

Brand Loyalty and Buying Patterns of Students for Smartphone Brands

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1. Introduction

In the current digital age, smartphones have evolved from simple communication devices into integral tools that shape the lifestyles of students. This transformation has made understanding brand loyalty and buying patterns within this demographic a critical area of study for marketers and academics. The rapid pace of technological innovation, coupled with the high competition among smartphone brands like Apple, Samsung, and OnePlus, necessitates a deeper exploration into the factors that influence students' purchasing decisions. This research aims to fill this knowledge gap by analyzing the drivers of brand preference, the influence of digital culture, and the extent of brand loyalty among college and university students.

Key Words: Brand loyalty, Digital culture, Buying Patterns, Digital age, Technological innovation

Significance and Relevance of the Study

This study is highly significant due to the immense market power of the student demographic. As a tech-savvy and socially connected consumer group, their purchasing behaviors not only reflect current market trends but also predict future ones. For smartphone companies, understanding this segment is crucial for developing effective marketing strategies, product features, and pricing models that resonate with young consumers. The findings can help companies tailor their products to align with student priorities, such as durability and value for money, rather than focusing solely on trendy but less important factors. Furthermore, for educational institutions and financial advisors, the study provides valuable insights into student spending habits, which can inform financial literacy programs and help students better manage their limited allowances.

Statement of the Problem

The problem this study addresses is the lack of a comprehensive understanding of the factors that drive brand loyalty and shape the buying patterns of college and university students for smartphones. While numerous brands exist, their strategies for capturing and retaining this demographic are often based on broad assumptions rather than specific, data-driven insights. The core issue is that many students are not firmly loyal to a single brand, and their purchase decisions are influenced by a complex interplay of practical needs, social factors, and financial constraints. This study aims to identify and analyze these

specific influences to explain why students choose certain brands and whether they are likely to repurchase them.

2. Literature Review

A 2012 study by Khan found that consumers' smartphone preferences are significantly influenced by a variety of factors, with product attributes like battery backup, camera resolution, and durability being paramount. Another study by Ndadziyira (2024) on students in a higher education institution found that brand popularity, price, and other product attributes, along with social influences, all play a role in brand popularity. The research emphasizes that students are a price-sensitive segment but also value perceived quality, which aligns with the finding that they seek value for money and quality.

Brand loyalty, a key focus of this study, is often driven by customer satisfaction and trust. A 2018 study on Generation Y in Malaysia found that satisfaction and switching costs are significant determinants of smartphone brand loyalty. This is further supported by a 2012 study on students in Sweden, which found that brand image and customer satisfaction were the key drivers of brand loyalty for popular brands like Apple. These findings resonate with the current study, where trust in the brand was a major reason for loyalty, and a significant portion of respondents were only "maybe" loyal, suggesting a moderate level of satisfaction that doesn't fully commit them to repurchase.

The influence of social and digital sources on young consumers is well-documented. Research by Gupta & Verma (2020) shows that over 70% of students rely on online reviews, influencer endorsements, and peer recommendations before making a purchase. A study on college students in Hyderabad (2024) confirmed this, noting that peer recommendations and social media are critical influencers of online purchase decisions. This is in direct contrast to traditional advertising and in-store promotions, which the current study also found to have a minimal impact. The combination of peer influence and online information forms a powerful decision-making framework for this demographic.

Research Objectives

To identify the key factors that influence students' brand preferences for smartphones.

To analyze the relationship between product attributes (e.g., quality, durability, price) and brand loyalty.

To examine the role of social and digital influences, such as online reviews and peer recommendations, on students' smartphone purchase decisions.

To study the level of brand loyalty students show toward their current smartphone brand and their intentions for future purchases.

Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive research design, utilizing a structured questionnaire as the primary data collection tool. The questionnaire was administered to a sample of 25 undergraduate students aged 18-21. The sample was selected using a convenience sampling method. The data collected included demographic

information (age, gender, education level, and monthly allowance) and a series of questions on smartphone usage, brand loyalty, and buying patterns. The questions used a combination of multiple-choice, rating scales (1-5), and open-ended formats. The collected data were then analyzed using descriptive statistics to present the findings in charts and graphs, allowing for a clear interpretation of the trends and patterns.

3. Analysis and interpretation

The survey of 25 respondents reveals a clear age concentration among the participants. The majority, 16 respondents (64%), are 19 years old. A smaller but notable portion, 6 respondents (24%), are 18 years old. The remaining participants are older, with 2 respondents (8%) being 20 years old and just 1 respondent (4%) being 21. This distribution indicates that the study's sample is predominantly composed of late teenagers, with a heavy emphasis on the 19-year-old demographic.

Based on the provided pie chart, the survey of 25 respondents reveals that the sample is male-dominated, with 56% of the participants being male. In contrast, females account for 44% of the respondents. There were no responses under the "Other" category. This gender distribution indicates that the study's findings are primarily influenced by the perspectives and behaviors of a larger proportion of male respondents compared to female respondents.

The survey of 25 respondents reveals that the entire sample is comprised of undergraduate students. This is visually represented by a single, solid slice that accounts for 100% of the participants, with no representation from postgraduate or other educational levels. This demographic detail is crucial as it confirms that the study's findings are exclusively reflective of the perceptions and behaviors of undergraduate students.

The study reveals that the vast majority of the sample has a limited monthly allowance or income. Specifically, 88% of the participants reported having a monthly income of below ₹5,000. The remaining 12% is split between higher income brackets, but this clear concentration at the lowest end indicates that the study's findings primarily reflect the spending habits and financial behaviors of students with very limited financial resources.

Based on the provided pie chart of 25 respondents, Samsung is the most widely used smartphone brand, accounting for 24% of the sample. This is followed closely by Vivo, which is used by 20% of respondents. Apple and Realme are tied for the next most popular brand, each used by 12% of the participants. The remaining brands—OnePlus, iQOO, Oppo, and Redmi—all have a usage rate of 8% each, showing a fragmented market among the rest of the respondents.

The study explains the duration for which they have been using their current smartphones. The largest group of participants, 40%, have been using their device for 1 to 2 years. The next most common duration is 6-12 months, which accounts for 32% of the respondents. A smaller portion of the sample, 16%, has used their smartphone for more than 2 years, while the smallest group, at 12%, has had their phone for less than 6 months. This distribution indicates that the majority of students surveyed have been using their current smartphone for between six months and two years.

The study indicates that the majority of students do not follow a strict schedule for upgrading their smartphones. A significant 56% of respondents only upgrade their phone when the old phone becomes unusable." This suggests that most purchases are necessity-driven. Another large group, at 32%, reported having "no fixed pattern" for upgrading. The smallest segments of the sample follow a predictable schedule, with only 8% upgrading every year and a tiny 4% upgrading every two years, highlighting that scheduled upgrades are not common among this demographic.

The study reveals a high degree of uncertainty regarding brand loyalty for their next smartphone purchase. A significant majority, at 60%, responded "Maybe," suggesting that most students are not firmly committed to their current brand and are open to considering other options. The remaining respondents are evenly split, with 20% answering "Yes" to buying the same brand again and another 20% responding "No." This shows that for this group, brand loyalty is not a dominant factor in repurchase decisions, with most keeping their options open.

From the study, it is clear that the top reasons for students sticking with a particular smartphone brand are overwhelmingly related to the product itself. The most significant factor is Quality & durability, chosen by 72% of participants. This is followed by Value for money, which was selected by 60%, and Trust in brand, which was chosen by 52%. In contrast, factors such as Innovative features (40%), Brand image/status (28%), Customer service (16%), and Peer influence (12%) were cited as less important reasons for brand loyalty. The findings clearly show that students prioritize the tangible quality and practicality of a smartphone over its social or trendy appeal.

The survey of 25 respondents indicates a mixed but generally positive level of loyalty to their current smartphone brand. The most common response, given by 40% of the participants, was a score of 3 on a loyalty scale of 1 to 5, suggesting a neutral or moderate level of commitment. However, a significant portion of respondents, 32%, rated their loyalty as a perfect 5, indicating strong loyalty. The remaining respondents were less loyal, with 20% giving a score of 4 and only 8% giving a low score of 2. Notably, no respondents rated their loyalty as a 1. This suggests that while a large portion of students are moderately loyal, there is also a very strong segment of highly loyal customers.

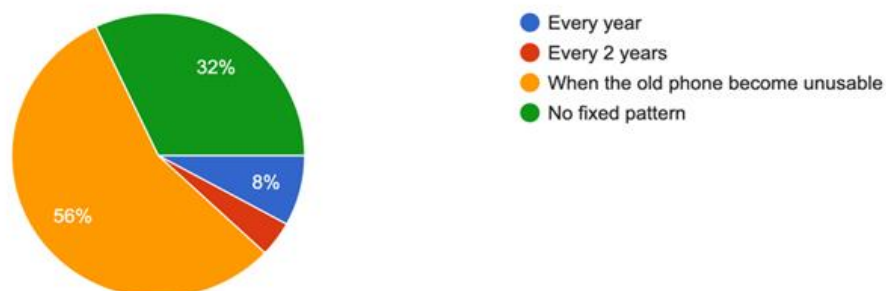
The study reveals their preferred price range for smartphones. The largest portion of the sample, 52%, prefers smartphones priced between ₹20,001 and ₹30,000. This is followed by 28% of respondents who prefer the lower-mid-range of ₹10,000–₹20,000. A smaller segment, at 20%, is willing to spend above ₹30,000. This data indicates that the majority of students surveyed are primarily interested in purchasing mid-range smartphones.

The most significant sources of influence for a smartphone purchase decision are Online reviews, which were chosen by 66.7% of participants, and Friends/family recommendations, selected by 62.5%. This indicates that students heavily rely on both impartial third-party information and trusted personal opinions. Brand reputation is also a major factor, influencing 45.8% of respondents. In contrast, less than a third of respondents are influenced by Social media ads (33.3%), while In-store promotions and Influencers/YouTubers have a much smaller impact, each chosen by only 16.7% of the sample.

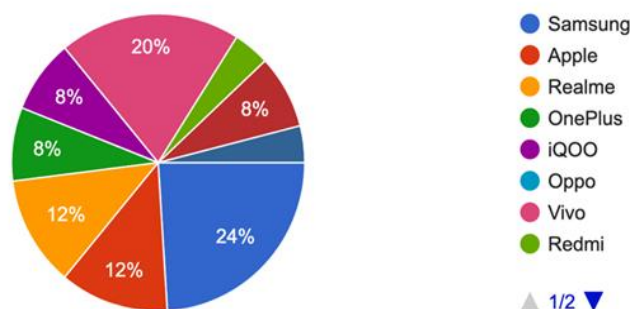
The most crucial factors influencing students' smartphone purchase decisions are primarily related to performance and longevity. Battery life is rated as the most important factor, followed closely by Storage capacity and Warranty/service, with each of these factors receiving the highest number of 5-star ratings. Camera Quality is also considered highly important. While factors such as Brand name and Operating system are significant, they have a more moderate distribution of importance ratings. Price is also a key factor, but shows a more varied response, indicating that while it is important, other features can outweigh it for some students.

Based on the provided open-ended responses, students' suggestions for smartphone improvements are centered on enhancing the device's performance, features, and user experience. The most common suggestions revolve around hardware and performance, including requests for a better refresh rate, increased storage capacity, and general improvements to mobile performance with more advanced options. Camera quality is another key area, with respondents specifically mentioning a desire for better overall camera quality, improved zoom, and higher-quality selfie cameras. Other suggestions include adding more AI options and providing nice customer service.

How often do you upgrade your smartphone?
25 responses

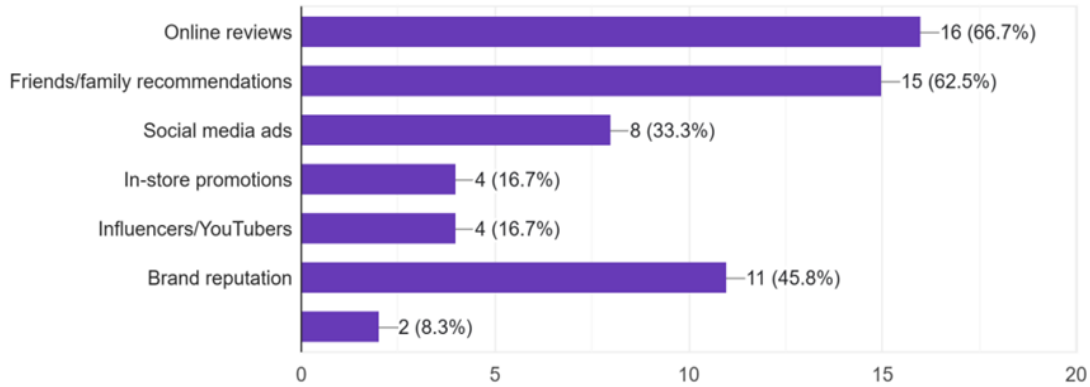


Which smartphone brand do you currently use?
25 responses



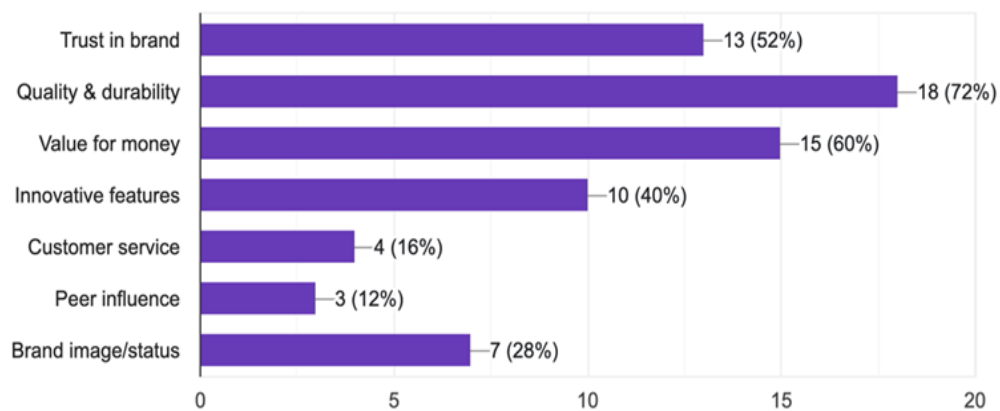
What sources influence your smartphone purchase decision the most? (Any 3)

24 responses



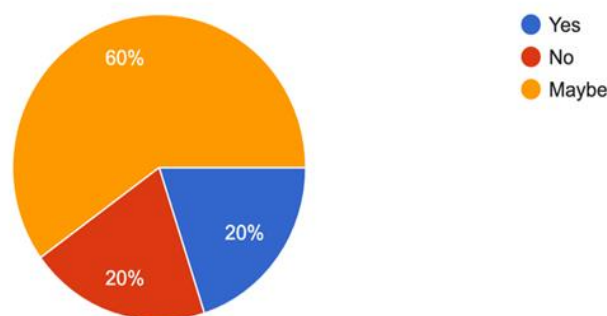
What are your top reasons for sticking with a smartphone brand? (Choose any 3)

25 responses



Would you buy the same brand again in your next purchase?

25 responses



Major Findings

The sample is primarily composed of 19-year-old male undergraduate students with a monthly allowance of less than ₹5,000.

Samsung and Vivo are the most used smartphone brands, highlighting a preference for a diverse range of Android devices.

The majority of students do not follow a fixed upgrade schedule, preferring to replace their phone only when it becomes unusable, suggesting purchases are necessity-driven rather than trend-driven.

A significant majority of respondents are either undecided ("Maybe" at 60%) or not loyal ("No" at 20%) when considering their next purchase, indicating a low overall brand loyalty within the sample.

The most important factors for brand loyalty are Quality & durability (72%), Value for money (60%), and Trust in brand (52%). In contrast, social and image-based factors like peer influence and brand status are rated as least important.

Online reviews (66.7%) and Friends/family recommendations (62.5%) are the most powerful sources of influence on purchasing decisions, far surpassing social media ads or in-store promotions.

The majority of students (52%) prefer a mid-range price for smartphones (₹20,001–₹30,000).

Students' top suggestions for improvements are related to hardware and performance, including better camera quality, increased storage, and faster refresh rates.

4. Conclusion

The study concludes that students' smartphone buying patterns are highly rational and practical, driven by the core attributes of the device rather than fleeting trends or brand image. They prioritize durability, value for money, and trust, and they are heavily influenced by impartial information from online reviews and personal recommendations from their social circle. The low level of brand loyalty suggests a highly competitive and fluid market where students are constantly evaluating their options based on performance and price.

5. Suggestions

Marketing campaigns should focus on the tangible benefits of the phone, such as long battery life, ample storage, and robust build quality, which are the most important factors for this segment. Companies should actively manage and encourage positive online reviews on e-commerce platforms and tech websites, as this is a primary source of information for students. Brands should create referral programs or incentivize existing customers to become advocates, as peer recommendations are a powerful driver of purchase decisions. Given the students' preference for mid-range phones, brands should offer feature-rich devices at competitive price points to capture a larger market share. Since a significant number of students value warranty and service, providing a seamless and positive after-sales experience can be a key differentiator in building long-term loyalty.

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