

RESE8419W: SUMMATIVE RESEARCH REPORT

An exploration into the effects of continuous
consumer research into consumer behaviour

Mieke Erasmus

Student Number: [REDACTED]

Supervisor: Dr Cerneels Coetzee

Word Count: 8273

Date: 5 December 2022

Declaration

I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the BA Honours in Strategic Brand Communication degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes.

Abstract

This study is *an exploration into the effects of continuous research into consumer behaviour outcomes – a study on smartphone brands*.

The fourth industrial revolution has seen significant technological advancements and has changed the world that we live in. Not only are modern consumers, specifically of smartphone brands, spoiled for choice, but there is also a myriad of research tools and methods available to research consumer behaviour.

Through qualitative and quantitative research, this study aimed to understand the effects of continuous research into consumer behaviour outcomes. To understand the motivation for this study, it is essential to note that '*effects*' in this context refers to successful or unsuccessful advertising, and '*outcomes*' refers to the desired action taken by consumers as established by smartphone brands.

What became evident through this research was that smartphone users undoubtedly evolve in terms of their needs and wants, life stages, external circumstances, and what they require to remain loyal to a specific smartphone brand.

The researcher anticipates that the results would aid smartphone brands in making better research and advertising decisions, including the variables essential to reassess and the need for adaptation based on consumer circumstances.

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1. Introduction

As is made evident in this paper, market research, particularly consumer research, has proven vital when developing marketing strategies and advertising campaigns. This study aimed to describe the role consumer research plays in delivering effective advertising to potential customers of smartphone brands, specifically when conducted continuously.

1.1. Context and Rationale

Historically successful brands have occasionally misread their consumers and produced tone-deaf or misguided advertising campaigns. Parumasur and Roberts-Lombard (2014) maintained that understanding consumer behaviour “can reduce the marketers’ chances of making the wrong decisions”.

In the past, successful technology brands collapsed when a newer, better alternative came along, such as BlackBerry, when Android and iPhone came on the scene (Savov, 2016).

Insufficient market research has led to not only product failures but advertising failures as well. An example is Dove’s “Real Beauty” campaign, which successfully ran for 15 years but suffered criticism when attempting to promote body positivity with curvy packaging (Bogost, 2017).

Though this example pertains to beauty brands, the premise can also be applied to technology brands, specifically smartphone brands.

External factors, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, have permanently altered consumer preferences and behaviour (Forbes Business Council, 2022). Thus, it is essential to consider how much consumer behaviour changes over time and how often to revisit user personas to ensure effective advertising.

This study was largely based on the assumption that, when going back to basics, successful advertising leads to sales or revenue. But what the study aimed to address in simple terms was, does successful advertising require smartphone brands to recurrently reassess their consumers in order to attain repeat-purchases and expand their market share?

1.2. Problem Statement

Smartphone brands that have mastered advertising to their target consumers are not insusceptible to failure.

The assumptions brands make about what satisfies their consumers versus the reality of what consumers want can adversely affect brands and their marketing efforts (Parumasur and Roberts-Lombard, 2014).

1.3. Purpose Statement

This study aimed to clarify how the lack of continuous consumer research may lead to ineffective advertising, explicitly pertaining to smartphone manufacturers/brands, and examine the cause-and-effect relationships between consumer research and successful marketing.

2. Research Questions

Some essential research questions and sub-questions were formulated to guide this study:

2.1. Primary Research Question

Does continuous research into consumer expectancies positively affect how smartphone brands communicate with consumers?

2.2. Secondary Research Questions

2.2.1. *Should smartphone brands continuously research the behaviour of their target consumers?*

- How often should smartphone brands redefine their buyer/user personas?
 - Do users or potential buyers evolve, or are they continuously replaced with new users/buyers?
 - What variables are essential to reassess recurrently?
 - Is it economically viable?
- Do smartphone brands influence their audiences or vice versa?

2.2.2. *Should smartphone brands adapt when their target consumers' circumstances change?*

- How do the external circumstances of consumers affect their interaction with/attitude toward the brand?
- How do consumers expect smartphone brands to be mindful of their circumstances?

3. Literature Review

3.1. Conceptualisation

Some recurrent terms that remained prevalent throughout this study included *consumer behaviour*, *market- and consumer research*, *consumer adoption*, *consumer loyalty* and *brand adaptation*.

Research into consumer behaviour, specifically pertaining to smartphone brands, was one of the overarching themes of this study. Based on the assumption that consumers are the quintessential part of brand success (Ahmed, 2020), this study aimed to shed light on the *frequency* and *extent* to which smartphone brands should research consumer needs and wants to be able to communicate their offerings effectively.

Du Plessis (2010) indicated that the more brand-loyal consumers are, the less advertising is required to reach marketing objectives. Similarly, Van Heerden (2010) stated that strong brand association is synonymous with brand loyalty, which prompts desired actions taken by consumers, in this case, repeat purchases.

Thus, one could conclude that consumer adoption or product purchasing, in other words, the desired action taken by consumers, has different facets and motivations, including brand loyalty, trust (brand association) and consumer-brand relationships.

What constitutes 'loyalty' or 'trust' is subjective (Ambavle, 2021); therefore, an opportunity ensued to study these phenomena in the context of smartphone brands and their consumers.

3.2. Theoretical Foundation

There are two overarching theories from seminal authors on which this study was based: first, The Uses and Gratification Theory by Katz and Blumler (1974) and second, The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing by Morgan and Hunt (1994).

3.2.1. The Uses and Gratification Theory (Blumler and Katz, 1974).

The Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) by Katz and Blumler (1974) can be viewed as the opposite of the Hypodermic Needle Theory, which suggests that audiences have no control over the media's influence in their lives (Perera, 2022). Thus, the UGT indicates that consumers have a choice in the media they consume and how said media influences them. This theory was a valuable basis for this study since brand trust, influence, and consumer-brand relationships were integral concepts to this research.

Exploring how smartphone brands utilise the influence of media on consumers, and if they do so successfully, was a solid foundation to establish the necessary inquiries, given that the purpose of this study was to discover consumer behaviour outcomes as an effect of continuous consumer research.

When dissecting the title and aim of this study, '*consumer behaviour*' to some extent indicates consumer attitudes toward smartphone brands, whereas '*outcomes*' indicates the effectiveness of advertising.

Thus, the two overarching themes described by UGT, namely consumer choice and media influence, correspond with the themes of this study.

According to Vinney (2022), UGT assumes that consumers are aware to a certain extent of their needs and what they expect to gain from exposing themselves to particular types of media. Based on this assumption, it is implicit that brands should grasp consumer expectations significantly. Therefore, this study's research questions and themes considered the necessity of continuously exploring these consumer expectations.

3.2.2. The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing by Morgan and Hunt (1994) suggests that relationship marketing relies on two key factors: commitment from brands to consumers and trust from consumers to brands.

The assumption that consumers base decision-making on trust was a critical component of this study; thus, the Commitment-Trust Theory was a valuable guide to determine whether smartphone brands influence their consumers or vice versa.

A recurrent premise in this study, as mentioned previously, was that consumers are essential to the success of any brand. Simply put, consumer loyalty could be considered volatile without trust and commitment. Therefore, the Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing guided the exploration of the cause-and-effect relationship between consumer research and successful marketing, arguably the central outcome of this study.

To elaborate, one can see the reciprocity of commitment and trust between brands and consumers. When consumer needs are satisfied, the brand is rewarded with consumer trust, leading to loyal consumers (Mack, 2022). However, this theory is not black-and-white, as brand loyalty is not interminable (Gordon, 2021). In fact, according to Gordon (2021), brand loyalty is something brands should strive to maintain. Therefore, a research opportunity arose to explore the conditions on which consumers remain loyal to brands and whether or not continuous consumer research by smartphone brands plays any significant role.

3.3. Overview of Existing Literature

Considering smartphone brands' unsuccessful advertising in the past, as mentioned above, it was essential to explore the reasons behind the said failure. The assumption of this study was that continuous research into consumer behaviour, or lack thereof, could be a determining factor in advertising success or failure.

The selection of existing literature aimed to discover what is known about consumer behaviour and advertising outcomes relating to smartphone brands and establish opportunities for further research.

The literature selected as a foundation for this study was based on specific criteria relevant to the problem, such as studies concerning consumer research, consumer adoption, and brand adaptation.

3.3.1. Importance of consumer research

Revella (2015) noted that buyer profiles had become a popular tool in marketing communications, primarily due to 'relationships' with users whom we have never met that can be formed by understanding the backgrounds and needs of individuals.

Given that the 'stories' of buyer personas vary, such as where they are in the decision-making process or their financial situations, it is essential to assess various aspects of each buyer profile to gain insight into the best way to advertise to each consumer segment.

Van Rooyen (2010:53) aptly stated that "consumer segmentation is the key to any successful advertising or communication plan" and that consumers should be profiled according to one or more criteria, such as demographics, psychographics and specific insights regarding consumer needs or mindsets.

Though consumer research methods and trends have shifted over the past few decades, the objective of consumer behaviour has remained the same; understanding consumer wants and needs to develop effective marketing strategies (Malter, Holbrook, Kahn, Parker and Lehman, 2020).

The above statement rings true throughout various publications on consumer behaviour and consumer research. However, little research has been done to detect how often brands should conduct consumer research and redefine their user personas.

Change is Constant

For the purposes of this study, the researcher aimed to discover whether consumers/users of smartphone brands evolve, or if they are continuously replaced.

Kotler (2017:19), in the context of the fourth industrial revolution, maintained that markets have been evolving recently, while also stating that there is a “new breed of customer”. When scrutinising this declaration, there is a disparity between whether consumers, or the market, evolves, or if the marketing landscape entirely changes due to consumers being replaced through time. A statement by Malter *et al.* (2020) corresponds with Kotler’s (2017) view on the modern-day consumer by acknowledging that consumer behaviour is evolving.

When examining specific trends or methods of marketing, it becomes evident that the modes of advertising to consumers and their preferred products change over time. An example of this is the increase in smartphone users (Zia and Iftikhar, 2018) which has led to more research on mobile marketing in recent years (Nguyen, 2021).

A review by Nguyen (2021) provided evidence of a need for research on consumer behaviour and presented a research gap in consumer trust and loyalty.

A study done by Ghorbanzadeh, Saeednia and Rahehagh (2020), with a strong focus on brand trust and partially based on the smartphone industry, noted that the lives of consumers are, to some extent, defined by brands.

Variables to reassess

According to Wong, Chang and Yey (2018), brand commitment is a key factor in brand switching behaviour, thus, brand commitment could be one of the variables smartphone brands should reassess.

Similarly, a post hoc study done by Vera-Martinez (2021) came to the conclusion that consumer-brand perception and consumer reflection are essential to successful branding strategies.

The study by Wong *et al.* (2018), however, primarily focuses on switching costs and consumption values as a cause for brand switching, neglecting the influence of advertising on brand commitment and consumer-brand relationships. Contrarily, the study by Vera-

Martinez (2021) considers that personal self-involvement is evident in advertising efforts by brands such as Apple.

However, both of these articles emphasise the importance of consumers as a component to brand success.

Recall Kotler's (2017) statement regarding the present-day consumer, who has a very different response to brands and marketing communication than previous generations. For example, though today's consumer is constantly bombarded with advertising given their interactions with various digital platforms, they also favour personal connections with brands (Kotler, 2017); likely an additional variable to reassess.

Thus, consumer research is undoubtedly a worthwhile exercise.

Economic viability

Since this study aims to discover the importance and need for frequent consumer research, a significant aspect to consider is the economic impact of such research on smartphone brands. Knihová (2021) noted that marketing budgets are decreasing; and while this decrease has a definite impact on the feasibility of recurrent consumer research, Knihová (2021) also noted that there are copious amounts of consumer data at technology brands' disposal.

Van Rooyen (2010) mentioned that, since formulating accurate consumer segments is crucial to successful advertising, there are ample research organisations that alleviate brands from having to conduct consumer research themselves. The question remains, however, if there are so many available tools in consumer research, if they are not being used recurrently, why not?

Taking the above into account, further research must be done to evaluate whether or not frequent, continuous consumer research by smartphone brands is viable; in terms of both time allotment and budget allocation.

3.3.2. Whether smartphone brands influence their audience or vice versa

Razak, Hidayat, Launtu, Kusuma Putra and Bahasoan (2020) conducted an investigation into the relevance of brand attitude, -awareness, and -reputation among other factors through modern marketing science. Razak et al. (2020), noted that Apple's strong brand reputation and identity from consumer perspectives was the overarching reason for its success. Similar to an observation made by Vera-Martinez (2021), Razak et al. (2020:308) maintained that "the brand can also describe the character of consumers who own the product".

These findings provide evidence that brands influence their consumers, however, the extent to which this is true is unknown, especially considering that consumers might have a larger influence on brands. This provides the opportunity to further investigate the influence consumers and smartphone brands have on one another.

3.3.3. The cause-and-effect relationship between consumer research and consumer adoption

One of the findings stipulated in a study done by Giovanis *et al.* (2017), is that the generation of consumer-brand relationships has a strong influence on brand trust and loyalty. What remains to be seen, however, is what constitutes brand trust and loyalty and whether this is a valuable topic for further inquiry by smartphone brands.

Brand loyalty is essential to profitability and creating a steady stream of income (Keller, 2013). Thus, smartphone brands should understand what their consumers require to remain loyal and take the desired action, possibly attained by advertising.

According to Armstrong (2022), South African consumers have a myriad of choices in smartphone brands, which reiterates the importance of attaining customer loyalty, possibly by (a) relationship marketing or (b) consumer research.

3.3.4. The need for adaptation based on consumer preference/circumstances

An aforementioned study on educational content in digital marketing by Knihová (2021), illuminated the cogency of changing consumer circumstances such as the Covid-19 pandemic, which is complemented by Andrljic, Sostar and Banozic (2020:7) who aptly stated that “[t]he only thing that is constant is change”. Both of these studies touch on fluctuating circumstances and needs of consumers, thus providing an excellent research opportunity to discover how consumers expect brands to be mindful of their circumstances.

Given that the abovementioned articles illuminate the consistency of change in consumer behaviour and -circumstances, a clear opportunity arose to explore consumer research as a prerequisite for consumer adoption.

Competition

When one considers the need for effective advertising as a precondition for a steady revenue stream, as mentioned above, as well as the importance of consumer loyalty, both illuminate an overarching goal: gaining and maintaining a consumer base to stay relevant in the market.

As stated by Van Rooyen (2010), direct competitors are brands that fulfil the same consumer needs with a similar product; which perfectly describes the market situation of smartphone brands.

Keller (2013) affirmed that the market is saturated in many ways, and increased competition has forced marketers to apply cost advantages to maintain or grow their customer base. Recall that Wong *et al.* (2018) mentioned switching costs as a prime cause of brand switching. The relevance here is that consumer circumstances change, and discovering whether these circumstances, for example a change in income levels, change the attitudes consumers have toward brands is essential.

4. Research Design and Methodology

4.1. Paradigmatic Approach

This study was primarily based on exploratory research; thus, the paradigm most applicable was critical realism. According to Du Plooy-Cilliers (2014), critical realism aims to understand and explain phenomena rather than predict them. Critical realism is also a mixed-method approach to research (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014).

As is evident in the literature review, consumer-brand relationships and trust are recurring themes, or phenomena, in this study. These phenomena were examined in the context of successful advertising based on previous research and evidence derived from qualitative secondary research.

Both quantitative and qualitative research was used to increase the legitimacy of this study.

4.1.1. Epistemology

Given that critical realism exists between interpretivism and positivism (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014), the mixed-method approach of this study assumed that the quantitative results formed part of an observational view. In contrast, the qualitative results were interpreted subjectively.

4.1.2. Ontology

Jansen (2019) explained that the concept of empiricism includes exposing a substantial difference between objectivity and subjectivity. Du Plooy-Cilliers (2014) set out the belief that reality changes over time as a characterisation of the ontological approach of critical realism.

The above is an accurate description of the ontology of this study, as one of the main focal points was the change in consumer expectation and how said change influences the success of communication by smartphone brands.

4.1.3. Axiology

The axiology of this study was primarily based on subjectivism, as what is deemed as successful outcomes of continuous consumer behaviour is subject to individual perception.

4.2. Research Approach

Given the exploratory nature of this study, the researcher found it suitable to employ a combination of qualitative- and quantitative research.

The research design included a mixed-method approach involving methodological triangulation, which, according to Frey (2022:1732), “engages multiple methods to study a single problem”. The qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were used interchangeably throughout the research process.

The design of this study was be cross-sectional, that is, conducted once over a few months, and followed a deductive direction.

The mode of inquiry of this study was a combination of qualitative and quantitative research and followed a non-experimental research design in the form of a questionnaire.

The approach started with secondary qualitative research to explore facets of the critical concepts stipulated, which was then supplemented with the collection and interpretation of primary research to draw conclusions and attempt to answer the research questions specified.

According to Ivankova, Creswell and Plano Clark (2019), the advantages of a mixed-method research approach include a better understanding of complex issues or phenomena, studying topics or information from different perspectives and allowing for holistic analysis of research problems.

This study followed an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design which, according to Ivankova *et al.* (2019), includes exploring a topic qualitatively, analysing qualitative data, collecting supplementary quantitative data and establishing new variables.

4.3. Population and Sampling Methods

4.3.1. Population

The population for this study can be divided into two groups; both human respondents and social artefacts.

Human Respondents

The population, the entire group of individuals who share characteristics relevant to this specific research study based on the purpose of the investigation, required three attributes; English-speaking, South African individuals (for ease of data collection) who own smartphones (due to the topic at hand).

Given the inestimable size of the total population, certain parameters were defined on which to base a sampling method. Based on the research problem and -questions, the population parameters included Millennials, as this age group, according to YPulse (2022), remembers a time before smartphones were such an integral part of our lives. Thus, Millennials grew up with the rise of technology (Calinoiu, 2020) and could provide critical insights based on their experiences with smartphone brands.

Social Artefacts

The population of social artefacts were written publications, articles and books containing information about technology brands, consumer behaviour, and consumer research in general. There was no restriction on the geographic locations in which previous relevant studies were conducted, as this study included concepts which are not limited to South African brands or respondents.

The purpose for using social artefacts in addition to human respondents was 1. to guide the researcher in developing a survey that would aptly answer the research questions and 2. to provide context and gain a deeper understanding of the data collected from human respondents.

4.3.2. Sampling

Non-probability, purposive sampling was used due to the exploratory nature of this study. The sample of 30 respondents, namely South African Millennials who own smartphones and have access to the internet, was procured by employing convenience sampling due to ease of access for the researcher.

Specifically, the research tool was distributed via social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Reddit and Facebook, and contained screening questions to ensure respondents' characteristics, ages, and locations were within the parameters established. The researcher actively followed the number of respondents and disabled participation once the limit of 30 respondents was reached.

The sample of written publications were based on specific topics and elements relevant to this study; including, but not limited to, brand trust and influence, successes and failures of smartphone brands, consumer research (specifically on Millennials and smartphone users), and Millennial consumer buying behaviour.

4.4. Data Collection Methodology

The secondary research used for qualitative examination included written artefacts, texts and publications, with the intention to increase validity of the information attained throughout. The motivation for this data to be investigated qualitatively is that there were no guarantees that quantitative variables measured in pre-existing research would be relevant to this study (Bhandari, 2022).

The qualitative data was obtained through secondary research related to the objectives of this study, in an attempt to guide the design of the primary research tool – an online survey (Annexure B).

The best option to ensure valid quantitative results to supplement the initial qualitative information collected was the use of a questionnaire (Bhandari, 2022).

The questionnaire was developed after collecting secondary information to further understand the themes or concepts recognised while examining qualitative sources.

The questionnaire, created on Google forms, was presented in English and primarily included closed-ended questions to simplify the process of response by the sample. Another purpose of closed-ended questions was to streamline the quantitative data analysis.

To increase validity, additional secondary research augmented the quantitative results of the online survey to further facilitate the deriving of insights. The survey design included the following types of questions:

- Closed-ended questions
- One open-ended question
- Matrix question: Likert scale
- Multiple choice questions

4.4.1. Screening

Initial screening questions were asked to ensure that the respondents of the survey possess the specific characteristics relevant to this study, as evident in Annexure B.

The answers to the screening questions mentioned above clarified that all respondents were South African millennials with a smartphone.

Furthermore, to establish the age distribution of individual respondents, each Millennial in the sample population was required to specify their current age.

4.4.2. Section 1

To answer the primary research question, “Does continuous research into consumer expectancies positively affect how smartphone brands communicate with consumers?” the researcher must first address the secondary sub-questions.

Thus, the first section attempted to answer secondary research questions which aim to discover (1) how often smartphone brands should redefine their buyer/user personas and (2) whether they should adapt according to consumer circumstances.

The questions asked in this section were formulated as multiple choice to simplify the data analysis process.

4.4.3. Section 2

To answer the primary research question as stated above, the second section focused on the importance of consumer research by smartphone brands. This section included a combination of one Likert scale, four multiple choice-, and one open-ended question to determine the respondents’ personal views.

4.5. Data Analysis Methods

The secondary data collected (online publications, journals, books, etc.) was analysed manually by subjectively determining the significance of the themes and concepts derived from the content.

In contrast, the primary data collected via Google Forms was exported as an Excel document (Annexure C), which enabled the researcher to organise and prepare the quantitative data for analysis.

The quantitative data gathered through an online survey was interpreted and analysed using manual calculations and automatic functions of Microsoft Excel.

The use of descriptive statistics predominantly focused on correlation and causation in order to explore cause-and-effect relationships between phenomena. The results were interpreted against the qualitative data collected, and presented using graphs, charts, and thematic written analysis.

4.6. Validity

To increase the trustworthiness of a qualitative study, Nieuwenhuis (2019:144) suggested “a theoretical underpinning that is aligned with the research question”, as well as the use of purposive sampling and documented analysis, all of which were present in this study.

To increase the validity and reliability of this study, the research instrument used for quantitative data collection was based on secondary data, and was submitted to a supervisor to ensure cogency.

Furthermore, the mixed-method approach of this study ensured additional legitimacy of the results.

4.7. Ethical Considerations and Limitations

4.7.1. Ethics

- The literature from other sources were subjectively interpreted and was by no means plagiarised.
- Data from questionnaires was not replicated, and respondents were kept confidential.
- Persons under 18 were not considered respondents for this study.
- All participation from respondents was purely voluntary, and respondents were by no means compensated for their participation.
- All research was done in accordance with the IIE's Ethical Clearance requirements.

4.7.2. Limitations

- Due to limited funds and time constraints, smartphone brands were not able to participate in this study actively.
- The primary research aspect of this study was limited to South African Millennials only.
- The study only aimed to answer specific questions based on the research objectives defined; thus, extensive analysis could not be conducted.

5. Findings and interpretation

5.1. Screening

Given the parameters of required characteristics of respondents, the researcher ensured that only South Africans between the ages of 25 to 40 were able to complete the questionnaire.

The numeric frequency distribution of the respondents' ages is summarised in the histogram (Figure 1) below, demonstrating that the majority (over 45%) of the respondents were among the youngest (ages 25-27) Millennials.

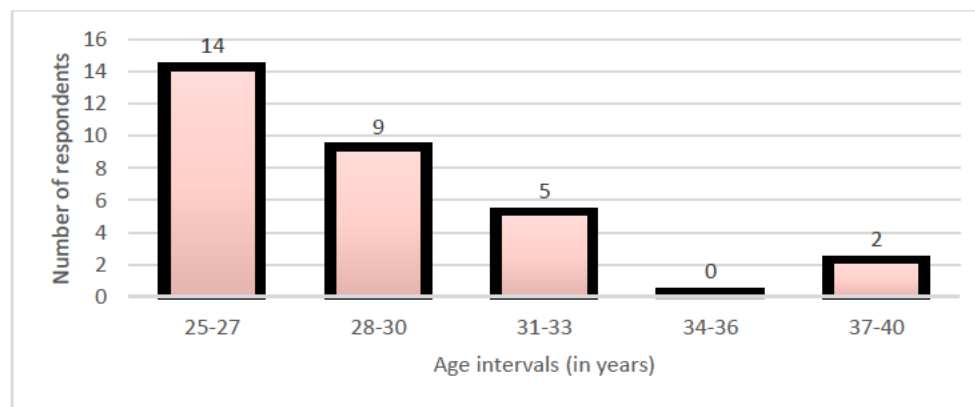


Figure 1: Histogram - Ages of respondents

5.2. Section 1

As mentioned in the methodology section of this paper, the first section of the questionnaire explored the frequency at which smartphone brands should reassess their buyer personas, as well as the need for adaptation according to consumer circumstances.

To examine whether the sample population, i.e., consumers of smartphone brands, evolved or if they were replaced, the researcher asked respondents what age they were when they acquired their first smartphone.

According to Wagner (2016), a correlation coefficient ($-1 \leq r \leq +1$) represents the strength of a linear relationship between two numeric variables.

An r correlation coefficient of 0.6 was returned, as evident in Figure 2 below, suggesting that there is a moderate positive linear correlation between the current ages of respondents, and the number of years they have owned a smartphone.

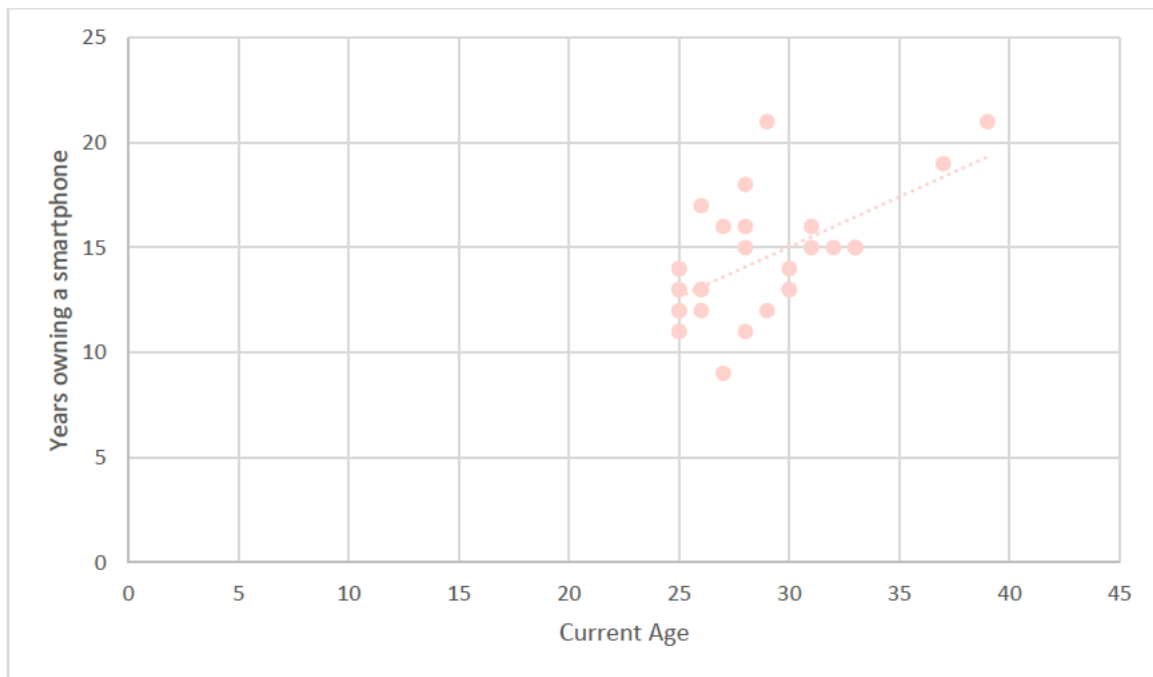


Figure 2: Linear correlation between the current ages of respondents, and the number of years they have owned a smartphone

Figure 2 above illustrates that, more often than not, the younger the respondent, the earlier they acquired their first smartphone.

Exploring whether smartphone brands' target audiences evolve required the researcher to ask respondents what their first smartphone brand was, and what their current smartphone brand is to discover whether they are still loyal to their original brand. The results are summarised in Figure 3 below:

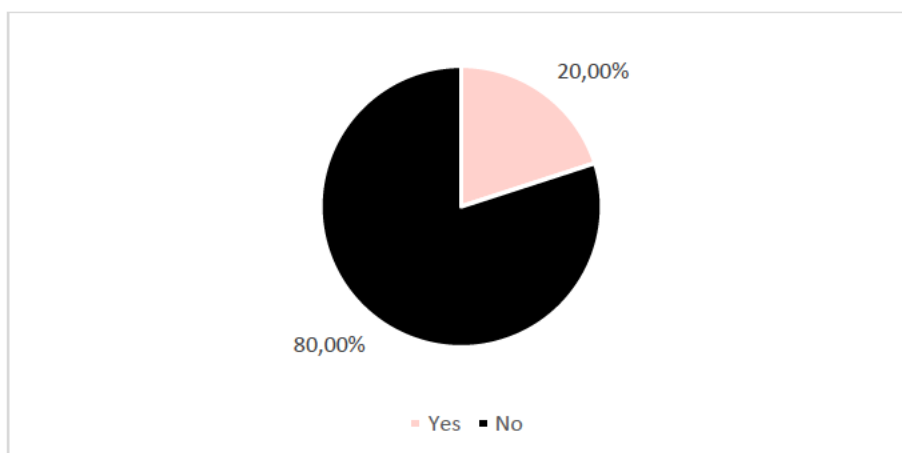


Figure 3: Pie Chart - Respondents still loyal to their original brand

As mentioned in the population description, Millennials grew up with the rise of technology and, in accordance with a statement made by YPulse (2022), 92% of respondents stated that they remember, or might remember a time without smartphones (refer to Figure below).

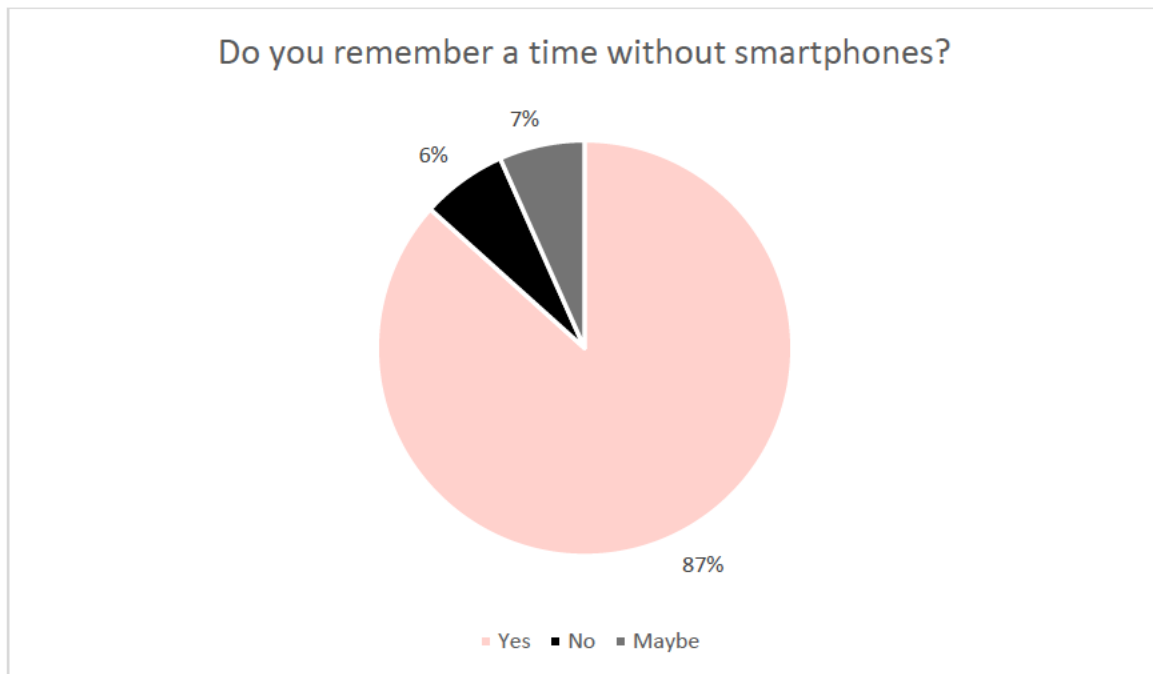


Figure 4: Responses to "Do you remember a time without smartphones?"

To establish the variables important for smartphone brands to reassess, and whether the external circumstances of consumers change their attitude toward smartphone brands, the researcher asked respondents, if applicable, what their primary reason for switching brands was.

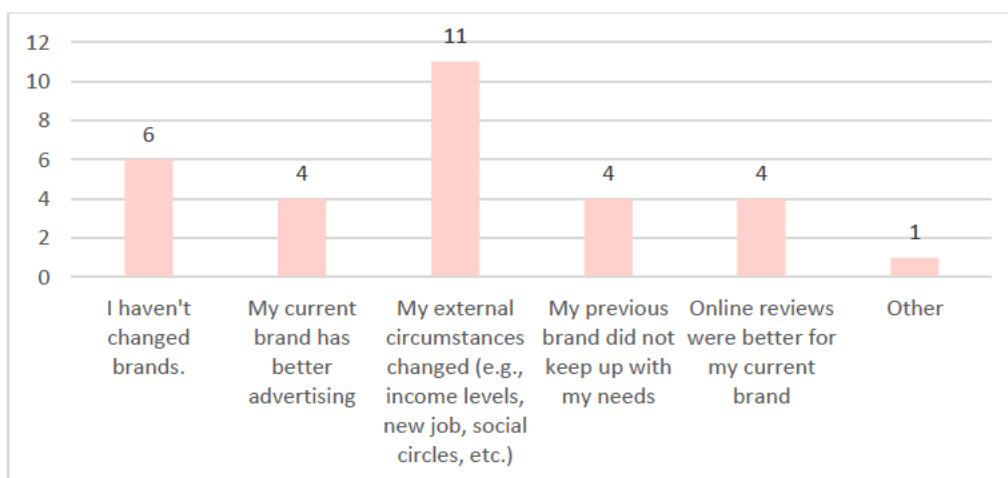


Figure 5: Bar Chart - Reasons for switching brands

The results in Figure 5 above suggest that the primary reason for switching brands among respondents was their external circumstances changing.

It is interesting to note that of the four respondents stating that their previous brand did not keep up with their needs, three are now with Apple. Similarly, of the 11 respondents who selected their changing circumstances as their primary reason for switching, eight are now with Apple. Refer to Figure 6 below:

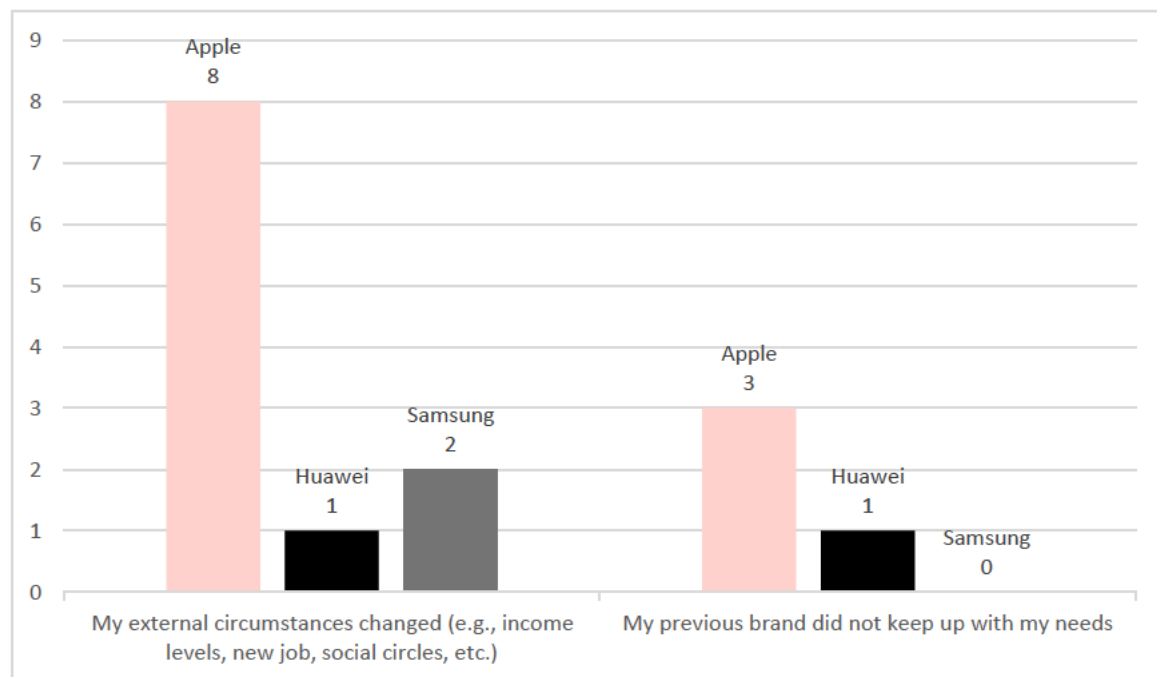


Figure 6: Bar chart - Apple evolving with consumer needs and circumstances

5.3. Section 2

Though the researcher already asked respondents what their first smartphone was and what their current smartphone is, the researcher needed to establish whether consumers have evolved in terms of loyalty, given the cognizance that loyalty is not interminable, as stated previously. Thus, the researcher decided to ask whether respondents view themselves as being loyal to their current smartphone brands. The results are summarised in Figure 7 below.



Figure 7: Loyalty to current smartphone brands

To further explore the need for adaptation by smartphone brands, the researcher asked respondents whether they trust their current brand to keep up with their needs, of which the majority responded “Yes”. The results are depicted in Figure 8 below:

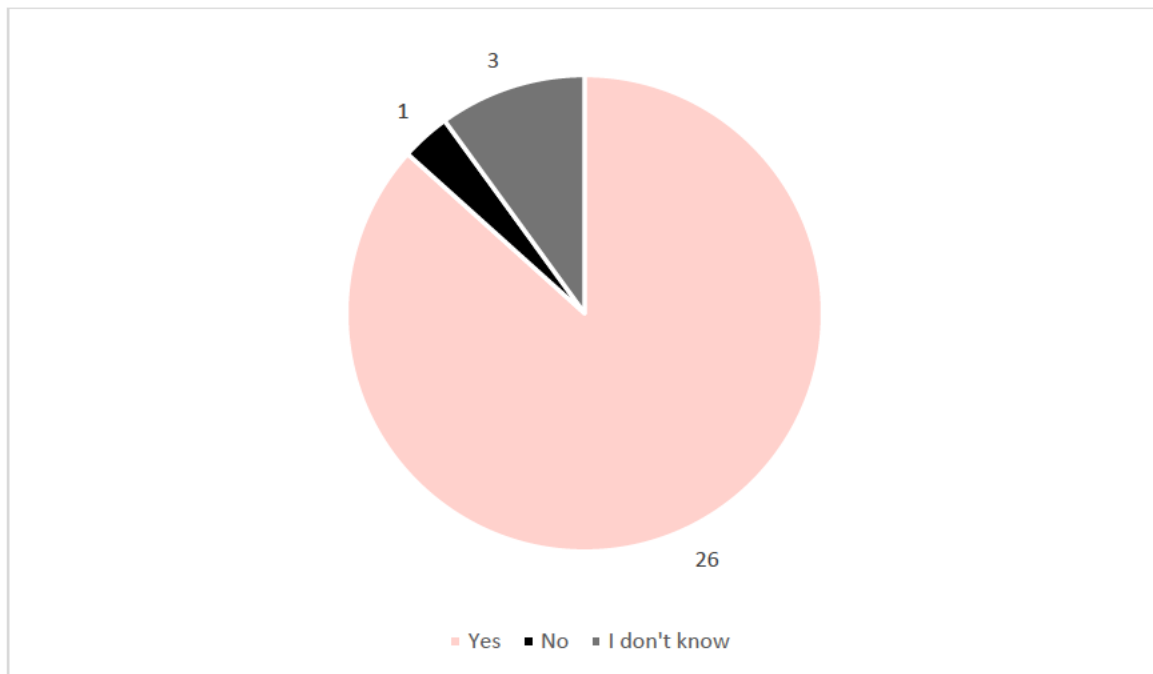


Figure 8: Pie chart - Respondents' trust in their current smartphone brand

Once again, Apple is in the lead with consumer trust, with 100% of respondents who own Apple smartphones stating that they trust their brand to keep up with their needs, followed by 77.7% of Samsung users and 71.4% of Huawei users (refer to Figure 9 below).

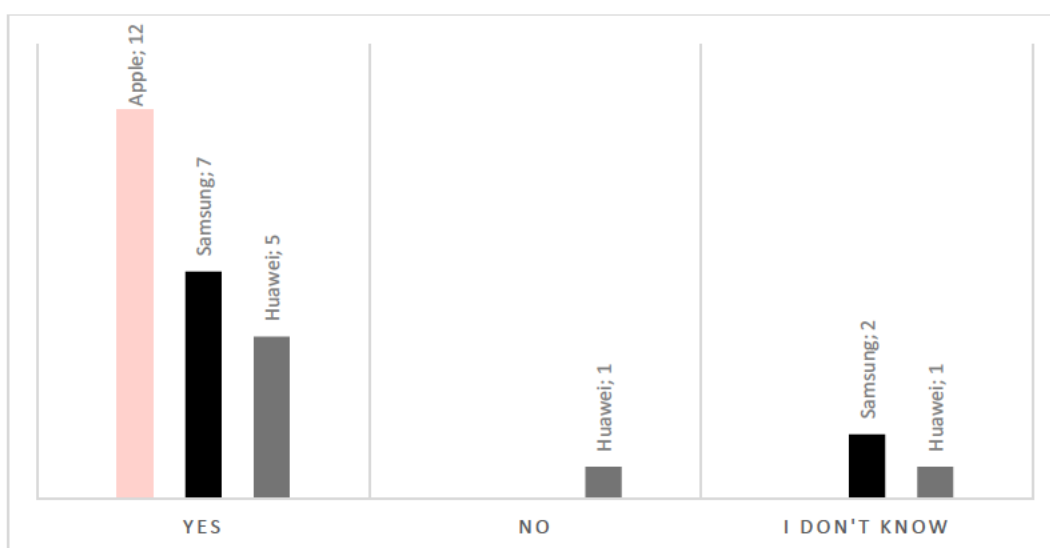


Figure 9: Bar chart - Consumer trust in their current smartphone brands - Apple, Samsung, Huawei

It is also worth noting that the majority of Apple users among respondents feel that they have a strong relationship with their current smartphone brand, and that the majority of Huawei users stated that they do not have a strong relationship with their current smartphone brand (refer to Figure 10 below).

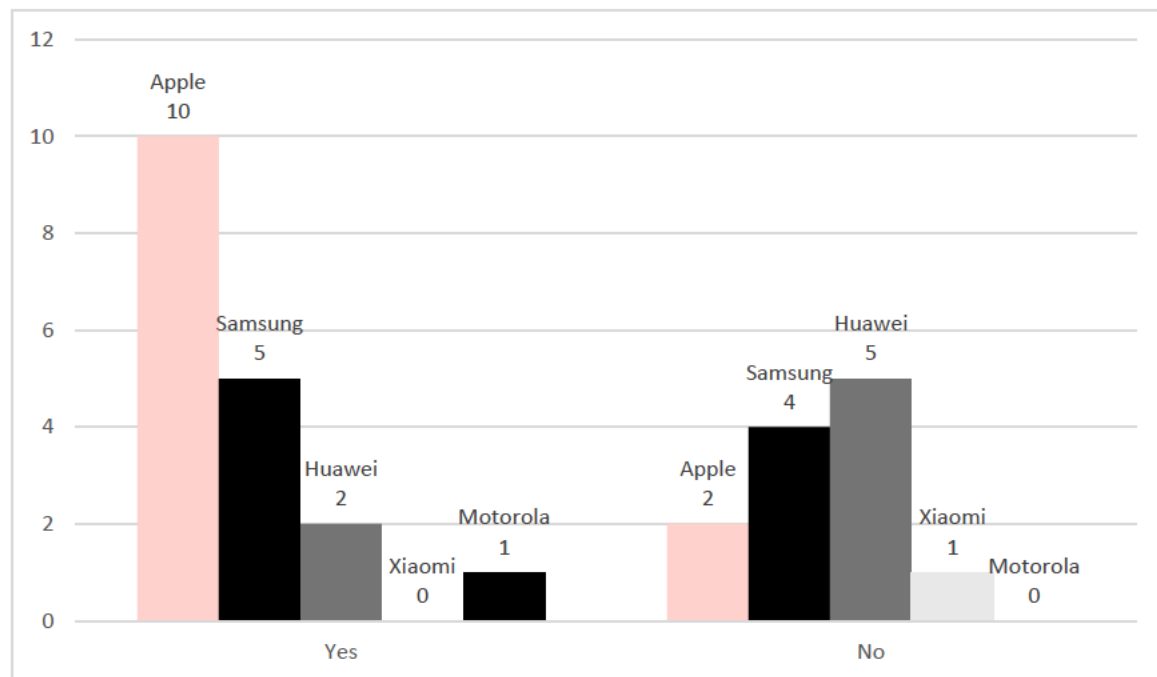


Figure 10: Bar chart - Consumer relationships with current smartphone brands

According to Calinoiu (2020), generations preceding Millennials are more price-sensitive and loyal to brands. Calinoiu (2020) also stated that “loyalty to the brands Millennials buy is relative”, suggesting that loyalty is earned through what Millennials deem credible.

According to Business Wire (2017), Chatmeter provided research that verified the reliability of online reviews and their influence on brand-consumer trust, which, combined with sentiment analysis engines, would aid brands in understanding consumer experiences and expectations.

To verify this statement, the researcher asked respondents whether or not online reviews have an influence on their smartphone preferences. The results are summarised in Figure 11 below:

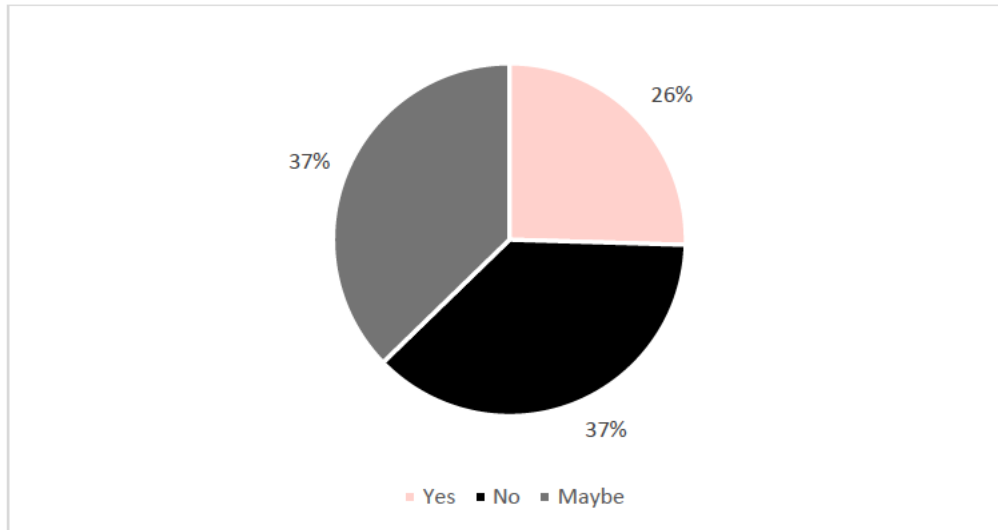


Figure 11: Pie Chart - The influence of online reviews on smartphone purchasing decisions

When referring to Figure 11, it is evident that 63% of respondents feel that online reviews have or might have an influence on their smartphone purchasing decisions, however, of the four respondents who selected better online reviews as the primary reason for brand-switching, one stated that online reviews do not have an influence in their purchasing behaviour. This suggests that the primary data concerning online reviews is unreliable and should be disregarded.

To explore whether continuous consumer research by smartphone brands has a positive effect on its advertising, respondents were asked whether advertising has an influence on their smartphone purchasing decisions (refer to Figure 12 below).

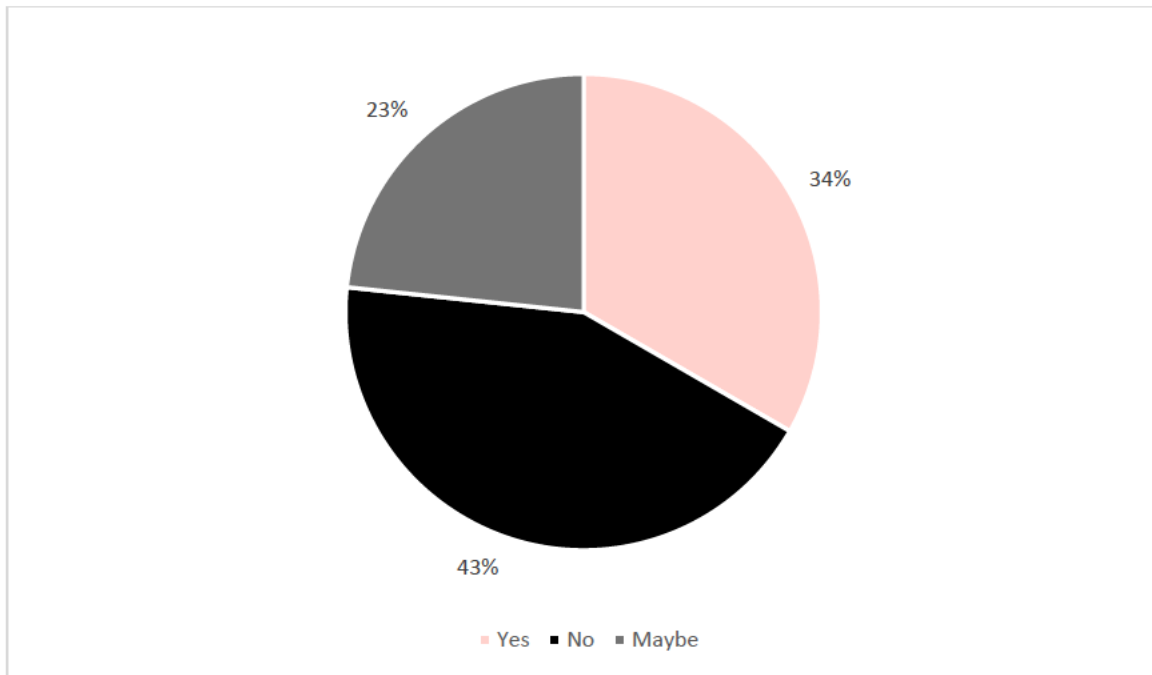


Figure 12: Pie chart - The influence of advertising on smartphone purchasing decisions

It is worth noting that 77% of respondents stated that advertising has or might have an influence on their smartphone purchasing decisions, where only 13.3% rated better advertising as their primary reason for switching brands.

Thus, advertising undoubtedly has an influence on consumer purchasing decisions, but the majority of smartphone brands are not advertising efficiently.

The final question the researcher asked respondents was what they thought the most important thing is that their smartphone brand should know about them. The results were as follows:

What do you think is the most important thing your smartphone brand needs to know about you and your needs?
Nothing
My two highest concerns are reliability and battery performance
I think I'm a pretty unique individual on this, at least I've never met anyone in my situation: got my first cellphone in 1996, but my first smartphone only in 2012, at the age of 29, and the most shocking thing, at least to all my friends, is the fact that I've never changed it. Yes, I still use my 10yo Samsung Galaxy Note 2, basically only for calls and taking notes with the S-pen. Everything else is done on my desktop pc, and if it counts in your survey, I do not use any form of social media.
My needs
A multifunctional device will be used for both personal and business use
Prioritising the camera
Camera quality
It's important that it has options to personalize accordingly to my needs and likes
That I am loyal to convenience, not the brand. Inasmuch as they are invested in getting my money.
Technical expectations
I want a small screen
My desired smartphone functional needs
How to meet them
Most important for me is data storage and ease of use.
iPhone forever
I need privacy, a beautiful phone and a fantastic camera.
To maintain having long lasting products
I shouldn't break easily, good camera, good ram.
N/A
How much I am willing to pay
The amount of internal storage is the most important.
Innovation
That I love convenience!
That I want a smaller phone with better battery life
I want the best phone option that will cover all of my requirements at a reasonable and affordable price.
Reliability, when i need my phone to work I'd like to be able to use it. Keep charging cables the same, stop changing it to different sizes, plugs, etc.

They don't support Google anymore. This means that lots of apps are not accessible.
Long battery life, be able to handle very strenuous testing from a development perspective
Easily communicate features not specifications
User friendly

Table 1: Results of what consumers deem important for smartphone brands to know

From the above results, the researcher derived several key requirements that smartphone brands should be aware of, according to respondents. Figure 13 below depicts the number of times these requirements were addressed by respondents:

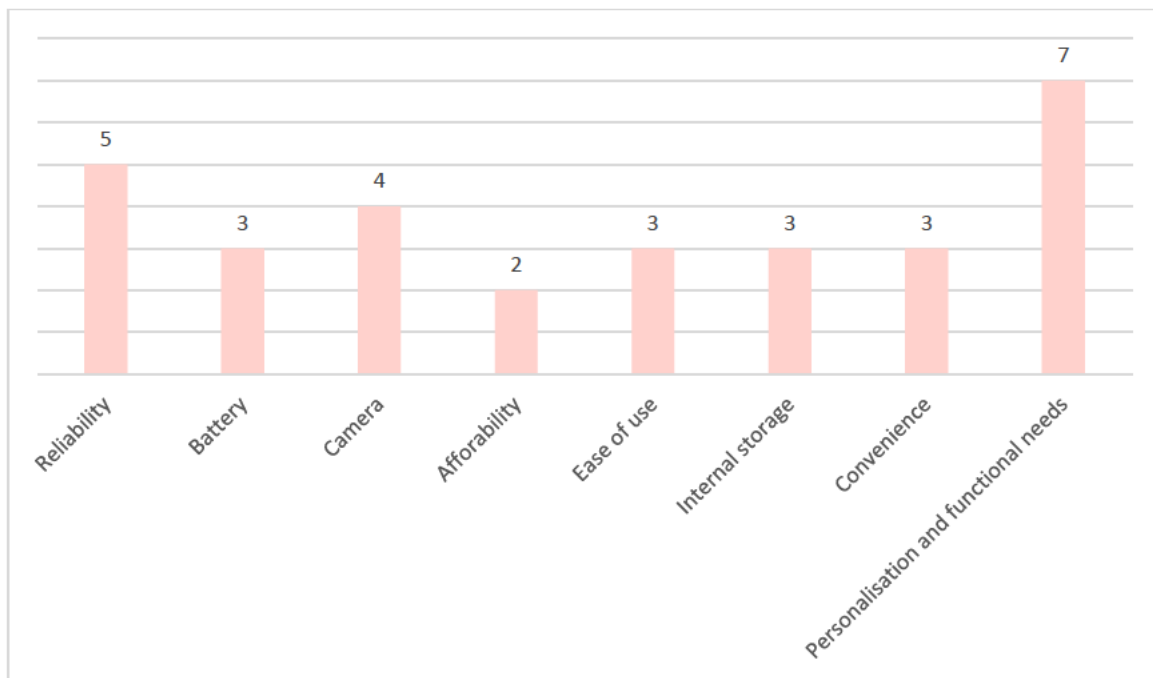


Figure 13: Bar chart - Consumer requirements

6. Addressing the Research Questions

The research questions derived to guide this study were examined extensively using primary, secondary, qualitative and quantitative data.

The researcher subjectively interpreted the findings to assign meaning to the data collected in the context of the research topic and previous literature.

As previously explained, addressing secondary research questions and sub-questions precedes addressing the primary research question.

To explore whether smartphone brands should continuously research the behaviour of their target consumers, the researcher attempted to discover how often they should redefine their buyer/user personas.

A concept reiterated multiple times through the development of this study is “change is constant”. It is evident that ideal consumer profiles are a valuable tool for marketers in any industry, but establishing how often these profiles should be revisited and adjusted requires a deeper understanding of the evolution of consumers.

To answer the question, “do users or potential buyers evolve or are they continuously replaced?” the researcher found it viable to explore whether older respondents acquired their first smartphone at an older age than younger respondents. The results (as depicted in Figure 2) suggested that, in most cases, older respondents acquired their first smartphone later in life than younger respondents. From this, we can assume that 1. the need for smartphones among younger consumers is increasing as time goes on, and 2. the market size is expanding due to an increasing dispersion between the ages of smartphone users.

A possible reason for smartphone users starting at a younger age could be the evolution of smartphones. The features they possess are no longer exclusive to working professionals but suitable for consumers of virtually any age. Thus, it might not be practical to say that consumers are replaced, but what is evident from the research conducted is that 1. consumers evolve in terms of their needs, wants, and knowledge, and 2. smartphone brands have increasingly more consumers to market to, which is a notion supported by Zia and Iftikhar (2018), as mentioned in the literature review section of this study.

Recall the importance of consumer segmentation by several factors noted by Van Rooyen (2010). Considering the above, it becomes evident that, due to an increase in potential consumers, smartphone brands have increasingly more segments or methods of segmentation to consider.

Given that these consumer segments now also include smartphone users under 18, smartphone brands have much more responsibility regarding modes and methods of advertising than they might have had in the past.

A research gap presented in the initial literature revision, and a recurring premise in this study, was consumer trust and loyalty evolution. As brand trust and loyalty are linked closely to consumer adoption, as evident throughout the literature review section of this study, these themes are essential to reassess, particularly in the context of Millennials.

Figure 3 suggests that only 20% of respondents are loyal to their original smartphone brand; however, Figure 5 demonstrates that over 60% of respondents lean toward extreme loyalty to their current smartphone brands.

When referring to Figure 3 and Figure 7 in conjunction with one another, it is evident that the same consumers who were not loyal to their original smartphone brand view themselves as being dedicated to their current smartphone brands.

Therefore, these results suggest that consumers evolve in terms of loyalty.

Armstrong (2022) summarised a study by Statista in 2021, which investigated “how likely South African consumers are to buy a device from a different brand”.

The results summarised in Figure 14 below depict that Apple is at the forefront of retaining customers compared to Samsung and Huawei (Armstrong, 2022).



Figure 14: Apple Leads on Smartphone Loyalty in South Africa

According to the primary research conducted, the results coincide with the findings by Statista (Armstrong, 2022) in that of the seven respondents whose first smartphone brand was Blackberry, over 50% are now with Apple (refer to Figure 15 below).

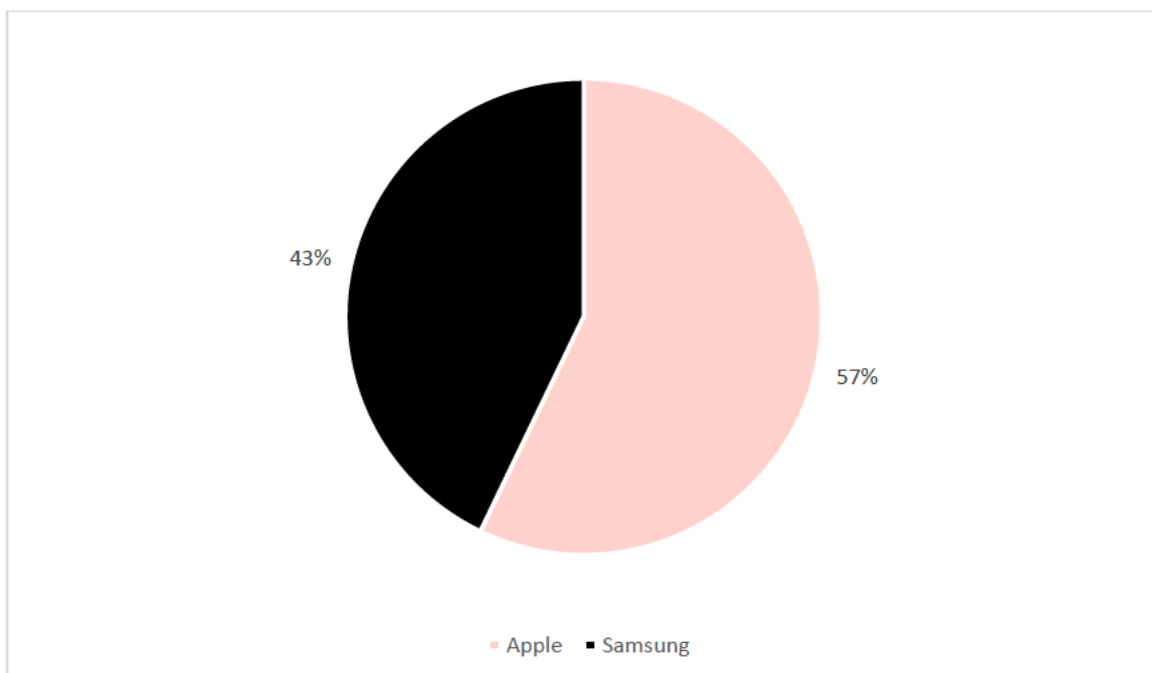


Figure 15: Pie Chart - Blackberry replaced by Apple and Samsung

Calinoiu (2020) considered the differences between Generation Z and Millennials in the context of consumer evolution and expectations and noted that changing trends and technologies need to be considered by all organisations.

Leung (2022) confirmed that the first BlackBerry smartphone became a highly sought-after device after its release in 2002 but struggled to contend with its rivals in the early 2010s, primarily brought on by the release of the Apple iPhone in 2007. The first iPhone's touchscreen feature was one of the more significant selling points, which led to the launch of the BlackBerry Storm in 2008 (Leung, 2022). However, with this smartphone came the exclusion of a QWERTY keypad, which was disconcerting to customers (Leung, 2022). This is yet another example of failure due to a lack of consumer research.

According to Leung (2022), BlackBerry's demise started when trying to build a new operating system to compete with Apple. However, by the time this endeavour was complete, BlackBerry had already lost most of its market share.

Given that Apple was integral to the downturn of Blackberry, the results depicted in Figure 14 support the notion that brands should keep up with evolving trends and technologies to stay relevant, which Apple did successfully, according to this research.

When exploring the research supplied on Blackberry and Apple, it becomes evident that Blackberry initially successfully researched their target audiences but was eventually displaced by the likes of Apple and Samsung (Figure 6), suggesting that Blackberry's consumer research largely deteriorated, allowing other smartphone brands to swoop in and take their market share.

When examining the influence of advertising on purchasing decisions in conjunction with advertising as a brand-switching driver, it becomes evident that advertising has the power to persuade consumers, but only when done correctly. Thus, smartphone brands should continuously research consumer expectancies in order to communicate their offerings effectively.

When examining the brand positioning strategy of BlackBerry (previously Research in Motion) since its inception, it becomes clear that the company continuously researched their target audiences until ultimately launching the first BlackBerry, which could send and receive emails – a key differentiator giving customers the freedom “not to be tethered to their computers” (Mohammed, 2022). Given that the likes of Apple and Samsung ultimately replaced Blackberry, it becomes evident that Blackberry failed to *research its target consumers continuously*.

The results of Figure 5 also imply that consumers evolve regarding life stages, income levels, and immediate functional needs.

Figure 5 suggests that smartphone brands should continuously reassess the significant life stages of their target audience to prevent them from switching to another brand.

The researcher asked an open-ended question to determine what variables are essential to reassess recurrently and concluded that personalisation and functional needs are among smartphone brands’ most significant research objectives. Following these results were reliability, camera-, storage- and battery-related features, and convenience and affordability.

Of the four respondents who selected better advertising as their brand-switching driver, three currently use Huawei smartphones. Based on this insight, the researcher found examining Huawei regarding consumer-brand relationships, loyalty, and brand-consumer trust worthwhile.

The researcher assigned the following values to consumer loyalty, brand trust, and consumer-brand relationships to test whether there is a correlation between the loyalty of Huawei customers and how much they trust the brand, and loyalty of Huawei customers and whether or not they feel they have a strong relationship to the brand:

Loyalty	
10	Extremely loyal to Huawei
5	Moderately loyal to Huawei
0	Not loyal to Huawei
Trust	
10	Trusts Huawei to keep up with their needs
5	Unsure if they trust Huawei to keep up with their needs
0	Does not trust Huawei to keep up with their needs
Relationship	
10	Feels they have a strong relationship with Huawei
0	Feels they do not have a strong relationship with Huawei

Table 2: Values assigned to levels of loyalty, trust, and consumer-brand relationships - Huawei

The results were as follows:

Loyalty	Trust	Relationship
10	10	10
10	10	10
5	10	0
5	0	0
5	5	0
5	10	0
5	10	0

Table 3: Scores achieved for loyalty, trust and relationship with Huawei

In terms of a correlation between brand loyalty and consumer-brand relationships, an r^2 coefficient of 1 was returned, suggesting a perfect correlation. On the other hand, in terms of a correlation between brand loyalty and trust, an r^2 coefficient of 0,1385 was returned, suggesting a very weak correlation. The results are summarised in Figure 16 below:

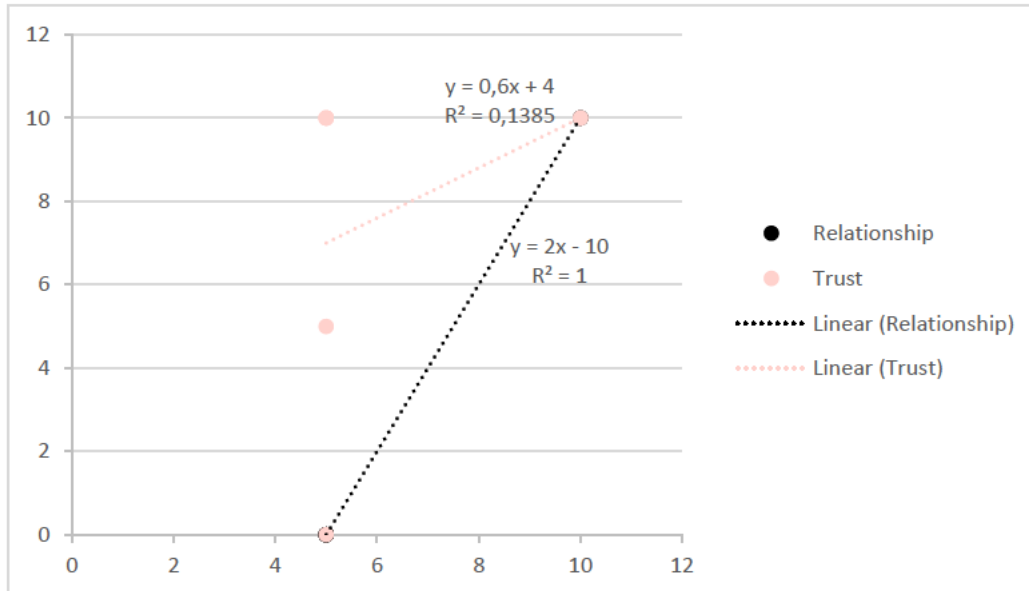


Figure 16: Correlation between loyalty vs trust and loyalty vs brand relationships - Huawei

Conclusion

Through quantitative and qualitative research, this study aimed to explore the need for smartphone brands to research their consumers recurrently and to establish whether frequent consumer research amplifies these brands' abilities to create more effective advertising campaigns with the ultimate goal of persuading potential consumers to make a purchasing decision.

The researcher attempted to view the research question, "does continuous research into consumer expectancies positively affect how smartphone brands communicate with consumers?" from two perspectives:

First, should smartphone brands not reassess their consumer profiles recurrently, would they lose consumers and revenue?

Second, should smartphone brands continuously revisit and adjust their ideal buyer personas, would their advertising and marketing communications be more efficient?

Through studying the evolution of research trends relating to consumer behaviour, Malter et al. (2020:144) derived an essential topic for further research, "how does the new generation of consumers differ from past generations?".

The abovementioned research gap applies to what became one of the primary concepts in this study: consumer evolution; i.e., do consumers evolve, or are they continuously replaced with new consumers?

What became evident through this research was that smartphone users undoubtedly evolve in terms of their needs and wants, life stages, external circumstances, and what they require to remain loyal to a specific smartphone brand.

Thus, the researcher concluded that smartphone brands should, in fact, regularly research their target consumers for various reasons. Some of the most significant factors that led to this conclusion were that it is impossible to know precisely when a consumer preference might change, when new customer segments emerge, and what external circumstances might influence a current customer segment.

Furthermore, consumer loyalty, brand trust and customer-brand relationships proved to be extremely valuable postulations. The research suggested that Millennials are not as loyal as their predecessors and require more convincing to make purchasing decisions.

Given the need for persuasion among this consumer group, advertising plays an essential part in the success or failure of smartphone brands.

Another significant insight discovered through this research was that adaptation is prevalent in all aspects of consumer-brand relationships. To elaborate, the study concluded that consumers evolve and adapt to their circumstances. Therefore, smartphone brands should adapt to their consumers to remain relevant and retain loyalty.

The simplified implication of these findings is that there is a reaction to every action. The more smartphone brands research their consumers, the better they can communicate with them. Similarly, the more effective the communication with consumers, the better the revenue stream for smartphone brands.

This study's outcomes could benefit the technology industry as a whole. These outcomes could guide the consumer research process for both new and existing brands to improve their marketing strategies. From the results of this study, the researcher suggests further exploration into consumer behaviour outcomes as an effect of consumer research by brands, as this study was limited to the smartphone industry and South African Millennials.

Given the time constraints and exploratory nature of this study, there is still ample research to be done on the topic. The effects of continuous consumer research on consumer behaviour outcomes are innumerable. Thus, future researchers are implored to continue this research and extend the parameters to other industries, generations, and countries.

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