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Factors Affecting Switching among Smartphones: A Study on Brand-Switching Behaviour of Young Smartphone Users

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ABSTRACT :

The mobile telephone market is intensely competitive, and consumers can switch from one brand to another with relative ease. This research seeks to find out what reasons motivate mobile phone brand switching; in particular, dissatisfaction with product-performance, price/promotions, rival handsets, and innovation. Cross-sectional quantitative research was carried out, using a structured questionnaire incorporating demographic variables, usage-behaviour, and 15 Likert-type statements on the four areas, on a sample of 32 mobile phone users, reliability of data was acceptable (Cronbach's alpha 0.78 to 0.81 for three of four constructs, 0.92 overall). The area most marked for influence was product-performance (mean 4.03), followed by rival features (mean 3.77), and thirdly, price and promotional offers (mean 3.37). Factors most associated with and a predictor of switching intention were rival features ($r=0.65$, $p<0.01$), product-performance ($r=0.57$, $p<0.01$) and innovation ($r=0.45$, $p<0.05$), but not price/promotions ($r=0.30$, $p>0.05$). However, a multiple regression ($R=0.48$) revealed that 'rival features' was the only significant independent predictor. 46.9% of respondents had already switched. The implication of this study is that user's switch for 'what a phone does' and rival offers, not primarily for its price. However, caution is expressed because of a small sample size, and results should be regarded as a preliminary finding.

Keywords: Smartphone, Brand Switching, Consumer Behaviour, Product Performance, Competitor Features, Innovation, Switching Intention.

Introduction

Smartphone is no longer a communication tool; it is a camera, a payment tool, an entertainment system and a study/work tool. This centrality makes the performance of the smartphone crucial to the user, who is also quick to look out for a better phone by considering options. Brand switching (changing from one brand to another when purchasing a new phone) is an essential phenomenon for manufacturers and retailers of mobile phones.

The logic of switching can be explained as push and pull. Push factors arise from the own brand – under performance, recurrent software issues, battery drain, unexciting camera quality, etc., and pull factors arise from competing brands – superior features, better camera, longer battery life, increased storage and processing power, innovations, launches, discounts, exchanges, better value for money, etc. A high price can prompt people to start looking elsewhere but however tempting special discounts and exchange promotions from rivals are, they also bring down the price of switching. People tend to only upgrade if it's necessary, so switching isn't always an easy decision.

Review of literature

A. Smartphone-specific studies

In another study, Maseda, Al-Kiwi and Ahmed (2017) developed a switching-intention model of high-technology products, which was validated among smartphone users. They showed that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and the relative advantage of product features were the primary factors that influenced switching, whereas subjective norm only played a minor role. This reinforces that features of competitors are most important.

Lin and Huang (2014), apply a push-pull-mooring model to examine smartphone usage for a "standards war". The push factors of low satisfaction and disconfirmation and the pull factor of relative advantage increased the switch intention. The mooring factors of inertia, switching cost and network effect decreased the switch intention. This is consistent with your performance (push) and competitor features (pull) constructs.

Fintikasari and Ardyani (2018), studied 385 Generation Y consumers of smartphone brand switching and found that lifestyle and variety seeking

increased switching brand and did not significantly reduce brand switching. Promotion did not increase the desire to switch and is in line with your non-significant price and promotion result.

Guo et al. (2021) validated the model with Chinese smartphone users. They found pull effects stronger than push, and overall mooring effects. Subjective norm was the strongest single item. Product quality and outdated features were significant, albeit weak, while brand image, switching cost and poor customer service were not significant.

Suan et al. (2023) analysed 141 Gen-Z smartphone users in Jakarta separated in entry level, mid-range, and high-end. In all three-segment push was the most important factor for switching intention. Ease of use, features, durability, needs, user experience, and price influences were also found. Similarly, you have a young user sample.

Ng, Law and Lin (2024), surveyed 235 Hong Kong smartphone customers and employed PLS-SEM. Brand commitment mediated the impact of brand values, trust and self-congruence on switching intention. The path of switching was non-significant for brand commitment, media influence and alternative attractiveness, confirming the pull side of your framework.

B. Mobile services and switching barriers

Kim, Park and Jeong (2004), found for Korean mobile telecom users that customer satisfaction and switching barriers both influence customer loyalty. It supports the argument that dissatisfaction is an ingredient for churn, but barriers may retain users even if they are dissatisfied. Kim and Yoon (2004), studied subscriber churn and loyalty in the Korean mobile market. They connected churn to service quality, tariffs, all handset-related issues as well as to the brand image. This illustrates that price is just one reason and not the sole thing contributing to the exit of users.

They tested consumers of mobile phone services in France, for Lee, Lee and Feick (2001). They found that switching costs diminished the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty, whereby a satisfied customer was more likely to stick around when costs were high. That ties in with your statement that exchange offers would reduce the switching cost.

Burnham, Frels and Mahajan (2003), created a typology of switching costs: procedural, financial and relational. Their research indicates that both procedural and relational costs influence the desire to stay. This gives us a management explanation for the ecosystem and data lock-in factors for smartphones.

C. Technology continuance, habit and motivation

Bhattacharjee (2001), developed the expectation-confirmation model of continued use of IS. Continuance intention is a function of satisfaction, which is determined by confirmation of expectations and perceived usefulness. This explains why in cases of lower-than-expected performances, (battery, camera, software), people look for other alternatives.

Ye and Potter (2011), use post-adoption switching of personal information technologies to highlight habit as a barrier. Users keep using an inferior device just because they are used to it. This backs up your argument that habit keeps users on a phone.

Karafuto et al. (2005) researched the determinants of mobile phone choice in two Finnish studies. Price, brand, user interface and handset characteristics all played a part, with the importance of each to different consumer groups. This reinforces your decision to compare performance, price and features altogether.

D. Push-pull-mooring in technology migration

Chang, Liu and Chen (2014), investigated the migration of users from one social networking site to another through applying push, pull and mooring to the situation. The authors found that migration decision was formed by push of dissatisfaction, pull of the potential service and mooring of the factor. It also backs up the push-pull logic of your conceptual framework.

Sun et al. (2017), made the same approach to explain the switching of users across mobile instant messaging applications. Their results indicated that push, pull and mooring factors all play a role, and the forces do not work independently, but seem to be combined. That is also in line with your finding that there is a large overlap between your constructs (VIF 5.32 for competitor features).

Research Gap

Effects on switching have been studied before: Although research has identified dissatisfaction, attraction to alternatives, price and innovation as being factors leading to switching, most of this research has looked only at service industries, or at a single factor alone; and for smartphone users, comparatively few have compared performance-related, price-related, competitor-related, and innovation-related factors together. The young, price-sensitive segment of students and newcomers to the workforce has not yet been investigated as a separate group, either. This study measures all four factors' groupings together using a single instrument, compares their influence, and tests for an association with a commitment to switch.

Problem Statement

The smartphone has become a daily must-have, and rapidly the number of brands, variations and price points that a consumer is faced with has increased. Brands are competing on camera features, phone battery power, computing performance, user interface, trade-in schemes, discounts, and the like, with a new set of models being released constantly. In this environment, user loyalty to brands is not strong: when a current user is dissatisfied, or sees a more attractive offer from a competitor, they can move to another brand when buying their next phone.

For manufacturers each abandonment is a cost and snagging customers from the competition can be costly. So, it is interesting to learn what factors customers are driven away from their current brand and what factors draw them towards a competitor. Users may be driven away if there is something wrong with the current phone (the performance, the software, the battery, the camera...) and on the other hand can be driven away in the case of attractive external factors (discounts, exchanges, innovative features, launches...). In the current debate, these themes are processed separately, and little attention has been paid to how young users, who comprise most of the smartphone market, balance these elements. The main question of the present study is to investigate which elements most effectively generate the intention to switch a smartphone brand and how the performance-related, the price-related, the competitor-related and the innovation-related factors compare.

Objective

Purpose of the study:

1. To analyse the profile and behaviour of the respondents regarding use of smart phones.
2. To determine the various reasons due to which the smartphone users change from one brand to another.
3. To compare the relative influence of product-performance factors, price and promotional factors, competitor features and technological innovation.
4. To test the effect of these factors on switching intent.
5. Investigate if prior brand switchers differ from non-switchers.

Research Methodology

This research has a descriptive, cross-sectional, quantitative approach, carried out through primary data, using a structured online questionnaire.

a) Dependable Variable (DV):

Switching Intention (SI)

b) Independent Variable (IV):

Product Performance (PP)

Price and Promotion (PR)

Competitor Features (CF)

Innovation (IN)

Research Strategy

Data collection by questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part A was concerned with demographic and usage-behaviour variables: gender, age group, occupation, monthly income or pocket money, range of prices of current smart-phone, current brand, length of ownership of current phone, number of phones used over the last five years, frequency of changing phones, whether the respondent had ever changed brand; and Part B contained 15 statements on a 5-point Likert scale (1 =Strongly Disagree, 2 =Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 =Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

Variables and Hypotheses

The DV is Switching Intention (SI) evaluated through a single item: "I will likely switch to another smartphone brand if I am dissatisfied with my current phone". The IVs are four constructs derived from the other 14 items:

Product Performance (PP): Poor Product Performance, software issues, poor battery performance, poor camera quality (4 items).

Price and Promotion (PR): Price of phone is relatively high, we also find attractive sale discounts, exchange schemes, more value for money from the current model (4 items).

Competitor Features (CF): competitors offer better features; better camera; better performance on battery; better performance on storage and processing (4 items).

Innovation (IN): Introduction of technological innovations; New model launches (2 items).

The following hypotheses were tested:

H1: There is no significant association between respondents' demographic profile and smartphone usage behaviour.

H2: Identified factors do not significantly influence smartphone brand switching.

H3: The relative influence of the four factor categories on smartphone brand switching differs significantly.

H4: The identified factors have no significant effect on smartphone switching intention.

H5: Prior switchers and non-switchers differ significantly in their perceptions and switching intention.

Sampling Strategy

The sample consisted of smartphone users, and a convenience sample was obtained using a circulation of an online questionnaire. Responses were received from 30 September to 5 October 2016. 32 responses were obtained and included in the data set. One respondent did not respond to one item on the questionnaire (better features offered by rival brands), but their construct score was based on the three items of this construct that they had responded to. E-mail addresses captured in the form were not used in the analysis.

Data Collection

Primary data were obtained from the questionnaire illustrated above. Secondary data were obtained from journal articles and books from published sources on consumer switching behaviour and technology adoption.

Data Processing and Analysis

Responses were coded 1-5 and analysed in Python (pandas and SciPy): frequency and percentage, mean and standard deviation, Cronbach's alpha for reliability, a one-sample t-test against the neutral midpoint (3.00), a Friedman test with paired t-tests to compare constructs, Pearson and Spearman correlation, multiple linear regression, independent-samples (Welch) t-tests and Mann-Whitney U tests, Chi-square test of association. A significance level of 5% was used. Cronbach's alpha was 0.81 for Product Performance, 0.78 for Price and Promotion, 0.78 for Competitor Features and 0.68 for Innovation, with 0.92 across all 15 items. The Innovation value is just below the 0.70 standard (Nunnally, 1978), which is normal for a two-item scale (Wilkinson and Taskforce, 1997), so findings for this construct are presented with some reservations.

Conceptual Background

Brand switching: When a brand that the customer uses are replaced by a competing brand it is called brand switching. This is measured in the study as the customer's intention to switch and whether a switch has been made in the past.

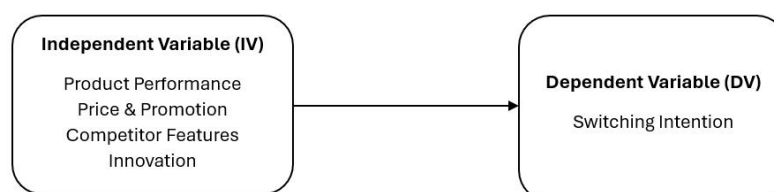
Push factors (product performance): They come from the existing phone. Things that make you dislike the phone such as software faults, bad camera quality, bad battery life, and poor performance.

Pull factors (competitor features and innovation): These come from competitors. Availability of better cameras, batteries, storage, processing and features, as well as new launches, make alternatives appealing.

Price and promotion: The price of the current phone, any discounts, exchange offers and price for money influences the cost-benefit of switching to a different brand.

Changing behaviour: Users vary in their tendency to change phones. In this sample, 43.8% change their phone when needed, not all change intention automatically leads to frequent replacement.

Conceptual Framework



The structure is the push-pull logic. The switching Intention is the result. Product Performance is the push from the current phone.

Competitor Features and Innovation are the pulls from other brands.

Price and Promotion is the economic inducement or disincentive to a switch. It is assumed that there are positive relationships between the stronger dissatisfaction for product performance, stronger attraction to competitor's features and innovation, stronger response to price and promotions with intention to switch. Demographic and usage variables (sex, age group, occupation, brand in use, frequency of change, previous switching) were treated as background variables.

Key Findings & Analysis

Respondent Profile

Table 1: Profile of respondents (N = 32)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	19	59.4
	Male	13	40.6
Age	18–21 years	19	59.4
	22–25 years	13	40.6
Occupation	Student	23	71.9
	Employed	6	18.8
	Other	2	6.3
	Business/Self-employed	1	3.1
Monthly income / pocket money	Below ₹10,000	20	62.5
	₹10,000–₹20,000	4	12.5
	₹20,001–₹30,000	3	9.4
	₹30,001–₹50,000	3	9.4
	Above ₹50,000	2	6.3
Current phone price range	Below ₹10,000	2	6.3
	₹10,000–₹20,000	7	21.9
	₹20,001–₹30,000	8	25.0
	₹30,001–₹50,000	8	25.0
	Above ₹50,000	7	21.9
Current brand	Samsung	8	25.0
	Apple	6	18.8
	Oppo	5	15.6
	Vivo	5	15.6
	Other	4	12.5
	OnePlus	2	6.3
	Xiaomi/Redmi	2	6.3
Duration of use of current phone	Less than 6 months	7	21.9
	6 months–1 year	6	18.8
	1–2 years	8	25.0
	2–3 years	6	18.8
	More than 3 years	5	15.6
Phones used in past 5 years	1	7	21.9
	2	11	34.4
	3	6	18.8
	4	7	21.9
	More than 4	1	3.1
Frequency of changing phone	Only when necessary	14	43.8
	Every year	2	6.3
	Every 1–2 years	8	25.0
	Every 2–3 years	4	12.5
	Every 3–4 years	4	12.5
Ever switched brand	Yes	15	46.9
	No	17	53.1

The sample consists of young and student led and most of the respondents have low monthly income or pocket money but 68.8% of them spend on

phone more than 20,000. 46.9% respondents have changed their brand at least once and 43.8% replace their phone as per need.

Item-wise Analysis

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of Likert items (N = 32)

Construct	Statement (short form)	Mean	SD	% Agree + Strongly Agree
SI	Likely to switch if dissatisfied	3.69	1.15	56.3
PP	Poor performance	4.25	0.84	87.5
PP	Frequent software problems	3.97	0.97	65.6
PP	Poor battery life	3.91	1.09	71.9
PP	Poor camera quality	4.00	0.84	71.9
PR	Higher price of current phone	3.22	1.10	34.4
PR	Discounts from competitors	3.22	0.91	34.4
PR	Exchange offers	3.38	1.10	43.8
PR	Better value for money	3.66	1.04	53.1
CF	Better features by competitors	3.97	1.02	65.6
CF	Better camera technology	3.78	0.91	59.4
CF	Better battery performance	3.69	1.09	59.4
CF	Better storage and processing	3.66	1.18	59.4
IN	New technological innovations	3.78	0.94	59.4
IN	Launch of new models	3.28	1.11	40.6

Performance is the top motivator for changing: 87.5% agreed and the mean was the highest (4.25). The next four factors were overall camera quality, software problems, competing products' competing features and the higher current price (all with the similar means of around 3.8). Items related to price per se had the lowest means (3.22 for higher current price, and for competitor's discounts) and the largest proportion of the respondents (43.8%) were neutral about those (...price and discounts alone).

Better value for money was rated higher (3.66) than the higher current price and the higher price for still getting a current device (3.55).

Construct-level Analysis

Table 3: Construct means, reliability and comparison with neutral midpoint (N = 32)

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α	Mean	SD	t vs 3.00	p
Product Performance (PP)	4	0.81	4.03	0.75	7.77	< 0.001

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α	Mean	SD	t vs 3.00	p
Competitor Features (CF)	4	0.78	3.77	0.80	5.44	< 0.001
Innovation (IN)	2	0.68	3.53	0.90	3.35	0.002
Price and Promotion (PR)	4	0.78	3.37	0.81	2.57	0.015
Switching Intention (SI)	1	–	3.69	1.15	3.39	0.002

All 5 means are well above the midpoint of the scales. The 4 factor groups also vary among themselves (Friedman (3) = 27.13, $p < 0.001$). Product Performance (mean rank 48.8) receives higher ratings than the other three factors (all $p < 0.001$) of Price and Promotion (mean rank 34.7), Innovation (mean rank 36.6), and Competitor Features (mean rank 37.3) and Competitor Features gets higher ratings than Price and Promotion ($p = 0.004$). In other words, product performance is the most important factor group and price and promotion the least important.

Relationship with Switching Intention (H1–H4)

Table 4: Correlation of constructs with switching intention (N = 32)

Construct	Pearson r	p	Spearman ρ	p	Hypothesis
Product Performance	0.573	< 0.001	0.588	< 0.001	H1 supported
Price and Promotion	0.301	0.094	0.293	0.103	H2 not supported
Competitor Features	0.646	< 0.001	0.661	< 0.001	H3 supported
Innovation	0.448	0.010	0.443	0.011	H4 supported

Product performance, competitor features and innovation have strong positive relationship with switching intention. Price and promotion are positively correlated, but statistically not significant at 5%, the result does not support H2.

Table 5: Multiple regression predicting switching intention

Predictor	B	SE	t	p	VIF
Constant	0.295	0.939	0.31	0.756	–
Product Performance	0.151	0.392	0.39	0.703	3.39
Price and Promotion	–0.371	0.314	–1.18	0.248	2.51
Competitor Features	1.256	0.459	2.73	0.011	5.32
Innovation	–0.201	0.345	–0.58	0.566	3.75

$R^2 = 0.476$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.398$, $F(4, 27) = 6.12$, $p = 0.001$.

The model accounts for 48% of the variation in switching intention. When the four constructs are entered simultaneously, only Competitor Features is a significant predictor. The four constructs are highly correlated with each other (e.g. R between Product Performance and Competitor Features, and between Competitor Features and Innovation is 0.82) and the VIF of Competitor Features in the regression is 5.32, so one should be careful when interpreting its individual coefficients.

The pattern suggests that there is a large overlap among the factors, for example, those who care about performance are also attracted to competitors features and innovation.

Switchers and non-switchers (H5)

Previous brand switchers indicated somewhat higher mean scores than previous non-switchers on all constructs and on switching intention (e.g. SI 3.87 vs. 3.53; CF 3.92 vs. 3.65), though no differences were statistically significant (Welch t-test p between 0.35 and 0.47; Mann-Whitney p between 0.46 and 0.66).

H5 is thus not supported.

Background Variables

Chi-square tests did not find any significant relationship between having switched brands and gender (1) = 0.09, p = 0.770), age group (1) = 0.09, p = 0.770), occupation (3) = 3.28, p = 0.351), current phone price range (4) = 2.31, p = 0.679), current brand (6) = 7.47, p = 0.280), or how often they changed phones (4) = 6.47, p = 0.167). Several cells had expected counts of less than five and so these tests are suggestive only. Descriptively, 7 of the 8 Samsung users had never switched brands; 4 of the 6 Apple users and both One Plus users had.

Switching intention did not vary by gender (3.68 versus 3.69, p = 0.986) or occupation, and the number of phones in five years was not related to switching intention (Spearman = 0.09, p = 0.625).

The only significant difference found was that, controlling for type of data used in the t-test, respondents aged 22–25 years, gave higher scores for innovation than those aged 18–21 years (3.92 versus 3.26, p = 0.048), however this should be considered exploratory as many comparisons were made.

Table 6: Summary of hypotheses

Hypothesis	Result
H1: Product performance → switching intention	Supported (r = 0.57, p < 0.01)
H2: Price and promotion → switching intention	Not supported (r = 0.30, p = 0.094)
H3: Competitor features → switching intention	Supported (r = 0.65, p < 0.01); only significant predictor in regression
H4: Innovation → switching intention	Supported (r = 0.45, p < 0.05)
H5: Switchers differ from non-switchers	Not supported (p > 0.05)

Implications for Practice and Theory

Practical Implications

The findings suggest that smartphone brands keep their users primarily by perfecting the basics. The most strongly supported reasons for switching were performance, the stability of the software, battery life and camera quality, which means maintaining quality and sticking to frequent software updates is step one in defending against switching.

The rival features were the strongest correlate and only significant regression predictor of switching intention. To attract customers away from competitors, brands should therefore compete on clear hardware and feature differences, particularly camera, battery, storage and processing, and not simply on price reductions.

Price and promotion did not factor in as strongly as the other items. Discounting and exchange offers might assist in finishing a sale when the consumer is already thinking of changing, but in this sample, they did not vary the likelihood to switch. Advertisers should avoid offering discounts separately from other items that suggest value for money.

Finally, with 43.8% of respondents replacing phones only when needed retention should be especially important in the context of replacement, when dissatisfaction, rival features and offers are combined.

Theoretical Implications

The results were in line with the push-pull perspective of switching (Bansal et al., 2005), which predicted that both product dissatisfaction and competing products' attraction are associated with switching intention. They also reveal that, at least among young users of smartphone, push and pull factors induced by the product may be more salient than economic factors. The high degree of overlap among the constructs leads to the conclusion that push and pull factors co-exist rather than exist independently and should be modelled as such in the future.

Limitations and Suggested Areas for Future Research

There are a few limitations to this study. Only 32 respondents were available to conduct the research and this convenience sample consisted largely of young students and therefore the findings cannot be generalised to the population of all smartphone users. The gender was significantly related to the

age group (16 of 19 women in the sample were aged 18-21, compared to 10 of 13 men who were aged 22-25) and therefore it is not possible to compare between these two measures. The measures of switches in term was taken with one item, the measure of innovation scale only two items long with slightly below the reliability of 0.70 and at the point of research they are all these are intentions and not actual behaviour.

Further research might employ a larger, more heterogeneous probability sample over a range of ages, locations, and income levels; use multiple items to measure switching intention; consider mooring variables including brand loyalty, ecosystem lock-in, social influence, and switching costs; and employ structural equation modelling. Longitudinal designs based on actual switching would indicate whether intentions are realized.

Conclusion

This research investigated the reason for smartphone brand switching among current users. Product performance was by far the most important reason, then competitor features, innovation, and finally price and promotion. Among the factors, product performance, competitor features and innovation were significantly related to switching intention while price and promotion were not, and competitor features was the only significant predictor of switching intention when all factors were included in one model.

Nearly half of the respondents had switched brands and in general, the switched users did not seem to differ based on their attitudes.

Overall, smartphone users switched because their brand delivered on these critical factors and competitors' offerings, more than price. Brands should therefore focus on reliable performance and key feature leadership, then price offers to supplement. Due to the small sample, these results are preliminary and in need of further study.

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