

SOCIAL INFLUENCE AND SMARTPHONE ADOPTION IN COLLECTIVISTIC COUNTRY: EVIDENCE FROM AZERBAIJAN

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the impact of social influence on usage and marketing-related aspects of smartphone adoption. The author was also interested in determining whether gender had a moderating role in these relationships. The framework of the survey is founded on the extension of the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT2) and widened by the inclusion of new variables – brand awareness and symbolic brand image. Young smartphone owners (i.e., 394 respondents aged between 16 and 35) answered questions regarding the formulation of attitude toward actual use. For collecting opinions, the author applied the nonprobability sampling technique. The results illustrated that social influence had a strong effect on symbolic brand image. Moreover, social influence had significant relationships with hedonic motivation and habit.

Key words: Smartphone market, Moderation, Azerbaijan, Social Influence, Smartphone use.

JEL codes: O33; O53; L96

INTRODUCTION

In 2007, Apple Inc. made a big change in customer preference by introducing a new approach for designing mobile phones. Design and aesthetics, as well as technical capabilities (Filieri & Lin, 2017; Ling & Pedersen, 2005) of the product, gained popularity in a short time. So, the presented “dominant design” (Giachetti, 2013; Trott, 2017) became widely accepted by users and applied by the other producers (e.g. Samsung, Nokia). Speaking of smartphones, it includes a touchscreen with a QWERTY keyboard, and an App market as well (Schilling, 2010, p. 61).

The competitors needed to adapt to changing circumstances and were able to launch the smartphone sales only in 2008 (Reid, 2018). Surprisingly, customer interest towards newly designed handsets was so high that the number of subscriptions, as well as smartphone penetration worldwide, were gradually increasing.

Azerbaijan is an oil extracting/manufacturing country in the South Caucasus (Almas & Hajiyev, 2014) that tries to develop other sectors of the economy. According to information on Data Reportal (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2019a), 67 out of 100 Azeri citizens own handsets. Interestingly, 57% of the population are active internet users while only 42% of the population uses social media through mobile phones. Moreover, handsets' affordability level was 72 on a scale of 100; the number clearly illustrates the situation of developing society (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2019b, 2019a).

Supported by statistical data, previous studies from the Middle East (Ameen & Willis, 2018; Ameen, Willis, & Hussain Shah, 2018) analyzed the adoption of smartphones using UTAUT2 by involving gender as a moderator variable. Based on statistical data regarding digital skills of customers and smartphone usage (Eurostat, 2020; We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2019b), the authors argue that there is no gender gap between smartphone users in the case of Hungary. Moreover, the gender gap in the case of information communication technologies is wider (Ameen et al., 2018) in developing countries (e.g. Jordan and other Arab countries) that are highly affected by culture and social norms (Moghaddam, 2010). However, the impact of gender on the decision of Azeri smartphone users was not previously analyzed. The current research aims to identify the influence of gender on the formulation of behavioural intention and actual usage among young adults. For this reason, smartphone owners between 16 and 35 were involved in the survey.

It might increase the value of the paper that no study yet analyzed particularly the compliance of the UTAUT2 with Azeri young smartphone users. Secondly, previous studies did not involve brand awareness as an external variable in the case of smartphone adoption even if the indicator was mentioned as influential in several marketing-related studies (Fileri, Lin, D'Antone, & Chatzopoulou, 2019; Huang & Shih, 2017; Wu & Ho, 2014).

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE EXTENSION OF THE UNIFIED THEORY OF ACCEPTANCE AND USE OF TECHNOLOGY

The rapid development of technology caused the emergence of new technology-related concepts. During this period, models dealing with human and technology interaction become more popular (Tarhini, Arachchilage, Masa'deh, & Abbasi, 2015) in the early 1980s. Each of the offered models (i.e., technology acceptance model, theory of reasoned action, innovation diffusion theory, and others) had its strengths and weaknesses. Mostly the models (eg. TAM, TRA, UTAUT) were focused on the organizational circumstances of adoption (Davis, 1989; Sheppard, Hartwick, & Warshaw, 1988; Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003). Considering that technology sales in the business-to-customer field were increasing rapidly, there was a big gap in analyzing the behavior of consumers. Therefore, Venkatesh et. al. (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Venkatesh, Thong, & Xu, 2012) offered a new model for analyzing behavior towards technological products that was built on the review of the most famous theories regarding technology adoption.

The extended version of the model (Venkatesh et al., 2012) that is aimed to focus on consumer electronics includes three new variables. These variables are hedonic motivation, price value, and habit. Moreover, the authors emphasize the influence of age, gender, and experience on the formulation of actual use (Venkatesh et al., 2003, 2012). However, the influence of moderation is rarely examined, because its implementation complicates calculation (Tamilmani, Rana, & Dwivedi, 2017).

BRAND AWARENESS AND SYMBOLIC BRAND IMAGE IN SMARTPHONE MARKET

Based on the previous studies in this field, the author agrees that attitude towards smartphone's brand might highly influence customers' choice (Jamalova & Constantinovits, 2020). This was the main reason for involving marketing-related variables in the model. The studies conducted by other scholars (Filieri et al., 2019; Liang, Lai, Hsu, & Chiu, 2018) also support this notion.

Apart from brand awareness, previous studies in the field (Jamalova, 2020; Jamalova & Constantinovits, 2020) also illustrated the importance of symbolic brand image. This was supported by the importance of symbolic benefits for handsets users (Liang et al., 2018; Sun, Zheng, Su, & Keller, 2017).

However, the survey conducted by the author of the current paper has already proved that symbolic brand image does not influence the behavioral intention of Azeri students (Jamalova, 2020). It might be closely related to the age and socio-economic status of survey respondents.

MODERATING EFFECT OF GENDER

The influence of gender on customers' decisions was gaining popularity after the 1960s (Palan, 2001). For marketers, it remains a prevalent variable used for segmentation (Schertzer, Laufer, Silvera, & McBride, 2008). In the current study, the author considers the gender of the respondents only from a biological point of view. A knowledge gap in terms of the influence of gender on customer behavior toward technological products was not filled. Venkatesh and Morris (2000) reviewed the studies regarding the influence of gender on technology adoption. Until the 2000s, no studies measured the moderating effect of gender on customers' decisions towards technological products (Venkatesh & Morris, 2000). It might be one of the reasons for including gender as moderating variable in UTAUT/UTAUT2.

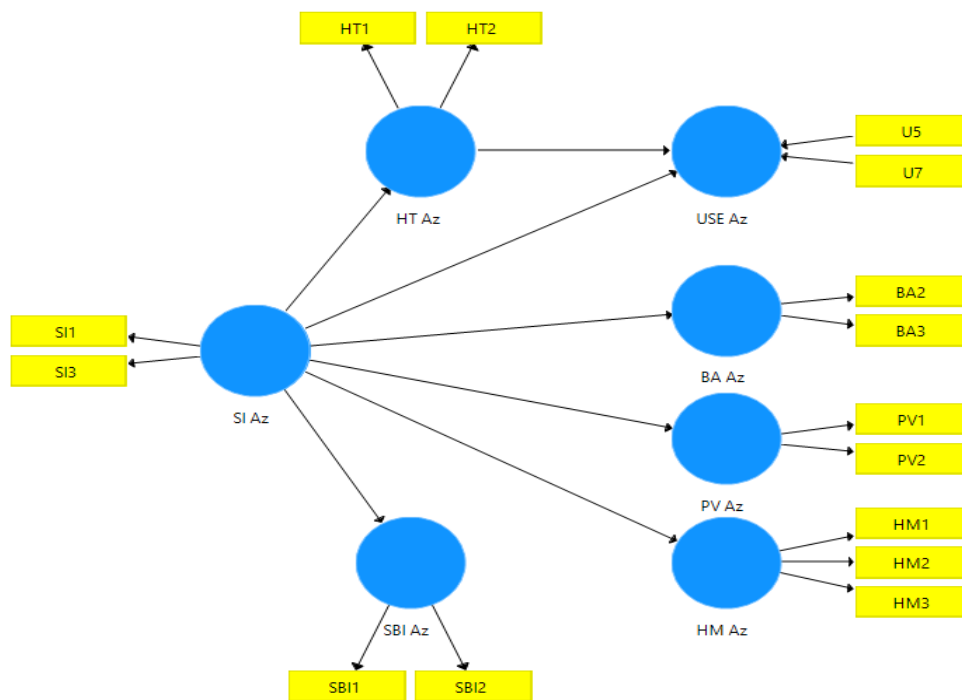


Figure 1 Proposed Model.

BA – Brand Awareness; SBI- Symbolic Brand Image; HM – Hedonic Motivation; HT – Habit; PV – Price Value; SI – Social Influence; USE – Actual Usage.

Source: own editing.

Researchers began to use gender as a moderating variable after the introduction of the extended version of the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology. The influence of gender on the formulation of behavioral intention and usage was deeply analyzed in Portugal (Rita, Oliveira, Estorninho, & Moro, 2018), in Iraq (Ameen & Willis, 2018), as well as in a cross-national study (Ameen et al., 2018) about the UAE and Jordan smartphone owners. The purpose of studies related to the Middle East was to determine and explain the reasons for the gender gap. The study from Portugal (Rita et al., 2018) focused on understanding the influence of the UTAUT2 with perceived value indicators on mobile service adoption with the consideration of the moderating effect of age and gender.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL / HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The study background was built on the assumptions and indicators regarding UTAUT2 as well as brand awareness and symbolic brand image (See Figure 1). In addition to the mediating role of gender, special attention was paid to the relationship between variables. The proposed model is illustrated in Figure 1.

BRAND AWARENESS

Brand is one of the essential indicators defining customers' choice of smartphones (Jamalova & Constantinovits, 2020; Sun et al., 2017). The author agrees with the definition of brand awareness which states that it is the “ability to identify the brand under different conditions”(as cited in Keller, 1993, p. 3). In marketing theory, it was usually widely examined from the brand equity aspect (Keller, 1993). Previous studies related to the smartphone market neither measured the influence of brand awareness on the social influence and usage behavior, nor the moderating effect of gender in this relationship. However, brand awareness was examined from smartphone advertising (Martins, Costa, Oliveira, Gonçalves, & Branco, 2019), brand equity (Huang & Shih, 2017) and, trust identification (Lestari, Nasib, Chaniago, Azzahra, & Effendi, 2019) aspects.

H1. The gender of respondents moderates the relationship between social influence and smartphone brand awareness.

SYMBOLIC BRAND IMAGE

The symbolic brand image was defined as “... the set of (symbolic) associations linked to the brand that consumers hold in the memory” (Keller, 1993, p. 2). Taking into account the extensive literature review, the author of the current study assumes that the main symbolic association linked to smartphone purchase and use demonstrates prestige (Kang & Jung, 2014; Sun et al., 2017) and status (Liao & Hsieh, 2013; Salmi & Sharafutdinova, 2008). The indicator was measured using the scale adopted from the study providing information about the relationship between product attributes and purchase intention in the smartphone market (Chen, Liu, & Ann, 2018). Based on previous publications in the field (Jamalova, 2020; Jamalova & Constantinovits, 2020), the author assumes that in the case of Azeri smartphone users, there will be a significant relationship between symbolic brand image and social influence.

H2. The gender of respondents moderates the relationship between social influence and symbolic brand image.

HEDONIC MOTIVATION

Hedonic motivation was firstly involved in consumer use context and explained as “fun or pleasure derived from using a technology” (Venkatesh et al., 2012, p. 161). It is a powerful indicator predicting behavioral intention toward consumer electronics (Venkatesh et al., 2012). Previous studies in the field illustrated contradictory results; some of the studies found a significant relationship between hedonic motivation and behavioral intention (Alalwan, Dwivedi, Rana, & Algharabat, 2018; Macedo, 2017), while the others reported that variables do not relate to each other (Gupta, Dogra, & George, 2018; Merhi, Hone, & Tarhini, 2019). Moreover, the authors of the model mentioned that hedonic motivation might be moderated by age, gender, and experience of the technology owner. Usually, females connect with their social surroundings much more than males (Anshari et al., 2016). Based on Hofstede’s estimate, masculinity/femininity is around 50% (Hofstede Insights, 2021), the author expects to see the same results for male and female subsamples.

H3. The gender of respondents moderates the relationship between social influence and hedonic motivation.

PRICE-VALUE RATIO

Venkatesh et al. (2012, p. 161) mentioned that price-value is an essential indicator in terms of B2C sales and explained it as a “cognitive trade-off between the perceived benefits of the applications and the monetary cost for using them”. Previous studies illustrated contradictory results regarding the influence of price-value on behavioral intention (Ameen et al., 2018; Merhi et al., 2019). Considering that handsets’ affordability level was 72 on a scale of 100 in 2019,(We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2019b, 2019a) the author expects to see a significant relationship among variables.

H5. The gender of respondents moderates the relationship between social influence and price-value ratio.

SOCIAL INFLUENCE – CENTRAL ELEMENT OF THE STUDY

Social influence is one of the indicators involved in the original version of the UTAUT (Venkatesh et al., 2003). The construct can be defined as the level at which close people might influence the adoption of a certain technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003, 2012). The findings of different studies related to social influence showed contradictory results (Venkatesh et al., 2003). According to Venkatesh et al. (2012), the relationship between social influence and behavioral intention is moderated by age, gender, and other factors. The previous study from Iraq (Ameen & Willis, 2018) showed that there is no any statistically significant relationship between the variables of the aforementioned factors.

HABIT AND ACTUAL USE

The definition of habit is “the extent to which people tend to perform behaviors automatically because of learning” (Venkatesh et al., 2012, p. 161). According to the UTAUT2 (Venkatesh et al., 2012) habit has a direct influence on behavioural intention as well as use. Previous studies (Ameen & Willis, 2018; Macedo, 2017) illustrated contradictory results. The author of the current work assumes that habit has a direct impact on Actual use as it was hypothesized by Venkatesh et al.(2012):

H5. The gender of respondents moderates the relationship between social influence and habit.Actual use was involved by Venkatesh et al.(2003, 2012) to original and extended versions of the model. It combines different aspects of smartphone use. The author included eight mainly used features such as phone calls, messages, internet browsing, social media. Venkatesh et al. (2012) recommended considering construct as a formative indicator.

H6. The gender of respondents moderates the relationship between social influence and actual use.

H7. There is a significant relationship between habit and actual use.

METHODOLOGY

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Considering that young adults are the main target group that uses smartphones the most frequently, the author of the current survey chose them as a target group. The collection of responses was conducted using the convenience sampling technique. The author is well aware of the limitations of the convenience sampling technique that restrain generalizing potential of the study (Babbie, 2016). The respondents could answer the question between the 25th of October till the 25th of December (two months), 2019. In order to increase the number of respondents, an online version of the questionnaire was used at the same time as a paper version. The online survey was conducted through Facebook; the questionnaire was shared among young adults which is an approach for analyzing customers' behavior (Gazley, Hunt, & McLaren, 2015). After performing data screening and exclusion of incomplete and duplicate responses, a total sample of 394 respondents (200 females and 194 males) was used for further analysis. Hypotheses testing was done by using SmartPLS (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015) and SPSS 23.0 (IBM Corp., 2015) software.

Table: Demographic Profile of respondents

<i>Demographic profile</i>		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Gender	Female	200	50.7%
	Male	194	49.3%
	Total	394	100 %
Age	16 - 18	223	56.6 %
	19 – 24	161	40.8 %
	25 – 35	10	2.5 %
Brand	Huawei	14	3.56%
	iPhone	139	35.28%
	Samsung	138	35.02 %
	Xiaomi	67	17%
	Others	36	9.14%

Source: own editing

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The questionnaire was designed to understand customers' attitudes towards the mentioned statements. For achieving the goal, participants answered 28 self-reporting questions that were organized into two sections. Information regarding the respondent's age, occupation, gender as well as his/her smartphone model/brand was included in the first section. Assumptions based on the scales included in the second section (i.e., Brand awareness, Symbolic Brand Image, Social Influence, Hedonic Motivation, Price Value, Habit, and Use/actual use).

ANALYTICAL PROCEDURES

A partial least squares-structural estimation technique (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 3.3.3 software was applied for measuring the association between variables. Considering recommendations of Chin (1998) regarding formative and reflective constructs as well as the suggestions of Venkatesh et al. (2003, 2012), actual use is considered as a formative construct. The analysis was carried out in three stages. Reflective measurement was tested in the first and the formative measurement model in the second. In the third stage, a non-parametric version of partial least squares-multi-group analysis (PLS-MGA) was applied. PLS-MGA is based on independent bootstrap analysis for each group (Vinzi, Chin; W., Henseler, & Wang, 2011). For proving the significant difference between groups, p-value should be less than 0.05 or higher than 0.95 (Henseler J., 2012).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

MEASUREMENT MODEL

Cronbach's alpha (abbr. CA or α) is a popular tool in the case of measuring reliability and it is accepted to be in a range from 0.6 to 1 where a higher value expresses a better level of reliability (Malhotra & Birks, 2007, p. 358). Three or more items needed to fulfill the main requirement for using Cronbach's alpha (Pallant, 2016), however, in the current survey most of the variables had only two items. Therefore, the consistency of the constructs was measured by Spearman's correlation coefficient (Table 2).

Construct/ Composite Reliability is usually applied in the case of SEM. Generally, CR higher than 0.7 is considered as a good level of reliability, while a value higher than 0.6 is also acceptable (Joseph F. Jr Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014, p. 619). The results illustrate that all constructs involved in the study have high Composite Reliability scores.

Additionally, statistical literature confirms that reliability estimates are also used as evidence of convergent validity (Joseph F. Jr Hair et al., 2014, p. 619) and high scores of average variance extracted (AVE) prove convergent validity. In this case, AVE is the share of total variance explained by the latent variable (Malhotra & Birks, 2010, p. 734). The accepted level of AVE (Joseph F. Jr Hair et al., 2014; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013) is greater than 0.5 (see Table 2). Except for Facilitating Conditions that were deleted from the study, the results of AVE for the remaining constructs were in the accepted range.

Table 2: Convergent validity and reliability

<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Composite Reliability</i>	<i>Average Variance Extracted (AVE)</i>
<i>BA Az*</i>	two items	0.827	0.711
<i>HM Az</i>	0.884	0.927	0.81
<i>HT Az*</i>	two items	0.682	0.521
<i>PV Az*</i>	two items	0.806	0.681
<i>SBI Az*</i>	two items	0.825	0.703
<i>SI Az*</i>	two items	0.73	0.577

Note: BA – Brand Awareness; SBI- Symbolic Brand Image; HM – Hedonic Motivation; HT – Habit; PV – Price Value; SI – Social Influence; USE – Actual Usage.

Note: *- Spearman’s correlation coefficient was calculated instead of Cronbach’s Alpha.

Source: own editing based on the results of the analysis

The other important criterion for ensuring discriminant validity is called the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The results for the criterion fulfill the main requirement which states that “the square root of each construct’s AVE should be greater than its highest correlation with any other construct” (Joe F. Jr Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins, & Kuppelwieser, 2014, p. 139).

Considering that actual use is a formative construct, rules for formative measurement indicators were applied. It must be reported that there was no multi-collinearity issue ($VIF < 3$). Based on the recommendation of Hair et al. (2017, p. 170) the items illustrating outer loading higher than 0.5 (i.e., U5 and U7) were kept for further analysis.

MULTI-GROUP ANALYSIS: EXAMINING THE MODERATION EFFECTS

In the current study, almost the same number of smartphone users were included in male and female subsamples (see Table 3). Based on the findings, mostly gender does not moderate the relationship between variables; apart from the relationship between habit and actual use, other examined pathways showed almost the same results for both subsamples. These are hedonic motivation, habit, and symbolic brand image. However, social influence has an impact on hedonic motivation in both samples with a stronger effect on the female subsample (see Table 3). In the case of the other pathways, (SI → HT; SI → SBI, and HT → USE) effect is stronger for males. Among all the relationships, the effect size of the relationship between social influence and symbolic brand image is highest.

Interestingly, there is no significant relationship between Social Influence and Brand Awareness ($p > 0.05$; $t_{male}(SI \rightarrow BA) = 0.308$; $t_{female}(SI \rightarrow BA) = 0.612$) and Price value ($p > 0.05$; $t_{male}(SI \rightarrow PV) = 1.309$; $t_{female}(SI \rightarrow PV) = 1.161$). For significant relationships value of T statistics must be higher than 1.96 (Joseph. F. Jr Hair et al., 2017, p. 216).

Table 1: PLS-MGA results for the effect of the gender moderator

PATHWAYS	F square Male subsample	F square Female subsample	T-value Male subsample	T-value Female subsample	P-value Male subsample	P-value Female subsample
H1. SI AZ → BA AZ	0.001	0.001	0.308	0.612	0.758	0.541
H2. SI AZ → SBI AZ	0.145	0.132	4.705	4.885	< 0.001	< 0.001
H3. SI AZ → HM AZ	0.061	0.085	3.632	4.246	< 0.001	< 0.001
H4. SI AZ → HT AZ	0.084	0.071	3.162	4.356	0.002	< 0.001
H5. SI AZ → PV AZ	0.023	0.012	1.309	1.161	0.191	0.246
H6. SI AZ → USE AZ	0.029	0.024	2.121	1.657	0.034	0.098
H7. HT AZ → USE AZ*	0.036		2.827		0.005	

Note: BA – Brand Awareness; SBI- Symbolic Brand Image; HM – Hedonic Motivation; HT – Habit; PV – Price Value; SI – Social Influence; USE – Actual Usage.

Note: * results were calculated for overall sample (N=394);

Source: own editing based on the results of the analysis

DISCUSSION

The current study aimed to identify factors that impact smartphone owners through social influence channels. The framework of the study was based on the UTAUT2 (2012), however, the author paid special attention to the emergence of attitude towards handset use through the social environment.

Moreover, based on the literature review two essential marketing-related variables (i.e., brand awareness and symbolic brand image) were included in the study. Also, the influence of the gender of respondents' behavior was tested.

In the original model, Social Influence was mentioned as a questionable indicator that is affected by age (higher impact in older age) and gender (Venkatesh et al., 2003, 2012). However, the author has a different opinion regarding social influence. She assumes that apart from age, social influence is also affected by cultural differences. The impact of the indicator on the decision-making process probably will be higher in collectivistic societies as Azerbaijan (Hofstede Insights, 2021). Therefore, this study focuses on the relationships between social influence and other variables. Based on numbers regarding effect size of significant pathways, the findings of the current work are in line with some of the previous surveys (Ameen & Willis, 2018; Ameen et al., 2018); the gender of smartphone users is an essential element (Venkatesh & Morris, 2000; Venkatesh et al., 2012) for determining relationships between different pathways.

It is widely known that different sources of information (attitude of peers, advertisements, personal experience) might have influence on attitude and decision of buyers (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). Considering a high level of collectivism (78%) as well as uncertainty avoidance (65%) the author assumed that social influence might have an impact on brand awareness. However, considering the age of respondents, it is highly relevant that they receive information from the other (i.e., above mentioned) sources and those sources have a stronger effect on the decision. Unfortunately, there is a knowledge gap regarding the relationship between social influence and marketing-related variables. So, the results regarding the impact of surrounding on brand awareness (H1. SI→ BA) cannot be compared with previous studies. Nevertheless, social influence does not have any effect on smartphone brand awareness among none of the genders (surveyed males and females) in Azerbaijan. It might lead the author to the idea that Azeri young adults are more influenced by advertising than by receiving information from peers.

Table 4: Results

N	Hypotheses	Status
<i>H1</i>	The gender of respondents moderates the relationship between social influence and smartphone brand awareness.	Hypothesis Rejected Female Subsample: Rejected $p > 0.05$ Male Subsample: Rejected $p > 0.05$
<i>H2</i>	The gender of respondents moderates the relationship between social influence and symbolic brand image with a stronger effect size on the male subsample	Hypothesis Accepted Female Subsample: Accepted $p < 0.001$ Male Subsample: Accepted $p < 0.001$
<i>H3</i>	The gender of respondents moderates the relationship between social influence and hedonic motivation.	Hypothesis Accepted Female Subsample: Accepted $p < 0.001$ Male Subsample: Accepted $p < 0.001$
<i>H4</i>	The gender of respondents moderates the relationship between social influence and habit.	Hypothesis Accepted Female Subsample: Accepted $p < 0.001$ Male Subsample: Accepted $p = 0.002$
<i>H5</i>	The gender of respondents moderates the relationship between social influence and price-value ratio.	Hypothesis Rejected Female Subsample: Rejected $p > 0.05$ Male Subsample: Rejected $p > 0.05$
<i>H6</i>	The gender of respondents moderates the relationship between social influence and actual use.	Hypothesis Partially Accepted Female Subsample: Rejected; $p > 0.05$ Male Subsample: Accepted; $p = 0.034$;
<i>H7</i>	There is a significant relationship between habit and actual use.	Hypothesis Accepted Total sample: $p = 0.005$

Source: own editing based on the results of the analysis

Social Influence has a positive impact on the symbolic brand image of the Azeri young adults ($H2: SBI \rightarrow BI$), who participated in this study. The findings show that males are more highly influenced by the image of their handset than females. It might be connected with the religion or influence of Post-Soviet culture (i.e., Russia). The signification of status/fashion in the case of Russian mobile phone users was previously reported (Salmi & Sharafutdinova, 2008).

The hypothesis explaining the relationship between social influence and hedonic motivation ($H3: SI \rightarrow HM$) was adopted from the original hypothesis used by Venkatesh et al. (2012). The findings of the Azeri sample illustrate that the effect size of social influence on hedonic motivation is stronger in case of the female subsample. Regarding $HM \rightarrow BI$ pathway, similar results from Jordan were presented (Ameen et al., 2018). However, Rita et al. (2018) reported different findings; according to the results of a study in Portugal, age and gender have no significant influence on the relationship between hedonic motivation and behavioral intention in terms of mobile service adoption.

The findings of the current research are especially influenced by the high education level of female (as well as male) respondents and mean that the surveyed females enjoy using handsets much more than males ($f^2_{male}(0.061) < f^2_{female}(0.085)$). The gap between genders decreases and enjoyment from handset use became usual. Moreover, some studies report (Anshari et al., 2016) that females tend to use handsets for keeping in touch with surrounding while males like gaming activities.

The results illustrate a significant relationship between social influence and habit (H4: SI→ HT) in the case of surveyed Azeri young adults. Even if indicators are partially different, the finding complies with the statement of Venkatesh (2012) as well as some of the previous surveys (Ameen & Willis, 2018; Ameen et al., 2018) in terms of effect size. The effect size of the relationship (SI → HT) in the male subsample is higher in comparison with the female subsample ($f^2_{male}(0.084) > f^2_{female}(0.071)$). So, the habit of questioned Azeri respondents is influenced by their social surrounding.

The findings illustrate that social surroundings cannot influence attitudes towards handsets' price-value between surveyed Azeri males and females (H5: SI→PV). It is logical as social influence is only one of the sources for receiving information. The socio-economic situation of the country (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2019a) and price-value ratio should be important for smartphone buyers/users too. It was confirmed in previous studies (Jamalova, 2020) that price value is an essential indicator influencing the behavioral intention of Azeri students, however, the source of this information is not related to close surroundings.

By contrast, the hypothesis regarding the relationship between social influence and actual use (H6: SI→USE) was partially accepted. This is the only hypothesis where results for male and female subsamples differ. In the case of males' social influence had a direct positive impact on actual use. However, in the female subsample, there is no any significant relationship between these variables. The results might be related to differences in technology use between genders (Venkatesh & Morris, 2000). Excluding this pathway, there is no significant difference between the decisions of males and females.

The relationship between habit and actual use was not investigated separately for each subsample. As it was originally offered by Venkatesh et al. (2012), the direct relationship was examined. There is a significant relationship between variables. This result complies with UTAUT2, however, some studies reported the opposite outcome (Ameen et al., 2018; Jamalova & Constantinovits, 2021). Considering the characteristics of mentioned latent variables, this issue might require deeper investigation (Limayem, Hirt, & Cheung, 2007).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to define the importance of social influence in a collectivistic country. This is one of the first study analyzing social influence not only from social surroundings but also marketing aspect. The author intended to define whether social influence plays a different role in collectivistic and individualistic societies. Results proved that there is no strong moderation effect of gender in the case of young adults. However, it is remarkable that social influence has a direct impact on symbolic brand image, hedonic motivation, and habit. Effect size in the relationship between SI and SBI is comparatively high, which proves that smartphone is also a status symbol for young Azeri adults. Future research will be focused on defining a set of marketing indicators that influences handset adoption.

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APPENDIX 1

<i>Item (by a variable)</i>	<i>Source</i>
Brand Awareness	
BA1. I was aware of my smartphone brand before purchasing it.	Filieri et al. (2019); Huang and Shih (2017)
BA2. I can recognize my smartphone brand among other brands.	Huang and Shih (2017)
BA3. Most people know about my smartphone's brand.	Wu and Ho (2014)
Symbolic Brand Image (SBI)	
SBI 1 I'm adopting the smartphone brand due to celebrity endorsements.	Chen et al. (2018)
SBI 2 The smartphone brand represents a higher social status for me.	Chen et al. (2018)
SBI 3 The smartphone's design reflects my personal taste.	Chen et al. (2018)
Social Influence (UTAUT2)	
SI1. People who are important to me think that smartphone use is necessary for me.	Venkatesh et al. (2003, 2012)
SI2. My friends and family influence my usage of the smartphone.	(Mohd Suki, 2013)
SI3. It is important for me that my friends like the brand of smartphone I'm using.	(Mohd Suki, 2013)
Hedonic Motivation (UTAUT2)	
HM1. Using a smartphone is fun. (3)	Venkatesh et al. (2012)
HM2. Using a smartphone is enjoyable. (2)	Venkatesh et al. (2012)
HM3. Using a smartphone is very entertaining. (1)	Venkatesh et al. (2012)
Price Value (UTAUT2)	
PV1. My smartphone is reasonably priced.	Venkatesh et al. (2012)
PV2. My smartphone is a good value for the money.	Venkatesh et al. (2012)
PV3. At the current price, my smartphone provides a good value.	Venkatesh et al. (2012)
Habit (UTAUT2)	
HT1. The use of a smartphone has become a habit for me.	Venkatesh et al. (2012)
HT2. I am addicted to using a smartphone.	Venkatesh et al. (2012)
Use (UTAUT2) Please choose your usage frequency for each of the following	
1. Phone calls	Venkatesh et al. (2012)
2. Messages	Venkatesh et al. (2012)
3. Photo/Video*	Venkatesh et al. (2012)
4. Internet browsing*	Venkatesh et al. (2012)
5. Social media*	Venkatesh et al. (2012)
6. E-mail*	Venkatesh et al. (2012)
7. Games	Venkatesh et al. (2012)
8. Office applications	Venkatesh et al. (2012)