

# BRAND PREFERENCE AND BRAND RHETORIC FOR MOBILE PHONES AMONG STUDENTS AT A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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## **ABSTRACT**

It is evident that the mobile phone industry is facing significant growth. The introduction of cheaper mobile phones in South Africa has intensified competition between mobile companies. A number of studies have been conducted in other countries on brand preference for mobile phones, but there remains a gap in knowledge with regard to the South African market. It is important to academically research factors influencing consumer brand preferences and its rhetorical implications when purchasing mobile phones, to understand these preferences, and what consumers consider when making such purchases. The rationale for the study was to provide insights for local marketers into the factors consumers consider most when looking at mobile phone brands. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to understand brand preferences for mobile phones amongst students at a selected higher educational institution in South Africa. The study adopts a quantitative research approach and is descriptive and cross-sectional in nature. The

research population was made up of students studying at the Durban University of Technology (DUT), where convenience sampling was used on a target population of 378 students. The results were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 24.0 software. The findings show that brand popularity, prices, product attributes rhetorically affect mobile phone brand preferences amongst students. The results also showed that there were some product attributes that did not influence these preferences.

### INTRODUCTION

Mobile phones have become a necessity in the daily lives of consumers. However, due to advancements in technology, the mobile phone industry has shown significant growth, and this makes it important for marketers to be informed on brand preferences for mobile phones. According to Henderson (2012: 1), the mobile phone industry is experiencing a fast growth rate with many affordable and similar phones being introduced. The GSMA Mobile Economy Report (2014: 1) which states that the mobile industry has increased dramatically over the last decade supports this view. The report reveals that, by the end of 2013, mobile phone subscribers increased to 3.4 billion. The South African retail environment for mobile phones is growing, with newer and cheaper versions being introduced to the market, leading to high levels of competition and innovation.<sup>1</sup> Due to the ease of communication and convenience brought about by mobile phones, they have become a necessity.

The rapid growth in the industry has led to a high rate of competition among manufacturers and retailers of mobile phones. This study focuses on university students because they are young and are frequent users of mobile phones.<sup>2</sup> The study targeted students at DUT, which is an institution of higher education. As a university of technology, DUT is a technologically-driven institution, and this is shown by some of the programmes it offers,

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<sup>1</sup> Euromonitor International 2015: 1.

<sup>2</sup> Shahzad and Sobia 2013: 370.

such as Information Technology (IT) and application development courses. In addition, students at DUT are enthused by technology, which thus presented a platform from which the researcher could perform substantive and reliable research.

Brand rhetoric known as the art of the brand's feigned speech. It is used as an element that explains the way customers interpret advertising images. Thus, brand rhetoric has an influence in the brand choice consumers make because the persuasive power of brand images depends mostly on the rhetorical presentation of the brand. There is need for mobile phone marketers to provide a link between rhetoric of mobile phone branding theories and the realities in their advertisements.<sup>3</sup>

#### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

##### ***Self-concept theory***

The self-concept theory is defined by Rosenberg (1979: 30) as the entirety of an individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to themselves as objective beings and is associated with behaviour and feelings. In addition, Pride and Ferrell (2010: 160) state that the self-concept theory defines the consumer within individuals, which can be a person with many images of themselves. This plays a significant role in identifying how consumers behave, since the way in which they perceive themselves influences the brands they prefer since they wish their choices to be reflected in the products they purchase.

According to Khare and Handa (2009: 58), there is a relationship between consumer brands and the self-concept of individuals. Consumers usually prefer brands that match their self-concepts in order to express themselves to those around them and show that they conform to the concept being emphasized by the brand's usage. Moreover, consumers prefer certain brands to maintain or create self-images for either themselves or to their peers. Consumers prefer brands matching their own self-images, thus the greater the relationship between self-images and brands, the

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<sup>3</sup> O'Loughlin and Szmigin 2007.

stronger will be specific brand preferences.<sup>4</sup>

Self-concept is the way in which individuals see themselves and it includes the entirety of their thoughts and feelings when looking at themselves. Consumers define their own self-concepts, which often change based on interactions between their psychological and social dimensions. Furthermore, consumers choose brands or products that match their own self-concepts, which therefore influences them in preferring certain brands, and can also affect the place where products are bought.<sup>5</sup> In a similar context, Schiffman and Kanuk (2010: 165) highlight that consumers are guided by different self-images, which the products that they buy depend on. Consumers choose different self-concepts to guide their buying behaviour. The persuasive power of marketing images depends mostly on rhetorical representational of the brand. Schroeder (2008: 7) states that visual rhetoric images influence the way consumers perceive and respond to a brand. For example, with everyday household products, individuals are guided by their actual self-image, whereas for societally appealing products, they might be directed by their social self-image. Rhetorical processes and cultural codes influence the relationships that consumers have with brands and advertising. Individuals use different aspects of self-concept, depending on the product with which they are dealing, and the brand or product bought makes a statement about who individuals are. Consumers usually prefer brands viewed as relevant to their self-concepts, and this influences their brand loyalties and preferences.<sup>6</sup>

Consumers have a number of self-images about themselves. These are closely related to personality, in that consumers are more likely to purchase brands or products whose images relate to their own self-images or self-concepts. In essence, customers seek to represent themselves by their brand preferences. They have a tendency to purchase brands with images that develop their own

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<sup>4</sup> Escalas and Bettman 2005: 378.

<sup>5</sup> Pride and Ferrell 2010: 160.

<sup>6</sup> Hoyer *et al.* 2013: 49.

self-concepts and avoid those that do not.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, Solomon (2013: 199) agrees that consumers choose brands with attributes similar to their personal self-concepts. According to Yusuf and Shafri (2013: 6), self-concept has four different components, which are: the real self-image, which is an individual's total real image; the perceived self-image, which is the way in which individuals view themselves; the looking-glass self-image, which is the way individuals think that people view them; and, lastly, the ideal self-image, which is what individuals aspire to be. Consumers usually prefer brands that align closely with their ideal self-images.

In addition, consumers usually use brands to communicate their personal self-concepts. Connections exist between consumer self-concepts and brand preferences. These connections begin at an early age and increase as individuals grow, with brands becoming viewed as linked to personal self-concepts. Furthermore, consumers choose brands that present images corresponding to their own self-concepts. This association between brand preference and self-concept is considered natural since consumers use brands to help them define themselves.<sup>8</sup> Marisa (2014: 10), however, argues that consumers do not simply choose brands to inform others about their self-images, but because they increase their self-esteem and communicate a desirable social status.

Furthermore, Marisa (2014: 2) identifies four possible 'selves' that individuals can portray. These are: 'the actual self,' which is how individuals, in fact, see themselves; the second is 'the ideal self,' which is how individuals would like to see themselves; the third is 'the social self,' which is how individuals feel others see them; and, finally, there is 'the ideal social-self,' which is how individuals would like others to see them. These three selves always influence purchasing decisions that consumers make, with buyers first considering what they think, see and wish to become before making choices. People buy brands that they think to represent images similar to their own self-images in order to attain self-image

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<sup>7</sup> Schiffman and Kanuk 2010: 163.

<sup>8</sup> Schiffman and Kanuk 2010: 164.

congruence.<sup>9</sup>

Consumers prefer brands that have brand personalities closely related to their ideal self-concepts, which is how they would like to see themselves. Brand personalities may also match the ideal self-concepts of individuals, which is how they would like to be seen by others, or how they think others see them. The self-concept theory influences consumer brand preferences.<sup>10</sup> It summarises the beliefs that individuals have about their own attributes, and how they assess themselves based on these. The self-concept theory also addresses social influences on individuals, because it deals with how people see themselves or imagine others see them. They prefer brands that define who they are and who others think they are. Consumers become attached to brands in order to maintain their personal self-concepts.<sup>11</sup> Consumers maintain their own self-concepts through the products and brands they prefer and consume, which define, maintain and enhance their self-concepts.<sup>12</sup>

Sincero (2015: 1) argues, however, that the self-concept theory possesses a limitation that it is learned, organised and dynamic. This makes it difficult for marketers to see self-concepts as influencing brand preferences because consumers are faced with different situations to which they react differently, and may switch from one brand to another depending on this. Self-concepts are therefore continuous development processes during which consumers may discard ideas, perceptions, and behaviors that are not self-congruent.

### ***Stimulus-Response theory***

Stimulus-Response (S-R) is a classic psychological conditioning model used to explain how individuals behave.<sup>13</sup> Consumers react

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<sup>9</sup> O'Cass and Frost 2002: 68.

<sup>10</sup> Kotler and Keller 2009: 198.

<sup>11</sup> Solomon 2013: 198.

<sup>12</sup> Marisa 2014: 3.

<sup>13</sup> Sahnay 2007: 3.

largely to external stimuli when faced with purchasing situations.<sup>14</sup> S-R, also known as Classical Conditioning, involves the study of the connections between stimuli and the behaviour with which consumers respond. According to the S-R theory, certain stimuli trigger responses from consumers. In this case, stimuli such as brand popularity, prices, social influences, and marketing communications affect the mobile phone brands consumers prefer. Stimuli are external objects, situations or cues that consumers perceive, whilst responses are behaviors by consumers in reacting to these.<sup>15</sup> Stimuli such as advertisements, brand prices, social influences, and marketing communications influence these consumer responses, which can lead to either negative or positive brand preferences evolving.

Similarly, Perreault *et al.* (2010: 120) explain the S-R theory as a learning process whereby stimuli encourage actions. These consumer actions depend on the types of stimuli to which they are exposed. Stimuli are cues which decide when, where and how individuals respond, and marketers influence consumer brand preferences by providing such cues to motivate them. This theory only focuses on external cues, however, and ignores internal cues which also influence mobile phone brand preferences. Stimuli here refer to brand attributes, such as popularity, price, that affect individuals in responding with specific behaviour. When consumers respond to stimuli, these, therefore, influence their behaviour.

### ***Persuasive strategies***

There are types of persuasive strategies used to support claims when informing or persuading consumers. These include *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*. *Logos* relies on logic or reasoning. The consumer is persuaded when the marketer uses facts or logic about the brand. This is mostly used on technology advertisement, marketers use logic with the aim of showing the new features. For example, the Apple's iPhone X

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<sup>14</sup> Schiffman and Kanuk 2010: 112.

<sup>15</sup> Sahnay 2007: 3.

advertisement uses logical proof. Marketers tell the consumers the best reasons for preferring the brand to other brands.<sup>16</sup>

*Ethos* is the ethical appeal of the brand or marketer. Ethos is based on the character, credibility and reliability of the brand or marketer. In this case, the marketer tries to persuade consumers that the phone brand is credible.<sup>17</sup>

*Pathos* is based on emotions. Pathos rhetoric does not only evoke feelings but also anticipate the response. Marketers use words since they trigger emotions. For example, mobile phone brand marketers will use words or rhetorical devices that will capture the emotions of the consumer thus preferring that certain brand.<sup>18</sup>

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### ***Brand Preference***

A brand is a name which is used to identify a marketer's or retailer's products among other products available.<sup>19</sup> According to Shahzad and Sobia (2013: 371), a brand gives a strategic form of position for competition and makes a product different from all other products available. Brand preference has been defined by different scholars and authors from within their disciplines. According to Hult, Pride and Ferrel (2012: 368), brand preference is a stronger degree of brand loyalty, it is when a customer prefers a brand over other brands available and will buy that brand if it is available. Shahzad and Sobia (2013: 371) further assert that brand preference takes place when a consumer chooses a specific brand over a competitor's brands. Perreault, Cannon, and McCarthy (2014: 207) add that consumers choose a brand over other brands available because of habit or good past history.

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<sup>16</sup> Detisch 2019: 1.

<sup>17</sup> McQuarrie and Mick 2003: 197.

<sup>18</sup> Detisch 2019: 1.

<sup>19</sup> Hult, Pride and Ferrell 2012: 366.

***Brand popularity, brand preference and brand rhetoric***

Brand popularity is the number of consumers who know about a particular brand, and this is increased by word of mouth. The more the consumers become familiar with a brand, the more it becomes popular.<sup>20</sup> Brand familiarity is how well consumers recognize the brand.<sup>21</sup> According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2010: 198), consumers rely mostly on well-known brands as an indication of quality. Thus, they prefer well-known brands to unknown brands. This is also supported by Ramesh (2013: 11) and Shahzad and Sobia (2013: 371) when they argue that consumers value popular brands when choosing a mobile phone. Negi and Pandey (2013: 131) added that consumers filter unknown brands and, most commonly, known brands will be preferred. Consumers prefer brands, which associate with their self-concept, thus brand popularity is associated with personal prestige.

In the results of their study, Soomro and Ghumro (2013: 512) show, that a large number of respondents prefer mobile phone brands with which they are familiar. Consumers do not choose brands that are unknown to them, but prefer brands of whose popularity they are aware of, especially where products are expensive.<sup>22</sup> In addition, Rijal (2013: 3) suggests that students do not choose unpopular brands because they want to create self-images, but because they believe that by choosing popular branded mobile phones, they reduce the risks they might otherwise encounter. Popular brands project images of quality, and many people, therefore, believe that brand names help to show consumers the quality and value of products. It is believed that if you were to show an individual two mobile phones, one has a popular brand name, and the other without, they would always choose the one with the popular brand, and always believe it to be of higher quality. Consumers however believe that unpopular or unbranded products

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<sup>20</sup> Winther 2011: 7.

<sup>21</sup> Perreault, Cannon and McCarthy 2014: 206.

<sup>22</sup> Ayanwale, Alimi and Ayanbimipe 2005: 10.

are of poor quality and that such companies are therefore hesitant to promote their brands.

Chi, Yeh and Yang (2009: 135) state that when consumers wish to purchase products, and a particular brand name comes first to mind, this shows that they are familiar with that brand. Consumer behaviour can be influenced by how familiar they are with certain brands. Consumers have a propensity to prefer brands they are familiar with, and which are known to them. They can easily recognise brands with which they are familiar with the many brands of mobile phones available on the market. Brands with higher popularity levels, therefore, receive higher consumer preference levels. In addition, Sardar (2012: 432) asserts that unpopular and unbranded products are usually of uncertain quality, which consumers believe they cannot depend on when compared to popular and branded mobile phones. Branded products hold a great place in the minds of consumers when they make choices as to which brands they prefer. Consumers usually choose well-known brands that they are familiar with. They do not wish to purchase new or unpopular brands, because they have insufficient information about these lesser-known brands. People trust popular branded mobile phones because they know how they function, and may have had past experiences with such brands.<sup>23</sup>

Brand rhetoric is known as the art of brand artificial speech. Brand rhetoric explains the way consumers interpret brands when they are advertised. For example, Cell C one of the cell phone company uses an advertising expression “I love Jozi” used as a promotional image. This is a form of rhetorical device called analogous. This expression is used to draw consumers’ attention to the brand. It is used rhetorically to inform about the company’s brand identity.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Alamgir *et al.* 2010: 150.

<sup>24</sup> Sihlongonyane 2015: 11.

***Price and brand preference***

Shahzad and Sobia (2013: 371) and Ling, Hwang and Salvendy (2007: 149) state that price plays an important role in consumers' choice; it affects the brands' perceived value and the choice of a brand. Many consumers use price to show brand quality. For young consumers, the price can be a key factor in their choice. Kotler and Keller (2012: 410); Joubert (2010: 41) and Yusuf and Shafri (2013: 7) agree that most consumers associate price with quality and most consumers consider low prices to be associated with poor quality brands. Riyath and Masthafa (2014: 5); Saif, Razzaq, Amad, and Gul (2012: 17) agreed that price plays an important role in influencing the preference of consumers. In addition, high priced brands are brands which are seen to have a good image compared to low priced brands. Consumers who prefer high priced brands often choose them mainly for image and status. They would want their brands to match with their ideal self-images, thus preferring high priced brands over all other competing brands available.<sup>25</sup> Some consumers are price sensitive and will prefer brands which have prices matching with their price sensitiveness. Price's sensitivity depends on different factors and it is usually high when there are many brands to select from.<sup>26</sup>

Price directly influences brand preference, especially when this is the only information available to consumers. Price is the first thing that consumers see and creates an initial impression of quality in brands or products. In addition, consumers obtain their perceptions of the quality of products from their prices. The various pricing models used have different effects on consumer brand preferences, where unexpectedly low prices can trigger fears that brands are of low quality, whilst unexpectedly high prices cause buyers to question the true worth of brands.<sup>27</sup> A study conducted by Sata (2013: 8) on factors affecting consumer buying behaviour for mobile phone devices, explored six important factors: prices, social

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<sup>25</sup> Yusuf and Shafri 2013: 7.

<sup>26</sup> Kotler and Keller 2012: 415.

<sup>27</sup> Yusuf and Shafri 2013: 7.

groups, product features, brand names, durability, and after-sales services. The author concluded that price is the most important factor influencing the choices consumers make in purchasing mobile phones.

Similarly, consumers of mobile phones consider price an important factor in showing perceived brand values and quality, where the high prices of products indicate advanced technology and improved features.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Mannukka (2008: 190) highlights the positive relationship between consumer price perceptions and their purchasing choices or behaviour. According to Akhtar *et al.* (2013: 388), in their study of mobile phone feature preferences and consumer patterns for students at the University of Sargodha, found that 68.8% of respondents preferred moderately-priced mobile phones, whilst 14.2% preferred high-priced phones. Park *et al.* (2014: 9) also identify price as the most critical factor affecting choices for mobile phones, especially with regard to younger consumers.

### ***Product attributes and brand preference***

Product attributes are the characteristics a product has or does not have that include both intrinsic and extrinsic features. Consumers prefer products which have attributes that meet their needs. Both tangible and intangible attributes are important when choosing a brand. The more the attributes associated with consumers' needs, the more consumers prefer that brand. However, different age groups have different mobile phone attribute preferences.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, product attributes are what consumers think the product has, they can be differentiated on how directly they are related to the product.<sup>30</sup> According to Sata (2013: 806), product attributes are an influential factor towards a brand preference of mobile phone. Wang (2013: 806) concurs that product attributes are an important factor and that most consumers have certain attributes

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<sup>28</sup> Kabadayi, Aygun and Cipli 2007: 76.

<sup>29</sup> Malasi 2012: 12.

<sup>30</sup> Dadzie and Boachie-Mensah 2011: 194.

such as durability that they consider when preferring mobile phones. Mack and Sharples (2009: 1517) show that usability is the most influential attribute when selecting a brand. However, other attributes such as features and aesthetics have an influence on the mobile phone brand preferred.

### **Brand rhetoric**

Brands speak in a similar noise in which everyone speaks. If they are heard by whom they intended to address to it is because they somehow chose well their words and delivered them effectively.<sup>31</sup> Brand rhetoric makes use of rhetorical devices which is a linguistic tool that uses certain types of sentence structure, pattern or sound so as to evoke a certain reaction from consumers. Rhetorical devices are many and have different applications that can make a brand compelling. Each time companies advertise their brands they are engaging in rhetoric. In addition, when consumers change their decision on which brand to use after being informed or persuaded they would have experienced the power of rhetoric. A company needs to develop knowledge on rhetorical devices so that it can strengthen its persuasive skills. Thus, brand rhetoric has an influence on mobile phone brand preference. How a brand speaks influence the choice that consumers make. There are brand related rhetorical devices that marketers can use in their brand advertising. These include repetition, figurative expression, visualization (*imagines*), and rhetoric questions. They affect brand memorization. In addition, they increase brand recall thus leading to brand preference among consumers.<sup>32</sup>

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a quantitative approach through the use of questionnaires. The research design for the study was both descriptive and cross-sectional in nature. The target population was made up of students at the Durban University of Technology. The

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<sup>31</sup> Brand rhetoric 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Mzoughi and Abdelhak 2011.

target population for this study consisted of undergraduate and post-graduate students at DUT, where the total student population is approximately 23, 000. The sampling technique for the study was convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a method whereby researchers use those respondents most conveniently available to them. The questionnaires were therefore distributed to students that were most conveniently available to the researcher. The questionnaire was developed based on the study's theoretical framework, research problem, and objectives. It used a 5-point Likert scale with values ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. In addition to the Likert scale, a multiple choice scale was used. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, with section A addressing demographics while section B mobile preference related questions to the respondents. A total number of 378 questionnaires were administered to respondents. In this research, findings from the data analysed were presented using tables, charts and descriptive statistics, such as mean, percentage and response frequency graphs. Frequency counts are the number of times certain values occur in datasets, for example the number of respondents giving a particular answer and inferential statistics. A 100% total response rate was achieved.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Biographical data***

This section summarises the biographical characteristics of respondents.

### ***Age and gender***

As reflected in Table 1, the ratio of male to female study respondents was approximately 1:1 (45.5% and 54.5% respectively). In the 26 to 28 year age category, 62.9% were male, and 37.1% were female. Within the male category, 10.7% were between the ages of 26 and 28 years, with this category also forming 5.8% of the total sample group. In the female category, 7.6% were between 26 and 28 years of age. The 17 to 19 year age category was comprised of

35.2% female and 64.8% male. The age category of 20 to 22 years held 53.7% female, and 47.6% male respondents, which therefore made it the category with the highest number of female respondents. The age groups 23 to 25, and 31 and over, made up 16.7% of male respondents, and 10.1% of the total sample size, respectively. Lastly, the 29 to 30 years of age category held the smallest number, of respondents, at 5.3%, where male and female respondents made up 2.9% and 2.4% of this group, respectively.

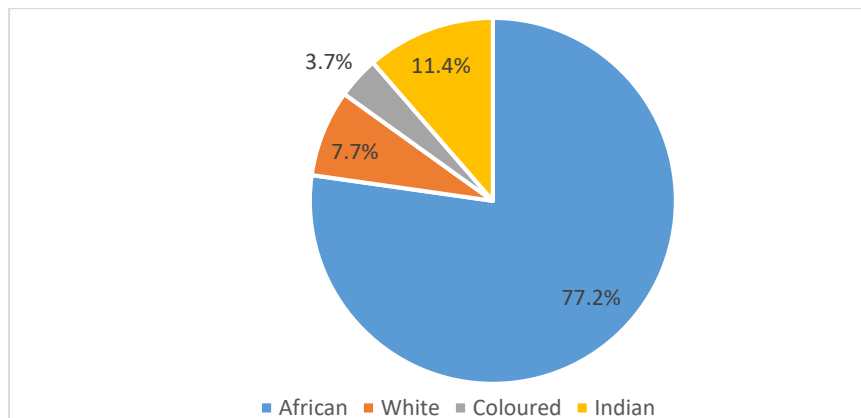
**Table 1: Gender and age distributions of respondents**

			Gender		Total
			Female	Male	
Age (years)	17-19	Count	31	57	88
		% within Age	35.2	64.8	100.0
		% within Gender	18.0	27.7	23.3
		% of Total	8.2	15.1	23.3
	20-22	Count	72	62	134
		% within Age	53.7	46.3	100.0
		% within Gender	41.9	30.1	35.4
		% of Total	19.0	16.4	35.4
	23-25	Count	33	30	63
		% within Age	52.4	47.6	100.0
		% within Gender	19.2	14.6	16.7
		% of Total	8.7	7.9	16.7
	26-28	Count	13	22	35
		% within Age	37.1	62.9	100.0
		% within Gender	7.6	10.7	9.3
		% of Total	3.4	5.8	9.3
	29-30	Count	11	9	20
		% within Age	55.0	45.0	100.0
		% within Gender	6.4	4.4	5.3
		% of Total	2.9	2.4	5.3
31+	Count	12	26	38	

		% within Age	31.6	68.4	100.0
		% within Gender	7.0	12.6	10.1
		% of Total	3.2	6.9	10.1
Total		Count	172	206	378
		% within Age	45.5	54.5	100.0
		% within Gender	100.0	100.0	100.0
		% of Total	45.5	54.5	100.0

### Race

The racial composition of the sample population is shown in Figure 1 and comprised mainly Africans, at 77.2%, followed by Indians at 11.4%, Whites at 7.7%, and Coloureds at 3.7%.



**Figure 1:** Racial composition

### Levels of study

The results, as shown in Table 2, indicate that approximately half of the respondents, at 46.0%, were first-year students. This level of the study constituted the majority of respondents, followed by second-year students at 18%, post-graduates at 17.4%, third-year students at 13%, and fourth-year students, who at 5.6%, made up the smallest group in the study.

**Table 2: Levels of study**

Level of study	Frequency	% (%)
First year	174	46.0
Second year	68	18.0
Third year	49	13.0
Fourth year	21	5.6
Post-graduate	66	17.5
Total	378	100.0

**Factors influencing brand preference**

The section that follows analyses the scoring patterns of respondents across the variables investigated. The results are presented first using summarized percentages for variables making up each section and are then further analyzed according to the importance of each of these statements.

**Table 3: Brand popularity scoring patterns**

Brand Popularity	Disagree		Neutral		Agree	
	Count	Row N (%)	Count	Row N (%)	Count	Row N (%)
I consider brand popularity when choosing a mobile phone	109	28.8	84	22.2	185	48.9
I associate brand popularity with mobile phone quality	74	19.6	67	17.7	237	62.7
I associate brand popularity with the choices I make	77	20.4	87	23.0	214	56.6

As depicted in Table 3, the majority (48.9%) of respondents agreed that they considered brand popularity when choosing mobile phones, whilst 28.8% disagreed with this statement. In addition, there was an agreement from the majority (62.7%) of respondents that they associated brand popularity with mobile phone quality, whilst 19.6% disagreed. The results also indicate that 56.6% of the respondents agreed that they associated brand popularity with the choices they made, whilst 20.4% disagreed with this. Branded products have a greater place in the minds of consumers when making choices regarding which brands they prefer. Consumers usually choose well-known brands with which they are familiar, and do not want new or unpopular brands because they have insufficient information regarding them. People trust popular and branded mobile phones because they know how they function, and also may have had past experiences with them.<sup>33</sup>

**Table 4: Price scoring patterns**

Price	Disagree		Neutral		Agree	
	Count	Row N (%)	Count	Row N (%)	Count	Row N (%)
Price affects the mobile phone brand I prefer	76	20.1	56	14.8	246	65.1
Price is important when I choose a mobile phone	71	18.8	62	16.4	245	64.8
The mobile phone is good value for the money paid	43	11.4	68	18.0	267	70.6
I associate mobile phone price with the quality of the phone	45	11.9	69	18.3	264	69.8

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<sup>33</sup> Alamgir *et al.* 2010: 150.

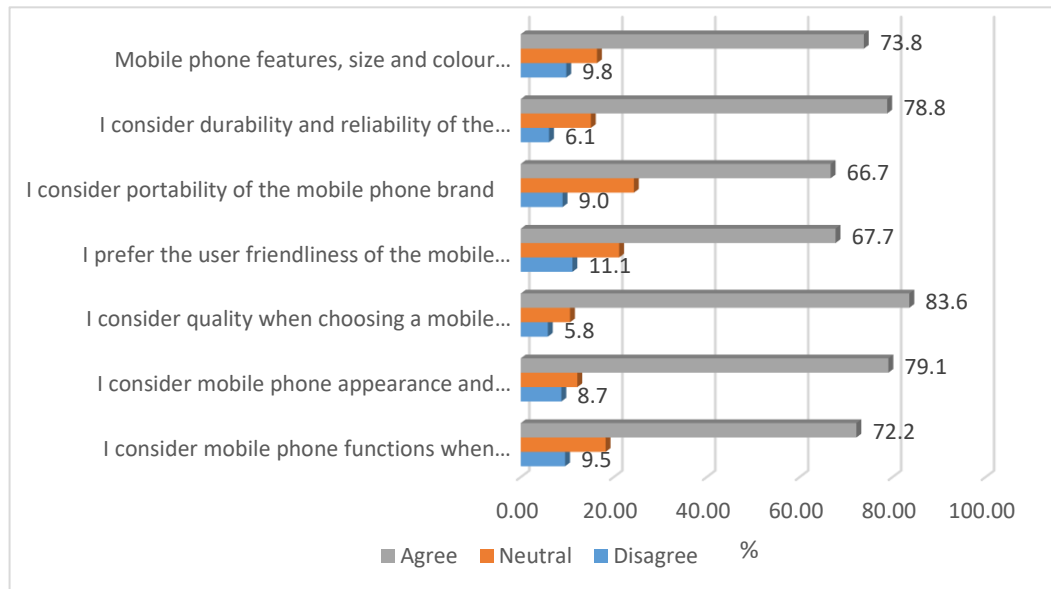
Price of the mobile phone has an impact on my ideal self-image	130	34.4	91	24.1	157	41.5
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Respondents were asked if price affected the mobile phone brands they preferred, with other brands it emerged that 65.1% of respondents agreed, and 20.1% disagreed, with this statement. In response to the statement that price was important when choosing mobile phones, the results showed that 64.8% of respondents agreed, and 18.8% disagreed, with this statement. Khan and Rohi (2013: 371) believe that price is the most important factor affecting the mobile phone brand choices that consumers make, especially for younger consumers to whom this is a key attracting factor. As indicated in Table 4, 70.6% of the respondents agreed, and 11.4% disagreed, that their mobile phones were good value for money. According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2010: 193), consumers usually perceive the price as an indicator of the value a brand offers.

The results also indicate that 69.8% of respondents associated mobile phone prices with the quality of products, while 11.9% did not. Price is the first thing that consumers notice, and this can create initial impressions of the quality of a brand. Consumers, therefore, deduce perceptions of quality from prices. As indicated in Table 4, 41.5% of respondents agreed, and 34.4% disagreed that the prices of mobile phones impacted their ideal self-image. This result contradicted the reviewed literature, which indicates that consumers prefer brands displaying brand personalities that match their ideal self-images, which signal how we would like to be seen by others, and which also impact on the self-concepts of others, which depict how we think others see us.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Kotler and Keller 2009: 198.



**Figure 2: Product attributes scoring patterns**

The results, as illustrated in Figure 2 show that 73.8% of respondents agreed that mobile phone features, such as size and colour, influenced the choices they made, whilst 9.8% disagreed. The results of this research correspond with those of previous studies conducted in other countries,<sup>35</sup> which consider mobile phone features as leading factors influencing consumer brand preference behaviour. It also emerged that 78.8% of respondents agreed, and 6.1% disagreed that they considered durability and reliability when choosing mobile phones. These findings are consistent with those of Aidoo and Nyamedor (2008: 33), who found that the reliability of mobile phones impacts on the brand's consumers prefer. 66.7% of respondents agreed, and 9% disagreed, that they considered portability when choosing mobile phone

<sup>35</sup> Pakola *et al.* 2010; Das 2012; Saif *et al.* 2012; Malasi 2012; Aidoo and Nyamedor 2008.

brands. Karjaluoto *et al.* (2005: 71) agree that mobile phone designs, in terms of appearance and size, influence the brands that consumers prefer, but that they consider other attributes, such as durability and reliability, to be more important. This was also shown to be the case by in this study, whose results were 66.7% positive for portability, and 78.7% positive for durability and reliability.

A large number of respondents (67.7%), indicated agreement that they preferred the user-friendliness of mobile phone brands, whilst 11.1% disagreed. Aidoo and Nyamedor (2008: 30), in a study conducted on the factors that determine consumer choices of mobile phone brands in Kumasi metropolis, found that user-friendliness affects consumer brand preferences. Respondents were asked whether they considered quality when choosing mobile phone brands. The results show that 83.6% agreed, and 5.8%, disagreed with this statement. The higher the quality of brands, the greater their chances of being preferred from amongst those available on the market.<sup>36</sup> Liu (2002: 43), who states that consumers prefer the quality they perceive in mobile phone brands they have used before, or which have been recommended by families and friends supports this.

The findings also indicate that 79.1% of respondents agreed that they considered mobile phone appearances and battery life when selecting brands, whilst 8.7% disagreed. These results corresponded with those of Zhou and Shanturkovska (2011: 28), who found that over three-quarters of respondents consider the durability of mobile phone batteries to be their most important characteristics. The majority of respondents (72.2%) agreed that they considered mobile phone attributes when preferring brands and 9.5% disagreed. The results of a study conducted by Owusu-Prempeh *et al.* (2013: 26) concur with these findings.

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<sup>36</sup> Dziwormu 2013: 160.

***Chi-square tests***

A Chi-square test was performed to determine whether any statistically significant relationships exist between variables (rows vs columns). A significant relationship was found to exist between mobile phone brand popularity and brand preferences ( $p=0.0396$ ). Should an individual wish to purchase a mobile phone, they look at the brand popularity. This could be because popular brands are trusted, and considered to be reliable due to being used by many people.

It emerged that there was a significant relationship between brand prices and mobile phone brand preferences, ( $p=0.017$ ). This implies that if brand prices are high, then consumer preference will be low. It emerged that prices exerted an influence on mobile phone brand choices. There was, therefore, a significant relationship between mobile phone brand preferences and their prices ( $p=0.016$ ), which indicated that price was an important factor when consumers made mobile phones brand choices.

A significant relationship was found to exist between mobile phone brand preferences and mobile phone attributes ( $p=0.001$ ). This implies that mobile phone attributes influenced respondent mobile phone brand preference and that consumers considered mobile phone attributes when choosing brands. It emerged that there was a significant relationship between mobile phone brand preferences and quality, based on the result ( $p=0.003$ ). This indicated that the quality of mobile phones influenced the brand choices that consumers made.

There was also a significant relationship between mobile phone brand preference and user-friendliness ( $p=0.015$ ). Respondents tend to consider the user-friendliness of mobile phones in their choices. In addition, it emerged that a significant relationship existed between mobile phone brand preferences and their durability and reliability, ( $p=0.032$ ), which indicated that students considered the durability and reliability of mobile phone brands.

The Chi-square test results showed no significant relationship between mobile phone brand preferences and mobile phone

appearances, ( $p=0.198$ ). This indicated that students did not consider mobile phone appearance as a significant factor when choosing mobile phone brands. It also emerged that no significant relationship existed between mobile phone brand preferences and product portability, ( $p=0.857$ ). This meant that the portability of mobile phones did not have a significant effect on brand preference. There was, in addition, no significant relationship between mobile phone brand preferences and mobile phone features ( $p=0.675$ ). This suggested that students preferred mobile phone brands without considering their attributes.

### **Correlation**

The bi-variate correlation was performed on data obtained for the study. Positive values indicated a directly proportional relationship between variables, and negative values indicated inverse relationships. The results showed the following patterns: A positive and significant correlation was found to exist between brand popularity and brand choices, ( $r=0.539$ ;  $p=0.000$ ). Furthermore, there was a moderately positive correlation between price, and whether the price was important ( $r=0.523$ ;  $p=0.000$ ). This indicated that price was important to respondents when choosing mobile phone brands.

It emerged that there was a positive, moderate correlation between mobile phone attributes and mobile phone appearance and battery life ( $r=0.515$ ;  $p=0.000$ ). There was also a moderate, positive correlation between mobile phone attributes and the portability of phones, ( $r=0.500$ ;  $p=0.000$ ). In addition, there was a moderate, positive correlation between mobile phone attributes and their durability and reliability ( $r=0.520$ ;  $p=0.000$ ).

The results also showed that there was a weak, positive correlation between mobile phone attributes and their quality ( $r=0.354$ ;  $p=0.000$ ). It emerged that there was also a weak, positive correlation between mobile phone attributes and their user-friendliness ( $r=0.462$ ;  $p=0.000$ ). In addition, a weak, positive

correlation was found to exist between mobile phone attributes and mobile phone features ( $r=0.407$ ;  $p=0.000$ ).

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The aim of this study was to determine brand preferences for mobile phones amongst students at a selected higher educational institution in South Africa. A literature review was undertaken to determine the theoretical underpinnings of brand preference. An empirical study was conducted using a questionnaire that was given to the respondents constituting mainly of university students. The findings show that brand popularity, brand rhetoric, prices, product attribute all exert an influence on mobile phone brand preferences amongst these students. The results show that brand popularity plays a major role in mobile phone brand preferences, with consumers being more inclined to choose brands that are well known, due to their high-perceived quality and reliability, and to consumer familiarity with these brands.

There was a significant relationship between brand prices and mobile brand preference. Majority of the respondents agreed that there is a relationship between price and quality. They also agreed that the price was the most important factor when considering mobile phone brands. Furthermore, consumers agreed that some of the mobile phone attributes influenced their brand preference whilst some had no significant relationship. Recommendations for brand preferences on mobile phones were made. Enabling mobile phone industry stakeholders to improve their knowledge of factors considered important, and allowing them to improve on their brands, thereby increasing preferences for their products in the highly competitive mobile phone market is essential.

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