confirming that the effect is statistically significant. Similarly, the coefficient (+0.596) indicates that an increase in features improves the dependent variable by 0.596 units. The T-statistics (8.637) and P-value (0.000) show strong statistical significance.

All VIF values are below 10, suggesting no multicollinearity issues among the independent variables. Durbin-Watson Statistics (1.863), i.e. close to 2, indicating no significant autocorrelation in the residuals.

Discussion

Boby Joseph S.J. and Khannal (2011) factors such as brand choice, information source, decision-making factors, financial sources, and product satisfaction levels influenced the buying behavior of smartphones, while this paper found that physical dimensions, reviews, and recommendations followed by features of the smartphones determined the buying behavior among Nepalese customers. Nepalese smartphone customers are seen as more concerned about features but no concern towards the advertisement of smartphones, which shows one the contradictors to Maliha et al. (2020) and Fulzele and Chirde's (2022) findings, where the researchers stated quality of a product is the most important factor, followed by price, brand and product uniqueness, camera function, and operating system. Rai et al. (2023) concluded that product attributes did not significantly impact consumer behavior in smartphone purchasing decisions, while the current study did not ignore the various features of smartphones.

Conclusion and Implications

The analysis provides key insights into the factors influencing smartphone buying behavior among consumers, highlighting the relative importance of various factors and their interactions with buyer behavior. The study reveals that functional and technical attributes like picture quality, multitasking capability, and fast charging significantly predict consumer behavior, while social circle recommendations and review ratings significantly influence buyer behavior, emphasizing the importance of trust and peer validation.

While moderately correlated with buyer behavior, availability shows an insignificant negative impact on the regression model. This suggests that while consumers prefer convenience and access, these factors are secondary to functional attributes and reviews.

Factors like phone thickness and screen size have a weak positive correlation and an insignificant impact indicating that they are not primary drivers. The paper determined that market attributes do not significantly influence the purchasing decisions of smartphone users in Nepal. Instead, what truly matters to these consumers is the quality and features of the smartphones themselves. While there may be concerns about the reliability of the paper's reviews and recommendations. It is important to recognize that these factors can still sway consumer behavior in the smartphone market in Nepal.

Smartphone manufacturers who intend to sell in the Nepalese market should prioritize enhancing technical features, as these significantly influence consumer decisions. Leveraging social proof through reviews and recommendations is essential. Investments in influencer marketing or testimonials could amplify consumer trust and appeal. A balanced approach to pricing is necessary, focusing on value rather than competing solely on cost. Ensuring availability in multi-brand outlets and accessible service centers remains important, albeit less critical than core product features.

This study concludes that consumers are more influenced by functionality and social validation than by traditional branding or pricing strategies, which should guide manufacturers and retailers in aligning their offerings with buyer preferences.

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