DRIVERS OF CUSTOMER PURCHASING BEHAVIOR IN THE SMART PHONE MARKET. EVIDENCE FROM ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

Understanding customers in increasingly lucrative markets like sub-Saharan markets is crucial for the future of smartphone manufacturers and retailers. This study sought to give deeper insight into the different factors that affect customer purchase behaviors of smartphones in Zimbabwe. It analyzed how both physical and intangible factors, including the marketing mix and personal characteristics of buyers, affect the behavior to purchase and to what extent each

does. Data was collected through a questionnaire and analyzed statistically to draw conclusions. The study found that monthly income together with price are the factors that affect the customer's purchase behavior. The marketing mix has mostly significant relationships with customer purchase behavior while the personal factors largely do not.
Keywords: Customer Purchase Behavior, Smartphone, Marketing Mix, Zimbabwe

INTRODUCTION

The rapid spread of the Internet and mobile phone technologies has seen dynamic advancements on account of development of consumer needs and preferences. Among these developments, smartphones have had one of the fastest adoption rates in the world's modern history (Comer & Wikle, 2008). Nowadays, mobile handsets have become a crucial part of daily life and personal communication, more so in Sub-Saharan Africa, one of the fastest growing regions in the world. In the highly competitive mobile phone market, manufactures are constantly fighting to create a competitive edge in differentiating their product to best suit the consumers and gain the loyalty of customers.

The penetration of smartphones in sub Saharan Africa has increased over the last decade, for citizens of Zimbabwe using a smartphone is no longer a luxury but a necessity. The average Zimbabwean uses a mobile phone; besides the basic functions of message and voice call, they need social media and internet-based communication with relatives in the diaspora, online payments to facilitate the ongoing cash shortages and other online platforms that allow the trading of goods to supplement high unemployment rates.

Research shows that currently usage rate of smartphones in Africa is 2% (Ayodele & Ifeanyichukwu, 2016) and this number is only set to rise. Low employment against high inflation of the ZWD means income is lower than other countries at approximately USD$305 monthly and while smartphones are increasingly a pinnacle of livelihood, it stands that citizens are indeed in a dilemma.

This dilemma seems to suggest the only driving force behind buying a much-needed smartphone is price but Zimbabwe still remains a quite lucrative market for expensive and branded smartphones. Why is this the case? It seems more factors into the decision of what smartphone to buy including quality, brand name. country of origin, sales, word of mouth and even the influence of social groups (Ganlari, 2016)

Previous literatures in the field concluded that the main driving force in consumer buying is the marketing strategy mix of companies (Ganlari, 2016). Many of these previous studies have been carried out in S.E Asian emerging economies and East and West Africa countries,

however none yet in the southern Africa, a region of uniquely positioned and disadvantaged countries.

Statement of the problem

Gweru is one of the fastest developing cities in the Zimbabwe with a young population and a higher than average income level. Smartphone retailers and manufacturers looking to take advantage of this and other similar cities across Southern Africa need to be able to answer the question "What do customers really want?" to take full advantage of the market.

The main aims and objectives of this research will therefore be to examine:

- To what extent the marketing mix strategy influences the purchase behavior of smartphones by customers in Zimbabwe.

- What other moderating factors influence this behavior?

- To what extent do these moderating factors influence the purchase behavior of smartphones by customers in Gweru city.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section of study is anchored on the theoretical background on purchasing behavior and its drivers that explains the factors which influence the customer in deciding the choice of smartphone. A mobile device that runs an operating software that allows it to have special functionality applications a normally associated with a computer is widely considered to be a smartphone. This software includes Apple's iOS, Google's Android and Microsoft's Windows. (Ganlari, 2016)They allow users access to mobile GPS, Internet software applications, Wi-Fi (Charlesworth, 2009) and more recently AI and facial recognition technologies to perform daily tasks.

Customer purchasing behavior

Customers constitute the individuals, households, groups and organizations (WebFinance, 2018) that patronizes goods or services. Purchasing behavior is seen as a process through which inputs and their uses and actions leads to final satisfaction (Dudovskiy, 2013). Customer purchasing behavior is the actions that influence buying and disposing of goods, service, ideas or experience by customers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010; Kotler & Keller, 2011) to satisfy their needs and demands. Schiffman 2007 believes it involves purchasing, using evaluation of the product. Planning in advance to receive services or purchase goods is dependent on individual(Min, Overby, & Im, 2012; Rahim, Safin, Kheng, Abas, & Ali, 2016) (Lim, Chew, Lee, Loke, & Wong, 2012) and group ability which replicates the phenomenon to be a complex issue

which is considered to be inseparable from marketing. Consumers around the world are different in various factors such as age, income, education level and preferences which may affect the way they avail of goods and services (Y.-S. Chen, Tso-Jen, & Lin, 2016; Taivanjargal, Batbayar, Batlkhagva, Tumenbayar, & Enkhtaivan, 2018) argue that there are five design characteristics that influence the Purchasing behavior of a customers in the smartphone industry. The induce impulsiveness of the customer could be formulated into brand name, cost, durability, recreation and innovation awareness that features with multiple functions. This behavior then impacts how products and services are presented to the different consumer markets. There are many other components which influence consumer behavior which could be grouped into; cultural, social, personal, and psychological. Consumer behavior is therefore the study of when, why, how and where people do or do not buy products.

Gweru which is the study area is located in the geographic center of Zimbabwe and is a fast-growing city with a majority young-middle aged population (15-45 years). It is known for its vibrant livestock farming as well as clothing and beverage manufacturing industries and is home to three university campuses, that makes it more than adequate to give a representative sample.

Classic theories

(Mohanty, Ramesh, & Kamat, 2020) describe the "black box model" also called the stimulus-response model, a tried and tested model to describe purchasing behavior of customers. This model stands to reason that the final decision for a customer to purchase an item isn't an instant decision but rather the culmination of a process triggered by several external stimuli and moderated by personal intangible factors (Furaiji, Łatuszyńska, & Wawrzyniak, 2012). According to the black box model of consumer behavior, there are two main stimuli that is related to buyer's response towards buying a certain product, in this research; mobile phone. The stimuli are characterized as Physical stimuli and intangible stimuli. The physical stimuli are planned and processed by companies, whereas the intangible stimulus is given by social factors. These two stimuli consist of different elements that have a direct and indirect influence on consumer behavior. In consumer's mobile phone buying behavior, both impact buying decisions with the intangible stimuli having a direct effect on the buying decision while the physical stimuli have both a direct and indirect effect (Howard, 1977; Jisana, 2014).

According to the 5-stage customer decision model proposed by (Kotler, 2012) the consumer typically passes through five stages before he purchases: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post purchase behavior. The buying process starts once the consumer recognizes a problem or need triggered by

internal stimulus (e.g. hunger, thirst etc.) or external stimulus (e.g. admiration for a neighbors' phone). A consumer's buying behavior is influenced by cultural, social, and personal factors(Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 2005). Culture, subculture, and social class are particularly important influences on consumer buying behavior. Customers are different in various factors such as age, income, education level and preferences which evidently affect the way they purchase of goods and services. Consumer behavior is the study of when, why, how and where people do or do not buy products.(Armstrong, Kotler, Merino, Pintado, & Juan, 2011) stated that consumer behavior refers to the mental and emotional process and the observable behavior of consumers during searching, purchasing and post consumption of a product or services.

Technology Acceptance Model interprets the rationale behind impacted behavior of attitude of people and customers. It has received affluent pragmatic supports (Chang & Horng, 2010) and its generally recognize as persuasive and common theory in information systems field (G. G. Lee & Lin, 2005; Y. Lee, Kozar, & Larsen, 2003) People desire to accept and use new technologies based on several factors be it external or internal factors. Drivers of the purchasing behavior of smart phones which are physical stimuli are dependent on two key factors namely perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness (Bhattacharjee.J;Chetty.P, 2019; Marangunić & Granić, 2015) to yield actual purchase decision (APD) as shown in figure 1. The former mirrors the utility while the latter indicates the standards to which people believe that they would be able to enhance performance with the use of the smart device. In figure 1, both perceived ease of use and the usefulness forms part of personal factors which is influenced by physical stimuli towards enhancing APD
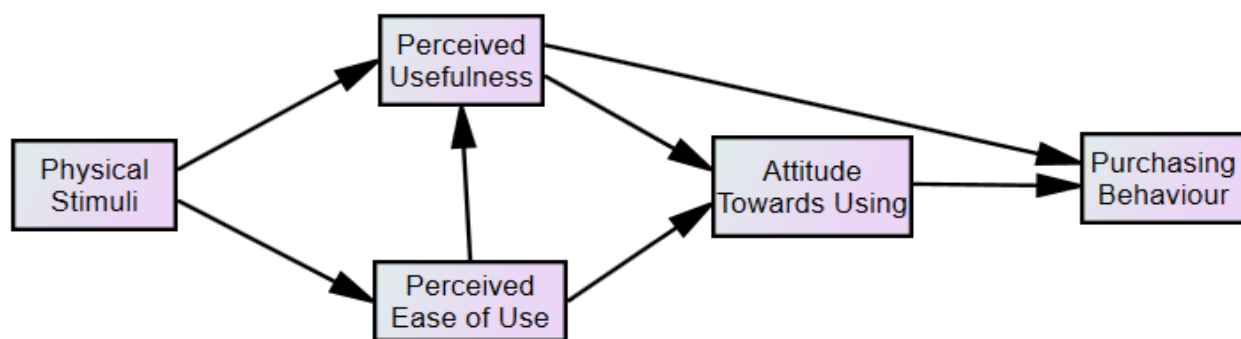

Figure 1: Technology Acceptance model: adapted from (Marangunić & Granić, 2015)

This model adapted from online shopping behaviors can be used to describe smartphone purchase behaviors

This literature review summarizes prominent theories in explaining customer behaviors. Although they elaborate on the process of how customers arrive at the final purchase decision, they do not give the amount of influence each stimulus has on this decision. This research therefore will find a quantifiable relationship amongst the variables to show to what extent each of the physical and intangible stimuli contribute to the purchasing behavior of customers towards smartphones.

Drivers of customer buying behavior

The table below describes the drivers derived from previous literatures and considered in this research.

Table 1: List of drivers affecting customer purchase behavior

	Factor	Description	Reference literature
Physical Stimuli	Product features	High tech features in smartphones attract customers based on their amenity in their lifestyle.	(Oulasvirta, Wahlström, & Ericsson, 2011), (Rahim et al., 2016), (Lay-Yee, Kok-Siew, & Yin-Fah, 2013), (Solomon, Russell-Bennett, & Previte, 2012), (Sata, 2013), (Sok, 2005), (Kivetz & Simonson, 2000), (Belch, 2008), (Ganlari, 2016). (X. Chen, Huang, & Davison, 2017)
	Price	Closely associated with brand names, price reflect only the perceived quality of a product but is also often associated as a symbolism of wealth in social settings	
	Sales Promotion	Customers are more exposed to social media and television marketing of products than ever before, making them susceptible to several marketing stimuli.	
	Distribution/service providers	Existing telecom companies enjoy customer loyalty and familiarity advantage to be the more trusted seller of smartphones as opposed to independent retailers. They use this to reach a wider customer base and can easily gain the trust of customers.	
	After sales service	After a purchase, the customer must evaluate if the product met, exceeded or fell short of expectations. Based on their opinion they will either recommend or discourage other customers from buying. They will also evaluate based on the access they have to further services and repairs.	

Intangible stimuli	Social Status	The general categorization of members with similar shared values, interest and behavior. It can be identified by grouping people of same occupation, income, education, wealth and other common variables.	(Furaiji et al., 2012), (Upadhyay, Upadhyay, & Shukla, 2017) (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010), (Ganlari, 2016) (Rahim et al., 2016), (Muniady, Al-Mamun, Permarupan, & Zainol, 2014), (Nagarkoti, 2014)
	Family background	Family relations and esteem can strongly influence purchasing decision. Marketers and advertisers usually design particular promotion to suit family groups.	
	Educational Background	Group members here have broadened or narrow knowledge and understanding base on their level of structured environment which determines the explicit purpose of what is to be purchased.	
	Societal Identification	It deals with the name associated with people in possession of a particular product or branded tag. Persons under this group are defined by what they have, use or exhibits.	
	Age	As people develop throughout their life-cycle so do their purchasing decisions. All ages have different appropriate purchase plans	(Kotler & Armstrong, 2010), (Hasslinger, Hodzic, & Opazo, 2007), (Rahim et al., 2016), (Ganlari, 2016), (Pride & Ferrell, 2007), (Stávková, Stejskal, & Toufarová, 2008), (Schaffner, Demarmels, & Juettner, 2015), (Upadhyay et al., 2017)
	Monthly Income	Not limited to salary or wage but total available disposable income in a month and if it is regular or not will determine the level of "sacrifice" one is willing to make	
	Priority	Closely associated with "perceived usefulness" one needs to decide just how important a smartphone as compared to other expenses they need to take care of.	
	Gender	Utility may be neutral in this aspect but perceived usefulness, product amenities and aesthetics will be affected by gender	
	Motivation	Human nature demands that lower level needs be met before higher order ones	
	Values	Based on culture, these determine the wants and behaviors taught as a member of a family or society	

Factors divided into physical and intangible factors that all make up personal factors. These values considered and consolidated are depicted in the theoretical framework, showing the relationship amongst the relationships
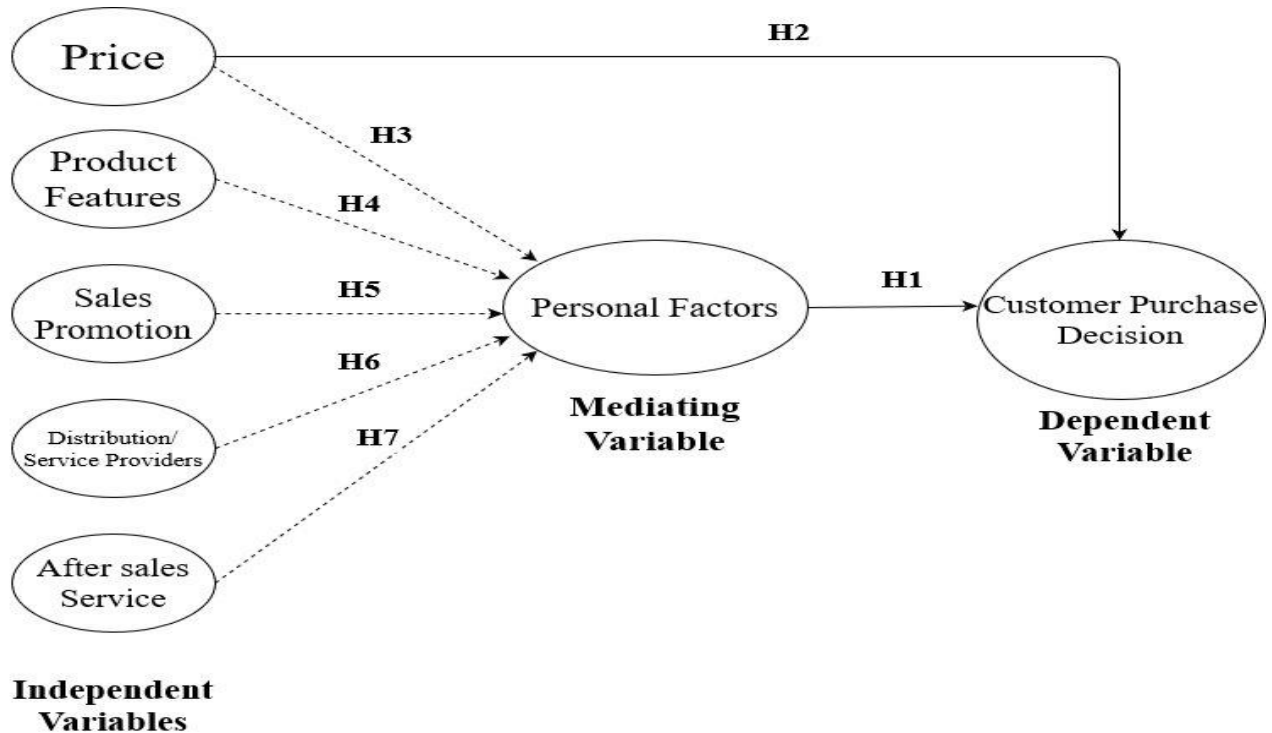

Figure 2: Conceptual framework and Hypotheses development

The topic of customer behaviors towards smartphones is a popular topic for firms and market researchers (Ganlari, 2016)Combining models proposed by (Hawkins & Roger) as well as (Furaiji et al., 2012)this research makes use of interpretive design of these models. The hypotheses formulated based on figure   and the relevant literature in table 1 are as follows:

H1: Personal factors have significant relationship with customer purchasing decision.

H2: Price has a direct significant relationship with customer purchasing decision.

H3: Price has a strong association with customer purchasing decision.

H4: Product features have strong association with customer purchase decision.

H5: Sales promotion has strong association with customer purchase decision.

H6: Distribution or Service providers have strong association with customer purchase decision.

H7: After sales services has strong association with customer purchase decision.

Tests for these hypotheses were limited only to the primary data, discussed in detail in table 1 and figure 2. The drivers and customer purchasing behavior nexus would be justified with supporting empirical results.

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of the research, a descriptive research design was adopted. After considering the literature review and drawing up the research model in figure, the researchers derived the graphical research model in mathematical form as follows:

$$CPB_{c,t} = a_0 + \beta_1 Price_{c,t} + \beta_2 SalesPromotion_{c,t} + \beta_3 Distribution_{c,t} + \beta_4 ProductFeatures_{c,t}$$
$$+ \beta_5 AfterSales_{c,t} + \beta_5 Personal_{c,t} + \varepsilon_{c,t}$$

Where:

α- constant

ε- error

c- Customer

t- purchase of smartphone at a specific time

The data that was used to examine the factors that affect customer purchasing behavior was obtained through the use of a questionnaire. This method was chosen because it allowed every respondent to answer the same questions in the same environment, making it the same experience for each. It also reduced the number of errors made because interviewers would complete the questionnaire on their smartphone, and answers are automatically recorded. Nonetheless the questionnaire needed to be easy to understand and able to capture all the needed data within a reasonable amount of time, making the design of it complex and lengthy. It was designed to capture the data in 3 sections:

 i. Demographic questions to ascertain the biodata of the respondent
 ii. Qualitative questions on the factors affecting their purchase behavior of smartphones (addressing the independent, mediating and dependent variables) using Likert scales of 5 and or 10.
 iii. One question on what they consider to be the most important thing when deciding to buy a smart phone.

The survey was conducted in November 2019 in Gweru City, in Zimbabwe. The urban population of the entire city is an estimated 154 825. But a convenience sample was taken to represent this in a busy CBD which has a radius of 2.4km inclusive of 2 high density suburbs, a university, high schools, markets, shopping malls and office buildings and encompasses an estimated 1540 people. The instrument used was a self-developed, close-ended electronic questionnaire delivered in the form of a QR code that one would have to scan and fill out on their smartphone. This was done to ensure that each sample is the owner of a smartphone to

participate in this study. The questionnaire targeted people who own smartphones and live or work within the 2.4km locale.

The actual sample size was chosen according to (Sportsman & Hamilton, 2007) as follows

$$n_1 = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where, N is the population size and e are the model error which was worked out to give a sample size of

$$n = \frac{1540}{1 + 1540 \,(0.05)^2} = 400$$

The number of respondents needed for this study was 400 and with only one incorrectly filled the actual sample size was 399. The data were evaluated using specialized software – the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) ver. 17 and was subjected to descriptive and inferential statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The demographics of the sample highlighted that the 32% of the respondents were aged between 21-30 while 30% was aged 40-50. These are majorly working class or student age groups. The gender was almost evenly distributed with 52% females and 48% males. It showed that 52% of respondents were single/unmarried and 22% married with children. 68% of the respondents have received basic higher education of vocational training and/or Bachelor degrees. It was found that 64% make at least $300 a month, which is almost the national individual living wage of $305 a month (WorldBank, 2018) 48% identified themselves as middle class citizens and 84% cited that a smartphone is a necessity.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis for Variables

Factor	Cronbach's Alpha
Price	0.862
Sales Promotion	0.861
Distribution	0.873
Product Features	0.904
After sales service	0.795
Personal factors	0.933

Cronbach's Alpha was computed to assess the internal reliability of the variables and the most of values being over 0.80 meaning overall consistency of variables is acceptable.

To understand the relationships amongst all the variables, Pearson's correlation was computed.

Table 3: Pearson's correlation

	Personal	Price	Promo	Dist	ProdFeat	After Sales	CPB
Personal	1						
Price	.453**	1					
Promo	.415**	.695**	1				
Dist	.009	-.213**	-.096	1			
ProdFeat	.301**	.556**	.300**	-.297**	1		
Aftersales	.186**	.190**	.111	-.005	.153*	1	
CPB	.526**	.919**	.422**	-.011	.735**	.280**	1

**: $p<0.01$, (2-tailed) *: $p<0.05$, (2-tailed)

It was found that most the variables have a positive coefficient with the highest being Price (.919**) and product features (.735**). A negative coefficient signifies that an increase in one variable will lead to decline in the subsequent one. This is the case with distribution (-.011*). This analysis stands to support (Lay-yee et al 2013, Rahim et al 2015) who suggest that the in-marketing mix, particularly price and product features are the most important factors that affect the customers decision to purchase a smartphone. According to (Ashaduzzaman, Khan, & Ahmed, 2011)this model price is in fact more important in influencing customer purchase behavior of smartphones than personal factors. The direct relationship is between price and CPB is much stronger than the indirect effect one. There is nonetheless a statistically significant correlation between each variable and CPB.

To further investigate the relationship amongst the variables based on groupings of monthly income and age (both personal factors), the one-way ANOVA was applied.

Table 4: One-way ANOVA

Variable		SS	df	MS	F	Sig
Personal Factors	Income groups	2904.667	24	121.028	9.630	.000
	Age groups	457.524	24	125.687	1.162	.000
Price	Income groups	4973.431	24	207.226	78.810	.000
	Age groups	536.320	24	197.645	1.272	.000
Price	Income groups	596.705	24	24.863	15.192	.000
	Age groups	222.667	24	17.904	12.890	.000
Product	Income groups	4575.240	24	195.238	40.219	.000

Table 4…

	Age groups	527.680	24	164.702	37.102	.000
Promotion	Income groups	305.013	24	12.709	9.988	.000
	Age groups	127.402	24	8.375	7.147	.000
Distribution	Income groups	223.653	24	9.319	5.216	.000
	Age groups	120.592	24	5.203	2.451	.000
Aftersales service	Income groups	192.013	24	8.001	7.623	.000
	Age groups	43.793	24	1.1732	.803	.000

Results show that there is a statistically significant influence of income, but not age, on the CPB. Income has the highest F ratio 78.810 and the significance value was .000. This goes to show that income is one personal factor that influences the customer purchase behavior, as it stands to reason that the amount of disposable income one has a direct influence on the price and therefore the customer's purchase behavior.

Having established the relationship amongst the variables, multiple regression was run and the result is detailed as follows:

Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	Unstandardized	Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient			Verification
	B	Std Error	Beta	t-value	Sig.	Results
H1	.157	.044	.086	3.594	.000	Accepted
H2	1.476	.060	.842	24.536	.000	Accepted
H3	.493	.210	.206	2.353	.020	Accepted
H4	.622	.129	.143	4.828	.000	Accepted
H5	.358	.240	.115	1.1490	.088	Rejected
H6	.874	.123	.157	7.125	.001	Accepted
H7	.734	.143	.109	5.123	.072	Rejected

$R^2 = 0.917***$

The R^2 value of .917 indicates that the model explains approximately 91% variation in the variables. This means the subsequent analysis is reliable as the model is a good fit for the variables chosen and shows a strong association amongst them. The table goes on to test the hypothesis proposed in this study. Hypothesis 5 and 7 were rejected on the basis that (p>0.05) which makes them insignificant. This therefor means there does not exist a significant relationship between customer purchase behavior. There also does not exist a statistically significant relationship between after-sales service and customer purchase behavior.

Hypothesis 1, 2,3,4 and 6 were accepted meaning there exists a significant positive relationship between personal factors, price, product features and distribution. The direct relationship that has with customer purchase behavior has the highest influence with (β=0.846) while distribution has the lowest degree of influence with (β=0.143).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study concludes that there exists a relationship between the marketing mix, several personal factors and customer purchase behavior of smartphones in Zimbabwe, specifically in Gweru city. Referring back to our previously stated objectives, the authors can say with a degree of certainty that the marketing mix, particularly price, product features and sales promotion have a significant influence on the customer purchase behavior of smartphones. It was found that personal factors do in fact moderate these marketing factors, but monthly income has the most significant moderating effect. Some of the variables chosen in this study had a weak relationship with the dependent variable. For this reason, further studies on this topic may consider other variables we didn't take into account such as brand names, product sacrifice, culture. A deep study into marketing mix and personal factors reveal that price has the greatest influence on personal factors that lead to a purchase of a smartphone.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are some limitations that the researchers encountered that could be improved for future research. The first is the possibility of omitted variables. Perhaps considering some personal variables or even other variables may lead to a more accurate prediction and understanding of the buying behaviors of smartphone customers. The second is the location of the study. Zimbabwe is a diversely developed country with some urban areas with lage GDP per capita rates as well as some rural areas that are sparsely populated with few urban amenities. The study was conducted in a city which is an average representation of the country but may not reflect results that are generalizable for the entire country. Further studies may consider comparing the buying behaviors of customers in more developed, less developed and mining or industry towns and compare the results.

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