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FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER PURCHASE BEHAVIOR IN
RETAIL PHARMACIES IN HARARE: A CASE OF PHARMARITE
PHARMACY.

BY

RUTENDO WHITNEY NDERERE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
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Abstract

The main objective of the study was to investigate factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour in retail pharmacies in Harare with specific reference to Pharmarite Pharmacy. An explanatory research design was adopted. Using questionnaires and interviews, data was collected from 54 purposively selected customers and staff at Pharmarite Pharmacy. The findings revealed that most customers tend to make purchases at the end of the month, during paydays, and on weekends, reflecting buying patterns linked to salary cycles and disposable income. Many visits are driven by the need to restock chronic medications, refill prescriptions or seek advice from pharmacy staff. Seasonal factors, such as school holidays, cold and flu periods, and festive seasons, also influence shopping behavior, prompting customers to stock up on medicines and health supplies. Women were observed to shop more frequently than men, and medical aid was often preferred over cash for payments. The study also found that purchase activity at Pharmarite Pharmacy is primarily driven by product availability, competitive pricing, and customers' income levels, with additional positive influences from helpful staff, convenient location, cleanliness, and flexible payment options. The study concluded that consumer purchasing at Pharmarite Pharmacy is shaped by a combination of personal, financial, and seasonal factors, which include income cycles, recurring health needs and seasonal trends. The study also concluded that customers are more likely to buy when products are available, prices are reasonable, promotions are offered, and service is efficient, while stock shortages or service delays reduce purchase activity. The study recommended that to enhance consumer purchases there is need to focus on promotional activities, competitive pricing and payment options, and maintaining product availability. The study recommended that future research be conducted to examine the long-term impact of digital engagement tools, mobile apps, and personalized customer services on consumer purchase behaviour in the pharmaceutical sector.

Key Words: Consumer Purchase Behavior, Retail Pharmacy

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my original work except where sources have been cited and acknowledged. The work has never been submitted, nor will it ever be submitted to another university for the award of a degree.

Rutendo W. Nderere



20.11.2025

Student's Full Name

Student's Signature (Date)

Dr S. Bigirimana



20.11.2025

Supervisor's Full Name

Supervisor's Signature (Date)

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family, for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout this journey.

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ESACP	East and Southern Africa College of Pharmacists
MCAZ	Medicines Control Authority of Zimbabwe
PSZ	Pharmaceutical Society of Zimbabwe
WHO	World Health Organisation
ZIMSTAT	Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency

Definition of Key Terms

Consumer Purchase Behaviour refers to the actions and decision-making processes individuals go through when selecting, buying, using, and disposing of goods or services to satisfy their needs and wants.

Retail Pharmacy- is a store where prescription medications, over-the-counter drugs, and other health-related products are sold directly to consumers. It also provides services like medication counselling and health advice.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the subject of the study, which focuses on the factors that shape consumer purchase behaviour in retail pharmacies based in Harare, Zimbabwe. The chapter begins with an introduction and spells out the background of the study, tracing the concept of purchase behaviour and its relevance in pharmacy settings. It outlines how consumer decision-making unfolds from need recognition through to the point of post-purchase reflection. This is followed by the problem statement, where the gap in existing studies is clearly identified, particularly the lack of focus on in-store consumer behaviour in urban pharmacy environments. The chapter then provides the research objectives and subsequent questions, outlining the goals that guided the study. The chapter then provides hypotheses formulated to tackle the identified problem. Following this, the significance of the research is discussed illustrating how the study's findings may benefit various stakeholders. The delimitations and limitations of the study are outlined to define its boundaries and scope, ensuring clarity about what lies within and beyond the investigation.

1.2 Background to the Study

Consumer purchase behaviour is one of the most widely examined yet continually evolving fields within marketing and business management (Szmigin & Piacentini, 2018). It refers not only to the act of purchasing but also to the full decision-making journey that individuals or groups undertake when considering products or services (Petcharat & Leelasantitham, 2021). This includes

recognising a need, searching for information, evaluating available options, deciding (including deciding not to buy) and assessing the experience after the fact. Consumer purchase behaviour encompasses both rational and emotional elements, with individuals influenced not only by personal preferences but also by their beliefs, surroundings and broader societal norms. As Blackwell, Miniard and Engel (2006) assert, the process is layered and changes depending on the situation, product type and individual disposition.

At its core, consumer purchase behavior attempts to answer what consumers buy, why they buy, when they buy, how often they buy and how they use or discard what they purchase. Abubakar and Bala (2020) have since long debated the reliability of consumer behavior models developed in Western settings when applied to developing countries. According to Anwar, Abid and Waseem (2022), cultural values, socio-political factors and even historical legacies often influence consumers in Africa in ways that differ markedly from Western assumptions. This raises questions about the universality of consumer decision-making frameworks and points to a need for locally grounded studies that can explain how people make purchasing decisions under unique national conditions such as those found in Harare.

Understanding consumer purchase behaviour has become increasingly important in today's commercial world because companies and organisations rely on this knowledge to tailor their services and remain competitive (Sandra, 2024). According to Mesly and Réthoré (2024), firms must go beyond simply stocking shelves and hoping for sales; they must actively study the motivations, hesitations and preferences that customers bring with them into a purchasing environment. When companies understand why customers behave the way they do, they are

better positioned to meet expectations, retain loyalty and drive profitability. Kotler and Keller (2016) argue that businesses that invest in customer behaviour research outperform those that rely solely on intuition. In the pharmacy sector, this is even more important, as consumers are not just buyers but often patients seeking relief, reassurance or health-related solutions (Moore et al, 2018). This emotional undertone makes the purchasing process more sensitive than in ordinary retail. Zimbabwe's healthcare landscape has gone through many transitions over the last two decades, with economic instability and medicine shortages affecting consumer access (Mahuni et al, 2025). Therefore, pharmacies cannot treat their customers as passive buyers. They must understand how income levels, trust in medicine suppliers, knowledge of drug alternatives and even societal attitudes toward generic medicines shape purchasing patterns (Ngonde, 2021). Without this understanding, pharmacy owners run the risk of misjudging the needs of their communities and potentially losing their market share to competitors who read the market better.

The process of consumer behaviour typically begins with need recognition, a stage where the individual realises a gap between their current state and their desired condition. This is followed by an information search, which may include online browsing, word-of-mouth, speaking with pharmacists or doctors, or relying on past experiences (Almomani et al, 2023). Once enough information has been gathered, consumers then evaluate the alternatives available to them, considering price, perceived effectiveness, brand, availability and other factors. After making a choice, the individual proceeds with the purchase and eventually evaluates whether the experience met their expectations. Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019) highlight that this final stage post-purchase evaluation is critical in determining

brand loyalty or dissatisfaction. Notably, deciding not to buy is also part of this behaviour, as some consumers may abandon the process midway due to lack of trust, unclear information or affordability concerns. Andy et al, (2024) argue that in pharmacy retail specifically, this process can be even more intricate, especially when it involves over-the-counter drugs, health supplements or beauty products. In some cases, the pharmacist's demeanour or product knowledge becomes more influential than the actual product on the shelf. Therefore, the purchase decision in such settings is shaped by a blend of psychological, social and situational factors, rather than mere product availability.

A wide range of actors are involved in shaping consumer behaviour, particularly within pharmacy retail. These include the consumers themselves, who bring with them attitudes, experiences, beliefs and spending power (Schlaile et al, 2018). Pharmacists and pharmacy staff play a huge role in guiding decisions through the advice they give and the atmosphere they create within the store. Suppliers and manufacturers influence behaviour through branding, packaging and promotional strategies. Government authorities and regulatory agencies also shape consumer confidence through policies on drug pricing, importation and advertising. Professional associations such as the Pharmaceutical Society of Zimbabwe (PSZ) influence the ethical conduct of pharmacists, while medical practitioners often act as gatekeepers through prescriptions or informal recommendations (Manyau et al, 2022). In many Zimbabwean households, decisions are also influenced by family members or caregivers, especially when dealing with children or elderly persons. As Chikazhe and Mupambireyi (2020) observe in their study on health-seeking behaviour in urban Zimbabwe, family and community networks often reinforce certain habits and discourage others. This means that in retail pharmacy settings,

understanding consumer behaviour requires considering a web of influence that goes beyond the customer at the counter.

Empirical markers such as statistics, reports and recent events point to why this study is both timely and necessary. According to the Medicines Control Authority of Zimbabwe (MCAZ), the country has seen a significant increase in licensed retail pharmacies over the past five years, with Harare accounting for more than 40% of these (Govu, 2019). The 2021 report by the Ministry of Health and Child Care indicated that urban demand for over-the-counter medicines, health supplements and cosmetic pharmaceuticals has surged, partly due to lifestyle shifts, increased awareness and rising incidences of non-communicable diseases (Ministry of Health and Child Care, 2021). Furthermore, the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT) showed in its 2022 household survey that urban households, especially in Harare, are spending more on health-related goods than they did five years ago, despite economic constraints (ZIMSTAT, 2022). Regionally, the East and Southern Africa College of Pharmacists (ESACP) held a 2023 summit in Nairobi where discussions were held about consumer trust in pharmaceutical products and how retail pharmacies could adapt to shifting buyer expectations in cities affected by economic volatility (ESACP, 2023). It is against such a backdrop that this study emerged, rooted in a desire to understand what truly drives the buying decisions of urban Zimbabweans when faced with a multitude of pharmacy options. There has been no recent local study that unpacks these behaviours in an in-store setting, especially at a time when competition among pharmacies is higher than ever.

Another motivation for conducting this study is the absence of grounded data that pharmacy businesses in Zimbabwe can use to improve their performance. While

Malik, Aggarwal and Vidyapeeth (2021)'s study has been conducted on broader consumer behaviour trends such as the rise of online shopping or the influence of social media, there is a glaring lack of attention paid to in-person consumer behaviour in health-related retail spaces. Most pharmacy owners operate based on trial-and-error rather than evidence-led strategies. This leaves room for misaligned product placement, ineffective marketing or poor customer service, which can all affect purchasing patterns (Tully et al., 2016; Mohan & Sequeira, 2019). A better understanding of how consumers behave in these environments can bring about practical changes that improve customer satisfaction and business outcomes (Ismail et al., 2020). Research done in Nigeria by Okeke and Uchenna (2018) on the retail pharmacy industry revealed that even small interventions like changing shelf layout, training staff on communication or highlighting trusted brands could increase customer retention. Zimbabwe's pharmacy sector stands to benefit from such findings, but these must be grounded in local realities, not borrowed assumptions.

It is also important to consider the historical and economic backdrop that affects consumer choices in Zimbabwe. Over the past two decades, repeated economic shocks have eroded purchasing power and altered shopping habits. During periods of hyperinflation, consumers focused on price alone, while in more stable times, factors such as product quality, brand familiarity and trust in the source became more important. In Harare today, even with relative currency stabilisation, many customers still carry the caution of the past, often scrutinising every purchase. According to Urban pharmacies reported fluctuating sales due to consumer suspicion of fake products and expired stock (WHO, 2022). This wariness has led some customers to rely more heavily on pharmacist recommendations, especially

in low-income suburbs. Understanding how such historic and emotional layers affect current behaviour is critical for anyone hoping to influence pharmacy retail performance in the city.

In the absence of reliable consumer data, pharmacy business owners are often forced to base decisions on anecdotal knowledge or incomplete sales records (Kibicho & Owour, 2019). Yet in a sector that deals directly with public health, such guesswork can lead to missed opportunities or reduced public trust (Anwar, Abid & Waseem, 2022). Pharmacies are not ordinary retail outlets; they serve a health function and deal with buyers who may be anxious, uninformed or seeking more than just a product they seek clarity, comfort and sometimes even validation (Babar, 2021). This makes consumer behaviour in this setting both urgent and unique. Zimbabwe's retail pharmacy environment is steadily becoming more commercial, but this should not come at the cost of understanding the human dimensions of purchase decisions (Munyoro & Madzinga-Kusena, 2024). A well-grounded study in this area can bridge the gap between customer expectations and pharmacy operations, helping decision-makers see beyond the transaction and focus more closely on relationships, experiences and service culture. It is within this space that the present study seeks to make a meaningful contribution.

Over the past three years, Pharmarite Pharmacy in Harare has experienced unstable and declining sales performance, marked by a 25% drop in yearly revenue in 2022, a 23% decline in 2023 and a 26% decline in 2024. Profits have also fallen by an estimated 30%, primarily due to inconsistent customer purchasing patterns, rising operational costs, and increased competition from informal drug sellers and new retail entrants. Sales data reveal fluctuations in customer footfall and purchase frequency, with some outlets experiencing up to 40% fewer transactions during

off-peak months, posing serious concerns for long-term sustainability. The unpredictability in consumer purchasing patterns with some months showing strong product movement and others recording slow or negligible sales suggests a lack of alignment between customer expectations and pharmacy offerings. Despite investments in stock variety and basic advertising, there remains a growing disconnect between what Pharmarite Pharmacy provides and what consumers are willing or able to purchase. This raises critical questions about the underlying factors shaping buyer behaviour.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Pharmarite Pharmacy in Harare has experienced fluctuating sales performance over time, characterized by unpredictable consumer purchasing patterns that vary across seasons, weekends, holidays, and month-ends. These fluctuations have resulted in inconsistent revenue streams and declining overall profitability. Despite these challenges, there has been no systematic investigation into the underlying causes of these variations in consumer purchase behaviour at Pharmarite Pharmacy. Existing research on consumer behaviour predominantly focuses on developed markets and online shopping environments or examines the broader retail sector, leaving a gap in understanding the dynamics specific to urban health retail settings in developing economies such as Zimbabwe. Studies by Pappas (2016) and Liu et al. (2023) have provided valuable insights into digital purchase decision-making and the role of personal traits in consumer choices, while Chikweche and Fletcher (2012) explored consumer behaviour in African informal markets. However, these studies do not adequately address the unique factors affecting consumer decisions within Zimbabwe's formal pharmaceutical

retail sector. Furthermore, although research by Ndlovu et al. (2021) and Maphosa (2024) has examined the general retail environment, the pharmaceutical industry remains underexplored, limiting the contextual relevance of their findings to pharmacies such as Pharmarite. This lack of focused research restricts a comprehensive understanding of buyer behaviour factors that are unique to retail pharmacies in Zimbabwe's urban context. Consequently, Pharmarite Pharmacy operates without grounded, evidence-based insights into what drives or inhibits consumer purchases in its market. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this critical knowledge gap by investigating the factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour at Pharmarite Pharmacy in Harare.

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

- 1.4.1 Assess patterns of buyer purchase behaviour at Pharmarite Pharmacy.
- 1.4.2 Examine the factors that contribute to either high or low purchase activity at Pharmarite Pharmacy.
- 1.4.3 Recommend strategies for optimising consumer purchases at Pharmarite Pharmacy.

1.5 Research Questions

- 1.5.1 What have been the patterns of buyer purchase behaviour at Pharmarite Pharmacy?
- 1.5.2 What factors contribute to either high or low levels of purchase activity at Pharmarite Pharmacy??

1.5.3 What strategies can be recommended to optimise consumer purchases at Pharmarite Pharmacy?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is important to several groups, including the academic field, the pharmacy industry in Zimbabwe and the researcher. It contributes new understanding on consumer behaviour within pharmacy retail, grounded in real experiences from Harare's urban population.

1.6.1 To Academia

The study contributes to academic work by offering grounded knowledge on consumer behaviour in urban health retail settings. While consumer research has been conducted in various sectors, little work has concentrated on in-store behaviour in Zimbabwean pharmacies. Previous studies have often focused on online platforms or broad retail patterns without narrowing in on pharmacy settings, where factors such as trust in health advice, urgency of need and availability of medicines heavily shape decisions. This work provides a localised view of consumer trends in Harare from 2020 to 2024 and engages with theories of buyer behaviour to test their relevance in an urban African setting. The findings are therefore useful to students and scholars in marketing, behavioural economics and pharmaceutical retail. They may also help strengthen future research by opening new lines of inquiry into urban health-related purchasing patterns in other parts of Southern Africa.

1.6.2 To the Pharmacy Industry

The study is beneficial to stakeholders in the pharmacy sector, particularly owners, marketing teams, product suppliers, and health product investors. With growing competition among pharmacies in Harare, many businesses are seeking ways to attract and retain customers; however, few have access to data that reveals the true drivers of consumer decision-making. This research unpacks the key factors influencing purchasing behaviour, such as pricing, product availability, trust in staff, and the in-store experience. Pharmacy operators can use this information to refine their marketing strategies, improve customer service, and enhance stock management. The study also highlights challenges that hinder consistent purchasing, including pricing concerns and a lack of customer trust. Its findings help pharmacies adjust their operations to better serve the needs of diverse customer groups in a dynamic economic environment. Additionally, policy actors and regulators may benefit from the insights when developing strategies to improve access to health commodities and strengthen consumer protection.

1.6.3 To the Researcher

This study presented an opportunity for the researcher to engage with a subject that affected both business performance and public health. Through fieldwork, data analysis, and the application of theory, the researcher sharpened their understanding of consumer decision-making processes, particularly within an urban health retail setting. It also provided practical experience in designing research tools, collecting data from diverse communities, and interacting with professionals in the pharmacy trade. The experience strengthened the researcher's competence in behavioural studies and applied marketing, while also offering space for personal growth, critical thinking, and industry engagement. As part of the requirements for graduating with an Executive Master's in Business

Administration, this research was undertaken in partial fulfilment of the degree. The knowledge and skills acquired may serve as a foundation for future work in business research, consultancy, or pharmacy marketing.

1.7 Delimitations of the study

The study was conducted as a single case study limited to Pharmarite Pharmacy. The study was conducted in Harare (geographical delimitation) and covers period between 2022 to 2024 (time delimitation) as it this is the period where there have been inconsistencies in sales, customer footfall and purchase frequency.

1.8 Limitations of the study

Like any research, this study was not without limitations. It was conducted within a single city (Harare) focusing on a single pharmacy as a case study, this therefore made its findings to be largely based on urban single pharmacy and did not represent pharmacy experiences in peri urban rural areas of Zimbabwe. While Harare is diverse and well-populated, the conditions in smaller towns or growth points could differ significantly. In addition, access to real-time pharmacy sales data was limited in some cases due to business confidentiality, which required the researcher to rely more heavily on consumer responses.

There were also constraints related to time and resources, which affected the size and reach of the data collection exercise. To overcome this limitation the study focused on a single pharmacy to enable timeous completion of the research. Furthermore, despite other set of these limitations, the study provided strong indications of urban consumer trends and challenges within the pharmacy sector.

Existing literature on consumer behaviour in health retail, both within and outside Zimbabwe, was used to augment and shape the analysis where gaps were present.

The researcher faced reluctance from respondents to provide information that was considered private and confidential. Staff members were hesitant to share sensitive information or express their opinions openly due to fear of repercussions and a lack of trust in the confidentiality of the process. To overcome this limitation, respondents were assured that their responses would be treated confidentially and that their feedback would be used solely for improvement purposes rather than for personal evaluation. Thus, all respondents were guaranteed confidentiality and were informed that the study was conducted for academic purposes only.

There was also a likelihood of bias in the data collected from staff. To strengthen the findings of the study and minimize this bias, the researcher used methodological triangulation by incorporating both primary and secondary data.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature relevant to consumer purchase behaviour within the retail pharmacy sector. It opens with an overview of the chapter's structure, setting out the main themes that guide the discussion. The chapter then presents the theoretical framework that underpins the study, explaining how selected models relate to consumer behaviour and why they are appropriate for understanding patterns in pharmacy purchasing. The chapter continues to assess patterns of consumer purchase behaviour in general. Furthermore, it examines literature on the factors that contributed to either high or low purchase activity in retail businesses. Thus, chapter highlights the key factors that influence consumer purchase behaviour, including psychological, social, economic and marketing-related elements. In the sections that follow, the discussion engages with scholarly debates around trust, pricing, brand loyalty, product availability and other variables known to affect decision-making in health retail. The chapter went on to review strategies for enhancing consumer purchases in retail enterprises. The chapter then outlines the conceptual framework, illustrating the relationships between the key variables in this study. The chapter concludes with a research gap identified from the literature and closes with a summary of the chapter.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 The Howard-Seth Theory of Buyer Behaviour

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the Howard-Sheth Theory of Buyer Behavior. This theory is a widely recognized model in marketing and

consumer behaviour studies. The theory of buyer behaviour was first developed by Howard in 1963 and in 1969 the theory was developed further by Howard and Sheth and became known as the “Theory of Buyer Behaviour” or the Howard and Sheth model (Howard & Sheth 1969). The Howard and Sheth model give a sophisticated integration of the various social, psychological and marketing influence on consumer choice into coherent sequence of information processing (Manuere, Chikazhe & Manyeruke, 2022). The major component of the theory of buyer behaviour includes inputs, exogenous variables, interfering variables and outputs. The major aim of Howard and Sheth was to construct a solid model that could be used to measure a wide range of buying scenarios and for this reason the term “buyer” was coined, instead of the term “consumers” and this was done to include all commercial purchases. Figure 2.1 below depicts the critical elements of the Howard Sheth model.

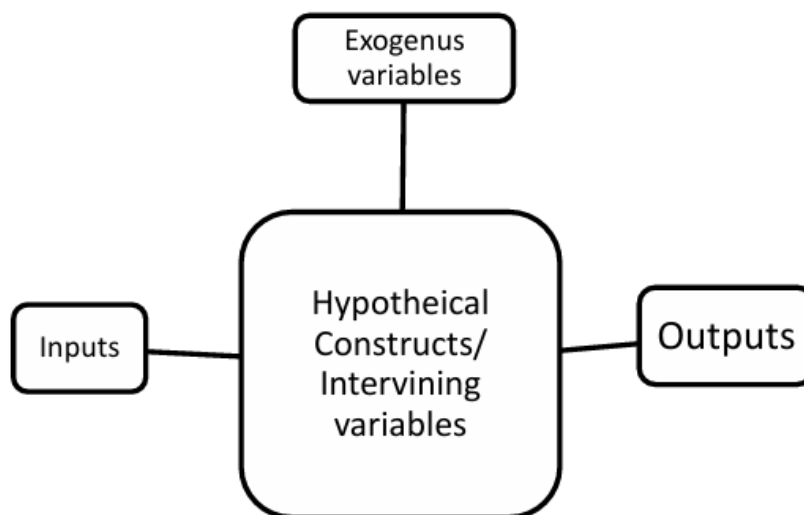


Figure 2.1: The critical elements of the Howard Sheth model

Source Adapted from Manuere et al (2022)

This theory treats consumer behavior as a system influenced by both external stimuli and internal psychological processes, emphasizing that purchasing decisions are not random but are shaped by a combination of social, psychological, and marketing factors.

The model identifies inputs, which are the external factors that influence a consumer's decision. These include significant stimuli, such as advertising, pricing, product features, and promotions, as well as symbolic stimuli, like peer influence, family expectations, and social status. These inputs interact with the consumer's internal processes to shape perception and evaluation of alternatives (Manuere et al, 2022).

At the core of the Howard-Sheth model are the internal processes, which include perceptual and learning constructs. Perceptual constructs refer to how the consumer interprets and perceives product information, while learning constructs involve how past experiences and knowledge influence current choices. Consumers actively process information through attention, interpretation, and learning, forming preferences and attitudes that guide their decisions.

The output of the model is the buyer's decision, which includes the choice of product, brand selection, timing, and purchase quantity. Additionally, the model considers post-purchase behaviour, as satisfaction or dissatisfaction can influence future decisions. This focus on the entire decision-making process, from problem recognition to post-purchase evaluation, makes the model particularly useful for understanding high-involvement purchases.

According to Howard and Sheth (1969), the consumer's decision making process is determined by the quality of the attitude associated with the brands in question

and the whole action of the consumer is based on the consumer prior knowledge and acquaintance with the product mix. Exogenous variables include importance of purchase, personality variables, social class and culture (Howard & Sheth, 1969). Exogenous factors are heavily depended on the buyer's personality, age sex religion, life style, education and employment status (Howard & Sheth 1969).

The Howard-Sheth model is significant because it integrates psychological, social, and marketing factors to explain consumer behaviour. Howard and Sheth (1969) argue that the attitudes of the consumers positively affect the purchasing decision of consumers through intention and this argument is supported by Loudon et al, (1993), who posit that both the input and the output variables and the exogenous variables are well blended in the model. The model makes a smooth and meaningful integration of psychological, social and marketing influences that impact positively on consumed behaviour hence the various decision-making strategies are well identified (Howard & Sheth, 1969).

2.3 The Relevance of the theoretical framework to the study

The Howard-Sheth Theory of Buyer Behaviour provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding the factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour. This model explains consumer behavior as a process shaped by both external inputs and internal psychological processes, ultimately resulting in purchase decisions. In the context of this study, the external inputs include marketing-related stimuli such as pricing, product availability, promotions, and service quality, as well as social and symbolic stimuli such as recommendations from family, friends, or the community. These inputs are consistent with the

variables identified in the conceptual framework (Figure 2.2) and form the basis for examining how consumers are influenced before making purchasing decisions.

The internal processes emphasized by the Howard-Sheth model: perception, learning, and attitude formation are particularly relevant for pharmacy purchases, which often involve trust, prior experience, and evaluation of alternatives. For example, consumers at Pharmarite Pharmacy may consider the reliability of prescription medications, the professionalism of pharmacy staff, or the perceived effectiveness of branded versus generic products. In the conceptual framework, these internal factors are reflected in mediating variables that shape the consumer's decision-making process. By linking these constructs to the framework, the study captures not only what external factors influence purchase behaviour but also how consumers interpret and weigh these factors before making a choice.

Furthermore, the model's focus on high-involvement and complex decision-making aligns with the study context, where pharmacy purchases can range from routine over-the-counter products to prescription medications requiring careful consideration. The conceptual framework (Figure 2.2) illustrates this interaction by showing how input variables such as product attributes, promotional activities, and social influence affect internal mediators like perception, trust, and satisfaction, which in turn determine the output variables of purchase decision, brand choice, and loyalty. This alignment ensures that the study systematically investigates the mechanisms through which various factors influence consumer behaviour, providing a clear link between theory and empirical observation. The conceptual framework in Figure 2.2 therefore serves as a practical representation

of the Howard-Sheth model, tailored to the retail pharmacy context in Harare, guiding both data collection and analysis in a systematic way.

However, several authors argue that there is widespread questioning of the model's validity due to the lack for empirical work, employing scientific methods, examining the organization of the model and the inclusion of individual constructs for example Loudon et al, (1993) have noted with concern that the model of Buyer Behaviour has been found to be incompatible when explaining joint decision making issues and the model fails to appreciate new trends in consumer practices (Manuere et al, 2022). Howard and Sheth (1969) were able to identify the impact the exogenous variables have on consumer behaviour and the authors (Howard and Sheth, 1969) further argue that "the personality of the consumer influences nonspecific motives but not specific motives or perceptual bias.

2.4 The Concept of Consumer Purchase Behaviour

Consumer purchase behaviour is a key indicator of retail performance, especially in pharmacy environments where purchasing decisions are shaped by a mixture of economic, social and psychological influences. Assessing this behaviour requires a multi-layered lens that takes into account behavioral, operational and strategic criteria. Each dimension sheds light on how effectively a retail pharmacy appeals to customer needs, fosters trust and translates engagement into actual purchases (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). Behavioural measures focus on individual-level decisions, such as frequency of purchase, brand loyalty and responsiveness to pharmacist interaction. For example, repeat visits and customer retention are often used to gauge satisfaction and sustained engagement. The level of trust in pharmacy staff, willingness to accept substitute or generic drugs and the

customer's openness to health-related suggestions all fall within this behavioural layer (Babar, 2021).

From an operational perspective, factors such as shelf arrangement, waiting times, staff responsiveness and product availability influence the likelihood of a purchase being made. Retail pharmacies that minimise queues, clearly display prices, or maintain consistent stock levels often enjoy higher purchase rates (Ismail et al, 2020). Indicators such as the percentage of walk-in customers who leave without buying, or sales per foot traffic, offer operational insights into gaps between customer interest and actual conversion. These are especially important in Zimbabwe's urban pharmacies, where limited product knowledge or price uncertainty can deter customers even when they have a purchase intention. Equally significant is the pharmacy's pricing strategy whether perceived as fair, affordable or exploitative particularly in environments where disposable income is constrained.

Strategically, the assessment of consumer purchase behaviour includes broader factors that influence long-term sustainability, such as customer lifetime value, brand perception and responsiveness to promotional campaigns. Pharmacies that actively engage in health campaigns, loyalty programmes or community outreach often position themselves more favourably in the minds of consumers, leading to increased repeat purchases over time (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Understanding demographic trends such as age, income or education levels also supports strategic decision-making, helping pharmacies align their product range and marketing tone with the needs of specific segments. Furthermore, digital interaction and e-pharmacy trends are beginning to shape urban consumer behaviour in Harare and

indicators such as online enquiries, app usage or home delivery uptake are becoming important markers of modern consumer engagement.

2.4.1 Patterns of Consumer Purchase behaviour

Understanding buyer behaviour is pivotal for businesses aiming to meet customer needs effectively. Various patterns have been identified that shed light on how consumers make purchasing decisions.

2.4.1.1 Habitual Buying Behaviour

Habitual buying behaviour refers to purchases made routinely with minimal cognitive effort. Consumers often buy the same brand out of habit, not due to strong brand loyalty but because of familiarity and convenience. This pattern is prevalent in low-involvement products where differences between brands are perceived as minor (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Habitual buying behaviour manifests when consumers repeatedly purchase the same product with minimal cognitive engagement, often due to ingrained routines rather than deliberate decision-making. This pattern is prevalent in the consumption of low-involvement goods where brand distinctions are perceived as negligible. Research indicates that such behaviour is influenced by factors including price discounts, brand awareness, perceived quality and shipping costs, all of which can significantly impact purchasing decisions in habitual contexts (Putri, 2020). Moreover, habitual purchasing is often a result of low consumer arousal and minimal emotional involvement, suggesting that judgments during the purchase decision occur non-consciously (Wood & Neal, 2019). This automaticity in purchasing underscores the challenge for marketers aiming to disrupt established consumer habits and introduce new products into a habitual purchasing cycle

2.4.1.2 Variety-Seeking Behaviour

In contrast, variety-seeking behaviour occurs when consumers switch brands not due to dissatisfaction but out of a desire for novelty or change. This is common in categories where product differentiation is significant and consumers enjoy exploring different options (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). Variety-seeking behaviour is characterised by consumers' propensity to switch brands or products, not due to dissatisfaction but from a desire for novelty and change. This behaviour is particularly evident in product categories where differentiation is significant and consumers derive pleasure from exploring diverse options.

An analysis of variety-seeking behaviours in consumer research consolidated findings from 61 empirical studies spanning two decades, highlighting both internal factors (such as personality traits and emotions) and external factors (including market offerings and cultural influences) that drive this behaviour (Zhang, 2022). Furthermore, studies have shown that environmental cues, such as background music tempo, can influence variety-seeking tendencies; specifically, fast-tempo music has been found to increase consumers' variety-seeking behaviour by elevating arousal levels (Meng & Leung, 2023).

2.4.1.3 Complex Buying Behaviour

Complex buying behaviour is observed when consumers are highly involved in a purchase and perceive significant differences among brands. This often applies to expensive or infrequent purchases, where consumers conduct extensive research and evaluate alternatives meticulously (Solomon, 2018). Complex buying behaviour arises when consumers are deeply engaged in a purchase decision and discern substantial differences among brands. This scenario typically unfolds with

high-stakes or infrequent acquisitions, such as automobiles, real estate, or advanced electronics, where the financial commitment and personal significance are considerable. In these instances, buyers undertake a thorough evaluation process, meticulously comparing product attributes, performance metrics and brand reputations to ensure their choice aligns with their expectations and requirements. This intensive deliberation is driven by the consumer's desire to mitigate potential post-purchase regret and to make an informed decision that justifies the substantial investment involved.

Research by Hauser (2018) emphasizes that consumers often form a 'consideration set' a shortlist of brands or products that meet their initial criteria before engaging in detailed comparisons. This approach streamlines the decision-making process by focusing attention on a manageable number of options. Additionally, a study by Meng and Leung (2023) highlights the impact of environmental cues on consumer behaviour, noting that elements such as background music tempo can affect the level of arousal and, consequently, the depth of information processing during complex purchase decisions. Furthermore, the proliferation of digital platforms has transformed information accessibility, enabling consumers to consult online reviews, expert opinions and social media discussions, thereby enriching their evaluative processes and influencing their final choices.

2.4.1.4 Dissonance-Reducing Buying Behaviour

This pattern emerges when consumers are highly involved but perceive few differences between brands. After the purchase, they may experience post-purchase dissonance, leading them to seek reassurance about their choice to reduce discomfort (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Dissonance-reducing buying behaviour

occurs when consumers are highly involved in a purchase decision but perceive minimal differences among available brands. This scenario often arises with high-value, infrequently purchased or emotionally weighted products, such as health-related services, insurance, or personal electronics. In these contexts, the perceived similarity between alternatives can lead to hesitation, particularly when the outcome carries implications for wellbeing or finances. According to Ramadan and Farah (2021), such decisions can trigger post-purchase dissonance a psychological discomfort that emerges when consumers question the correctness of their decision. The lack of clear product differentiation, combined with high consumer involvement, amplifies this effect, prompting behaviours aimed at reducing the discomfort. Consumers may actively search for positive feedback, avoid criticism of the purchased brand, or seek reassurance from peers (Rahman et al., 2022).

For retail pharmacies and health-linked businesses, understanding this behavioural phase is essential to building long-term trust. Successful post-purchase engagement through follow-up communication, clear return policies, or after-sales support can reduce uncertainty and reinforce customer satisfaction (Kaur et al., 2023). Retailers who address post-purchase emotions tend to benefit from stronger brand loyalty and fewer returns or complaints (Ali et al., 2020). Especially in health-related retail environments, where anxiety and urgency often accompany purchase decisions, strategic post-purchase reassurance can improve both customer retention and emotional security. As noted by Wang and Kim (2022), timely customer feedback loops and emotional cues during the follow-up phase are increasingly recognised as pillars of effective consumer relationship management. Research indicates that consumers often rationalize their decisions,

seek supportive information, or avoid contradictory information to reduce dissonance (Sweeney et al., 2000). Furthermore, a study by Koller and Salzberger (2007) found that consumers experiencing dissonance may alter their attitudes or beliefs to align with their choices, thereby reducing psychological discomfort.

2.4.1.5 Impulse Buying Behaviour

Impulse buying is characterised by spontaneous, unplanned decisions to purchase, often triggered by emotions or immediate gratification. Retail environments that strategically place products can significantly influence this behaviour (Muruganatham & Bhakat, 2013). Impulse buying behaviour is characterised by spontaneous, unplanned purchase decisions made immediately before a transaction. This behaviour is often driven by emotional responses, desires, or sudden urges, rather than a premeditated need for the product. Retail environments play a significant role in triggering impulse purchases through strategic product placements, promotional offers and sensory stimuli designed to elicit immediate consumer responses (Kathuria & Bakshi, 2024). Factors such as in-store displays, limited-time offers and the overall shopping atmosphere can significantly influence a consumer's likelihood to engage in impulse buying.

Additionally, individual traits, including a consumer's tendency towards impulsivity, mood states and susceptibility to marketing cues, further contribute to this behaviour. Understanding the psychological and environmental triggers of impulse buying is essential for retailers aiming to design effective marketing strategies that encourage spontaneous purchases while ensuring ethical practices that do not exploit consumers' vulnerabilities. Research has shown that positive emotions can reduce purchase evaluation time, leading to quicker, impulsive

decisions (Zhang et al., 2023). Moreover, a study by Liu et al. (2022) found that online reviews and shopping enjoyment significantly influence online impulsive buying behaviours among millennials.

2.4.1.6 Online Shopping Behaviour

With the advent of e-commerce, online shopping behaviour has become a critical area of study. Factors such as website design, ease of navigation and online reviews significantly impact consumers' online purchase decisions (Prasetyo & Putra, 2024). The rise of e-commerce has transformed consumer purchasing patterns, making online shopping behaviour a critical area of study. Key factors influencing online purchase decisions include website design, ease of navigation and the availability of online reviews. A study by Pappas (2016) highlights that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness significantly impact online shopping behaviour, mediated by purchase intention. Additionally, research indicates that factors such as demographic characteristics, social influences, prior online shopping experience and website design play pivotal roles in shaping consumer behaviour in online environments (Kumar & Kashyap, 2019). Furthermore, the quality of product descriptions, shipping costs, return policies and the overall convenience of searching for products are crucial elements that affect online purchasing decisions (Digital Doughnut, 2018). Understanding these factors is essential for businesses aiming to enhance their online platforms and improve customer satisfaction

2.4.1.7 Cross-Cultural Consumer Behaviour

Understanding how cultural differences influence buying behaviour is essential in a globalised market. Cultural values, norms and traditions can lead to varying

consumer preferences and purchasing patterns across different regions (De Mooij, 2019). In an increasingly globalised market, understanding how cultural differences influence buying behaviour is paramount. Cultural values, norms and traditions can lead to varying consumer preferences and purchasing patterns across different regions. De Mooij & Hofstede (2019) emphasise that most aspects of consumer behaviour are culture-bound, highlighting the importance of considering cultural relationships with the self, personality and attitudes in consumer behaviour models. Cross-cultural consumer behaviour research helps businesses identify behavioural patterns that vary across regions, thereby aiding in the development of effective marketing strategies that resonate with target audiences (Netscribes, 2022). Moreover, studies have shown that cultural orientations significantly influence consumer responses to marketing stimuli, underscoring the necessity for marketers to tailor their approaches to align with cultural contexts (Valenzuela et al., 2010). Recognising and adapting to these cultural differences is crucial for businesses aiming to succeed in diverse markets.

2.4.1.8 Generational Consumer Behaviour

Different age cohorts exhibit distinct purchasing behaviours influenced by their unique experiences and values. For instance, millennials may prioritise convenience and digital engagement, while baby boomers might value personal interaction and brand loyalty (Parment, 2013). Generational consumer behaviour recognises that different age groups approach purchasing with distinct preferences shaped by historical events, technological change and societal values. Millennials, typically born between 1981 and 1996, often show strong preferences for convenience, technological integration and socially responsible brands (Ivanova et al., 2019). They tend to rely on online reviews, influencer endorsements and

mobile shopping platforms, prioritising speed and efficiency over traditional service engagement. In contrast, Baby Boomers those born between 1946 and 1964 are more likely to value personal attention, brand consistency and in-person shopping experiences. This divergence is not merely attitudinal but deeply behavioural, as shown in Parment's (2013) foundational work, which highlighted generational identity as a key factor in retail brand selection.

Empirical studies continue to validate these generational distinctions. Bolton et al. (2013) conducted a global generational analysis and confirmed that Millennials are more responsive to digital marketing stimuli, while Baby Boomers tend to trust conventional communication channels and place greater weight on perceived product reliability. More recently, Williams et al. (2020) found that Generation Z consumers now entering the marketplace demonstrate hybridised behaviour that mixes impulsivity, social media dependence and value-consciousness. This generational lens allows researchers and marketers to segment markets more precisely and design messaging and retail environments that align with distinct generational expectations. Research by Muzanechita, (2022) condense that in Zimbabwe, generational shifts in urban areas like Harare have seen younger consumers embrace mobile payment platforms such as EcoCash and engage more heavily with e-commerce and health-related apps, further signalling evolving retail expectations by age cohort.

A summary of key criteria for assessing consumer purchase behaviour is presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Key Criteria for Assessing Consumer Purchase Behaviour

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Purchase Frequency</i>	Measures how often a customer makes purchases within a specific period, indicating behavioural loyalty and sustained interest (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019).
<i>Brand Loyalty</i>	Assesses a customer's repeated selection of a specific pharmacy or product, suggesting satisfaction or trust (Kotler & Keller, 2016).
<i>Responsiveness to Staff</i>	Evaluates how consumer decisions are influenced by pharmacist advice, service quality and interpersonal interaction (Babar, 2021).
<i>Product Availability Impact</i>	Analyses how stock levels or out-of-stock items affect customer retention or abandonment (Ismail et al., 2020).
<i>Sales Conversion Rate</i>	Compares the number of walk-in customers with those who make a purchase, helping evaluate store layout and pricing transparency (Wirtz et al., 2021).
<i>Pricing Perception</i>	Investigates how customers perceive product affordability and fairness in pricing, especially for essential medicines (Foxall, 2014).
<i>Customer Retention</i>	Tracks repeat visits or purchases, often used to predict customer lifetime value and business sustainability (Solomon, 2020).
<i>Response to Promotion</i>	Assesses the effectiveness of marketing campaigns, discounts or health drives in triggering a purchase (Schindler & Kibarian, 2018).
<i>Digital Engagement</i>	Looks at customer interaction with online platforms, mobile apps or home delivery services in influencing pharmacy choice (Chikazhe & Mupambireyi, 2020).

Source: Author's compilation based on literature

This structured approach to evaluating consumer purchase behaviour allows pharmacy owners and marketers to identify what encourages or discourages sales, how customers perceive their service and where gaps may exist between interest and conversion. According to Solomon (2020), using a mix of behavioural,

operational and strategic criteria provides a grounded way to evaluate customer decisions, ensuring that business strategies are aligned with real-world buying patterns. In the context of Harare's retail pharmacy sector where pricing, trust and service matter immensely these criteria help build a data-driven understanding of consumer engagement that supports both short-term performance and long-term planning.

2.5 Factors That Contribute to Either High or Low Purchase Activities

Various factors influence the level of consumer purchase activities, ranging from psychological aspects to external environmental influences.

2.5.1 Demographic and psychographic characteristics of the buyer

Age, occupation, lifestyle and personality influence buying behaviour. For instance, younger consumers may be more inclined towards trendy products, while older individuals might prioritise quality and durability (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). Age often correlates with a number of factors that influence how frequently, how much, and what types of products consumers purchase in pharmacies. For example, a 2022 study in Greece ("Effects of Demographic Characteristics and Consumer Behavior in the selection of Retail Pharmacies and Over the Counter Medicine") found that older participants placed more importance on pharmacy staff and additional services when choosing which pharmacy to use (Kevrekidis et al, 2022). Because older people are more likely to have chronic health issues, require more regular medication, and value trust and service, they are likely to show high purchase activity, especially of prescription or recurring items. In Harare, this might translate into older consumers being more

reliable customers, purchasing more often and more consistently, provided that pharmacies offer good service and trustworthiness.

On the other hand, younger consumers may have lower purchase activity in some categories due to fewer health needs or lower disposable income. They may also be more price sensitive and more attracted to promotions, less likely to insist on service, or more willing to switch pharmacies. The Greek study also showed that students (a younger group) preferred more formal relationships with staff rather than expecting additional personalized services, and were less demanding of service beyond product availability (Kevrekidis et al, 2022).

Personal characteristics such as age, occupation, lifestyle and personality significantly influence consumer purchasing decisions. For example, younger individuals often gravitate towards products that are fashionable and align with current trends, whereas older consumers may place greater emphasis on quality and durability. Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019) highlight that these personal attributes shape preferences and buying habits, reflecting the diverse needs and values across different life stages. Empirical studies support this notion; for instance, research by Liu et al. (2023) demonstrates that age and lifestyle are pivotal in determining consumer choices, with younger demographics showing a higher propensity for innovative and technology-driven products. Furthermore, a study by Kansal et al. (2024) found that personal attributes, including occupation and financial status, significantly influence preferences and purchasing behaviour. In the context of Zimbabwe, Mutsikiwa and Basera (2012) observed that lifestyle and personality traits are critical determinants of consumer behaviour, affecting product selection and brand loyalty.

Individual perceptions, attitudes and motivations play a crucial role in purchasing decisions. For example, a consumer's perception of a product's quality can significantly impact their willingness to buy (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). Psychological factors are foundational in shaping consumer behaviour, as they encompass individual mental processes that drive purchasing decisions. These include perception, motivation, beliefs, attitudes and personality all of which influence how a consumer interprets product information and whether they eventually make a purchase (ibid). Consumers' perception of quality, trustworthiness, or even packaging aesthetics can weigh heavily on their buying choices, particularly in sectors where decision confidence is crucial. Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019) affirm that perception acts as a filtering mechanism through which all marketing messages are processed, meaning two individuals exposed to the same product or advert may respond differently based on their internal biases or emotional states.

Empirical research backs the centrality of these psychological elements. In a recent study, Yu and Zhou (2021) found that perceived value and emotional involvement are strong predictors of purchase intention, particularly in high-contact retail environments. Similarly, Mahapatra et al. (2022) demonstrated that motivation, whether hedonic or utilitarian, plays a decisive role in shaping consumer engagement, especially in retail formats offering both convenience and sensory appeal. Zimbabwean studies are beginning to reflect similar trends. In a Harare-based study, Nyandoro & Sibanda (2022) observe that urban youth consumers exhibit behaviour driven more by social affirmation and digital influence than by product necessity. This shows how deeply psychological constructs like self-image and social comparison are entangled with modern

purchase decisions, especially in sectors like personal care, fashion and health retail.

Gender is another demographic factor that influences purchase behavior, often through differences in shopping roles, risk perceptions, frequency, and preferences. In the same Greek study, women were found to make more unscheduled purchases of OTC medicines than men. This suggests that, for certain product categories, women may have higher spontaneous or need driven purchase activity (Tarka, Kukar-Kinney & Harnish, 2022). In a retail pharmacy context in Harare, this might mean women are more likely to purchase OTC remedies, health supplements, or hygiene products on impulse or when need arises, which boosts sales in those categories.

Additionally, gender moderates other influences such as responses to personality or to marketing stimuli. For example, in “Consumers’ personality and compulsive buying behavior: The role of hedonistic shopping experiences and gender in mediating - moderating relationships” (2022), it was found that gender moderated the relationship between personality traits and compulsive buying. Women, under certain personality traits and hedonic contexts, may show higher compulsive buying behavior (Tarka, et al, 2022). In the Harare pharmacy market, this suggests that for consumers with traits inclined toward impulsiveness or seeking pleasure (hedonism), female customers might show higher purchase activity under those conditions (e.g. when attractive displays, promotions, or additional “nice to have” health/hygiene aids are present).

Personality types or traits (e.g. the Big Five traits, need for variety, compulsivity, risk aversion) also play a strong role in influencing whether consumers tend

toward high or low purchase activity. Although there is less literature specifically about personality in retail pharmacies in Harare, broader research provides useful insights. Consumers with more positive personality traits (e.g. higher openness, greater extraversion) tend to be more responsive to marketing stimuli, more willing to explore new products, and more likely to increase purchase frequency or try new OTC items. In a pharmacy in Harare, such customers might respond well to new product launches, promotions, or loyalty programmes their personality predisposes them toward exploring or experimenting.

2.5.2 The marketing mix: the product, the price, promotion and place (channel of distribution)

2.5.2.1 Product

In retail pharmacies, the product includes not only prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs, but also health supplements, hygiene products, and wellness-related items. Consumers tend to prefer pharmacies that consistently stock essential and branded products. A study by Nakambale, Tambama, and Bangalee (2024) found that essential medicines were more available (average 71%) and had higher mark-ups than non-essential ones (46%), suggesting higher consumer demand and willingness to pay for necessary and trusted products. Additionally, Munyoro, Mapfunde, and Madzinga-Kusena (2023) observed that branding plays a significant role in consumer loyalty in Zimbabwe's pharmaceutical retail sector, meaning well-positioned and well-known brands contribute to higher purchase activity.

2.5.2.2 Price

Price is a critical determinant of consumer behavior in pharmacies. Many consumers are price-sensitive due to economic constraints. Nakambale et al. (2024) found that community pharmacies in Harare had an average mark-up of around 60% for essential medicines, which affects affordability. Consumers are more likely to delay or avoid purchases when prices are perceived as exploitative or inconsistent. Moreover, the opposition to price regulation among over 50% of pharmacists indicates a pricing environment that may not always align with consumers' capacity to pay (Nakambale et al., 2024). Therefore, high prices on non-essential or branded products tend to reduce purchase frequency among low- and middle-income consumers.

2.5.2.3 Promotion

Promotion in pharmacies includes advertising, in-store displays, word-of-mouth, and pharmacist-customer interaction. Promotional strategies not only inform consumers but also shape their preferences and trust. According to Semu, Ngara, and Mudzviti (2021), pharmaceutical promotions significantly influence prescribing patterns among health professionals, indirectly affecting what patients demand at pharmacies. Furthermore, Munyoro et al. (2023) highlight the impact of branding and advertising on consumer loyalty, showing that consistent promotion contributes to higher consumer retention and purchase frequency. Promotions such as price discounts or bundled offers may also encourage impulse purchases, especially for OTC and wellness products.

Effective advertising, promotions and branding strategies can stimulate consumer interest and drive sales. Tailored marketing campaigns that resonate with the target audience's values and needs are particularly impactful (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Strategic marketing initiatives, encompassing advertising, promotions and branding, play a pivotal role in stimulating consumer interest and driving sales. Tailored marketing campaigns that resonate with the target audience's values and needs are particularly effective. Kotler and Keller (2016) emphasise that understanding the target market and crafting messages that align with consumer preferences are fundamental to successful marketing. Empirical evidence supports this; a study by Singh et al. (2024) demonstrates that personalised marketing efforts significantly enhance consumer engagement and purchase intentions. Furthermore, research by Haji Ahmad et al. (2020) indicates that technological innovation in marketing has fundamentally altered business strategies, significantly impacting consumer behaviour. In the Zimbabwean context, Chikweche and Fletcher (2012) highlight the importance of adapting marketing strategies to local consumer behaviour, emphasising the need for culturally relevant messaging to effectively engage consumers.

2.5.2.4 Place (Channel of Distribution)

Place refers to the location and accessibility of pharmacies, as well as the distribution chain from wholesaler to consumer. In most countries, many community pharmacies are concentrated in central areas, making access difficult for those in high-density or peri-urban locations. Nakambale et al. (2024) emphasize that the physical location of pharmacies affects consumer behavior, with more centrally located stores seeing higher traffic. On the supply side, Musiza (2023) found that pricing strategies and logistical challenges faced by pharmaceutical wholesalers in Zimbabwe affect stock availability, which directly impacts consumer purchasing decisions. Furthermore, emerging distribution channels, including online pharmacies and home delivery services, are beginning

to influence consumer expectations and behaviors, especially among urban youth and professionals.

2.5.3 Contextual factors

2.5.3.1 Political Factors

Political factors play a significant role in shaping the regulatory environment, economic stability, and market conditions under which retail pharmacies operate. One of the most prominent political influences is the government's pharmaceutical pricing and regulation policies. The lack of strict regulation on medicine mark-ups in Zimbabwe has led to significant price disparities across pharmacies. According to Nakambale, Tambama, and Bangalee (2024), over 55% of community pharmacists in Harare opposed government-regulated mark-ups, which results in inconsistent pricing practices that directly affect consumer affordability and, ultimately, purchase behavior. Consumers in politically uncertain environments tend to be more price-sensitive and cautious, reducing purchase activity for non-essential drugs or health products.

Furthermore, foreign currency policy and import regulations, which are heavily influenced by political decisions, have a direct effect on medicine availability and pricing. For example, Zimbabwe relies heavily on imported pharmaceutical products. When government policies restrict access to foreign currency or prioritize other sectors, pharmacies struggle to stock essential and branded medicines, resulting in shortages or inflated prices (Musiza, 2023). This leads consumers to delay purchases, seek cheaper alternatives, or turn to informal markets, undermining formal retail pharmacies' profitability and public trust.

In addition, political instability or lack of consistent health governance can undermine long-term investments in the pharmaceutical sector, discouraging innovation and improvement in customer service. For example, inconsistent enforcement of pharmacy regulations, or politically influenced decisions about who can operate or import medicines, contributes to uneven service quality and a fragmented pharmacy landscape (Semu, Ngara, & Mudzviti, 2021). Consumers may perceive formal pharmacies as unreliable or unaffordable, especially when political decisions result in medicine shortages or sudden price hikes. Thus, political uncertainty and regulatory gaps erode consumer confidence and lower purchasing activity in the sector.

2.5.3.2 Economic Factors

Income levels, economic stability and price sensitivity directly impact consumer spending. During economic downturns, consumers may prioritise essential goods over luxury items, leading to fluctuations in purchase activities (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Economic conditions are one of the most visible and immediate determinants of consumer behaviour, especially in contexts marked by volatility and constrained incomes. Household income, inflation, unemployment and currency instability directly shape not only what consumers buy, but how often and from whom. In Zimbabwe, the prolonged economic crisis has led to strategic purchasing behaviours, where buyers prioritise essentials and delay or forgo non-essential consumption. Kotler and Keller (2016) observe that in uncertain economies, consumers shift from aspiration-based buying to necessity-driven decision-making. This phenomenon is clearly evident in Zimbabwean cities, where hyperinflation and currency fluctuations have reshaped the hierarchy of consumer priorities, often placing health and food items above all else.

Empirical studies in African contexts echo this reality. In a survey of urban households in Malawi and Zimbabwe, Chidoko and Mabvurira (2020) found that reduced disposable income and limited access to foreign currency strongly influenced consumer downgrading behaviour, where buyers opt for cheaper alternatives or abandon formal retail altogether. Likewise, Ndhlovu (2021) reported that price volatility in Zimbabwe's pharmaceutical sector has forced consumers to make trade-offs between recommended and affordable drugs, altering purchasing trajectories even in life-saving categories. Moreover, a South African study by Fatoki (2020) revealed that during periods of macroeconomic uncertainty, consumers exhibit higher levels of financial planning, delay purchases and turn to community-based support systems to manage their consumption. These studies underline how deeply embedded economic realities are in consumer thought, pushing decisions into a more survival-oriented mindset when the macroeconomic landscape becomes unpredictable.

2.5.3.4 Social Factors

Family, friends and social networks can influence consumer behaviour. Recommendations and word-of-mouth play a significant role in shaping purchasing decisions, especially in close-knit communities (Solomon, 2018). Social influence is one of the most consistent forces shaping consumer purchase behaviour. Family members, peers, colleagues and broader social networks play a decisive role in shaping preferences, validating product choices and creating behavioural norms around what is acceptable to buy or consume. In tight-knit communities, especially in African urban contexts, word-of-mouth remains a powerful medium of persuasion that often outperforms formal advertising in terms of trust and reach (Buasha, 2024). This influence is not limited to direct

interpersonal exchanges but also extends to digital platforms, where consumers observe the purchasing patterns and endorsements of others. Solomon (2018) further notes that consumers do not operate in a vacuum they rely heavily on social cues to construct meaning around products. The perceived approval or disapproval from significant others can determine whether a consumer completes a transaction or abandons it.

A recent investigation by Akram et al. (2021) found that social influence was positively correlated with online purchasing intentions among consumers in developing markets, suggesting that peer validation has become increasingly important even in virtual settings. Similarly, Shanka et al. (2022), in a study conducted across urban regions of Ethiopia and Kenya, reported that community-based product endorsements and informal recommendations have a statistically significant impact on the uptake of both household and health-related goods. Zimbabwean urban settings reflect similar patterns. Research by Mavhunga and Kahiya (2022) observed that Harare residents often trust referrals from friends and relatives more than corporate advertising when it comes to over-the-counter purchases. These findings confirm that social influence whether offline or digital acts as a critical filter through which consumer decisions are formed and reinforced in environments characterised by trust-based decision-making.

2.5.3.5 Cultural Factors

Cultural background affects consumer preferences and behaviours. In Zimbabwe, traditional values and communal practices can influence purchasing patterns, with consumers often favouring products that align with their cultural norms (Chikweche & Fletcher, 2012). Culture remains one of the deepest-rooted drivers

of consumer behaviour. It encompasses shared values, customs, beliefs and rituals that condition how individuals interpret and interact with products and services. Cultural factors influence not only what people consume, but how, when and why they do so. In African contexts, including Zimbabwe, culture is tightly interwoven with consumption, as purchasing patterns often reflect deeper communal priorities or taboos. Chikweche and Fletcher (2012) argue that African consumers are often misrepresented in mainstream consumer research, which tends to apply Western models that fail to account for the weight of tradition, collective decision-making and cultural symbolism. In Zimbabwe, many consumers remain anchored in socially reinforced consumption norms that favour known and trusted product categories over untested or foreign alternatives, particularly in sectors related to food, medicine and personal care.

Recent empirical research continues to highlight the influence of cultural identity in shaping consumer action. Kacen and Lee (2020) emphasise that collectivist cultures, as found in much of Sub-Saharan Africa, exhibit stronger tendencies toward conformity, group influence and risk aversion in purchasing decisions compared to individualist cultures. This is supported by Mutsikiwa and Gono (2015), who found that traditional beliefs in Zimbabwe still play a powerful role in consumer preference formation, especially for older and rural consumers. More recently, a 2021 study by Musungwini and Mupambireyi noted that urban youth in Harare demonstrate cultural dualism, where global consumer trends are filtered through local values, resulting in hybrid behaviours that reflect both global and Zimbabwean identities. This underscores the need for marketers and policy analysts to appreciate the cultural specificity of consumer behaviour, rather than rely on universalist assumptions.

2.5.3.6 Technological Factors

The rise of digital technology has transformed consumer behaviour. Access to online shopping platforms and digital payment systems can increase purchase activities by offering convenience and a broader range of options (Pappas, 2016). The rapid advancement of digital technology has profoundly transformed consumer behaviour. The proliferation of online shopping platforms and digital payment systems has enhanced convenience, enabling consumers to access a broader range of products and services. Pappas (2016) notes that factors such as website design, ease of navigation and online reviews significantly impact online purchase decisions. Recent studies corroborate this impact; for example, research published in Sustainability indicates that personal factors, including one's value system, influence online purchasing behaviour, with technology adoption playing a crucial role. Additionally, a study by Haji Ahmad et al. (2020) highlights that the evolution of technology during the Industry 4.0 era has significantly impacted consumer behaviour and expectations. In Zimbabwe, the adoption of mobile money platforms like EcoCash has revolutionised purchasing patterns, facilitating transactions and expanding market access, as discussed by Mago and Chitokwinda (2014).

2.5.3.7 Situational Factors

Specific situations, such as seasonal events or personal circumstances, can influence purchasing behaviour. For example, consumers may increase spending during festive seasons or special occasions (Solomon, 2018). Situational factors, encompassing specific contexts and circumstances, significantly influence consumer purchasing behaviour. Events such as festive seasons, holidays, or

personal milestones often lead to increased spending due to the celebratory nature of these occasions. Solomon (2018) highlights that such situational variables can temporarily alter consumer priorities, leading to deviations from habitual purchasing patterns. Empirical studies support this notion; for instance, research by Lee and Chen (2020) demonstrates that consumers are more likely to indulge in discretionary spending during holiday seasons, influenced by promotional activities and the festive atmosphere. Additionally, a study by Sharma and Alter (2012) found that time-related factors, such as the urgency associated with limited-time offers, can significantly impact purchasing decisions, prompting consumers to make quicker choices to take advantage of perceived deals.

2.5.3.8 Environmental Factors

The physical environment, including store layout and ambiance, can affect consumer behaviour. A well-designed retail space can enhance the shopping experience and encourage purchases (Bitner, 1992). The physical environment of a retail space plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behaviour. Elements such as store layout, ambiance, lighting and music can enhance the shopping experience, thereby encouraging purchases. Bitner (1992) introduced the concept of “services capes,” emphasizing how environmental dimensions influence buyer behaviour. Empirical research corroborates this; for example, a study by Bindu et al. (2021) found that a well-designed store environment positively affects customer satisfaction and increases the likelihood of impulse buying. Similarly, research by Turley and Milliman (2000) indicates that atmospheric cues, including scent and music, can significantly influence shopping behaviour, affecting the time spent in-store and the overall expenditure.

2.5.3.9 Regulatory Factors

Government policies and regulations can impact consumer behaviour. For instance, restrictions on certain products or advertising standards can influence purchasing decisions (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Government policies and regulations can profoundly impact consumer behaviour by altering the availability, marketing and perceived safety of products. Regulations may include restrictions on advertising, imposition of taxes, or bans on certain products, all of which can influence purchasing decisions. Kotler and Keller (2016) discuss how such regulatory interventions can modify market dynamics and consumer perceptions. Empirical studies provide further insight; for instance, research by Smith et al. (2016) examined the effects of advertising restrictions on tobacco products and found a significant decrease in consumption following the implementation of stringent advertising bans. Additionally, a study by Griffith et al. (2010) demonstrated that the introduction of taxes on sugary beverages led to a notable reduction in their purchase, indicating the effectiveness of fiscal policies in shaping consumer behaviour.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the factors affecting purchase behaviour mentioned above, the conceptual framework for this study is therefore shown in Figure 2.2 below.

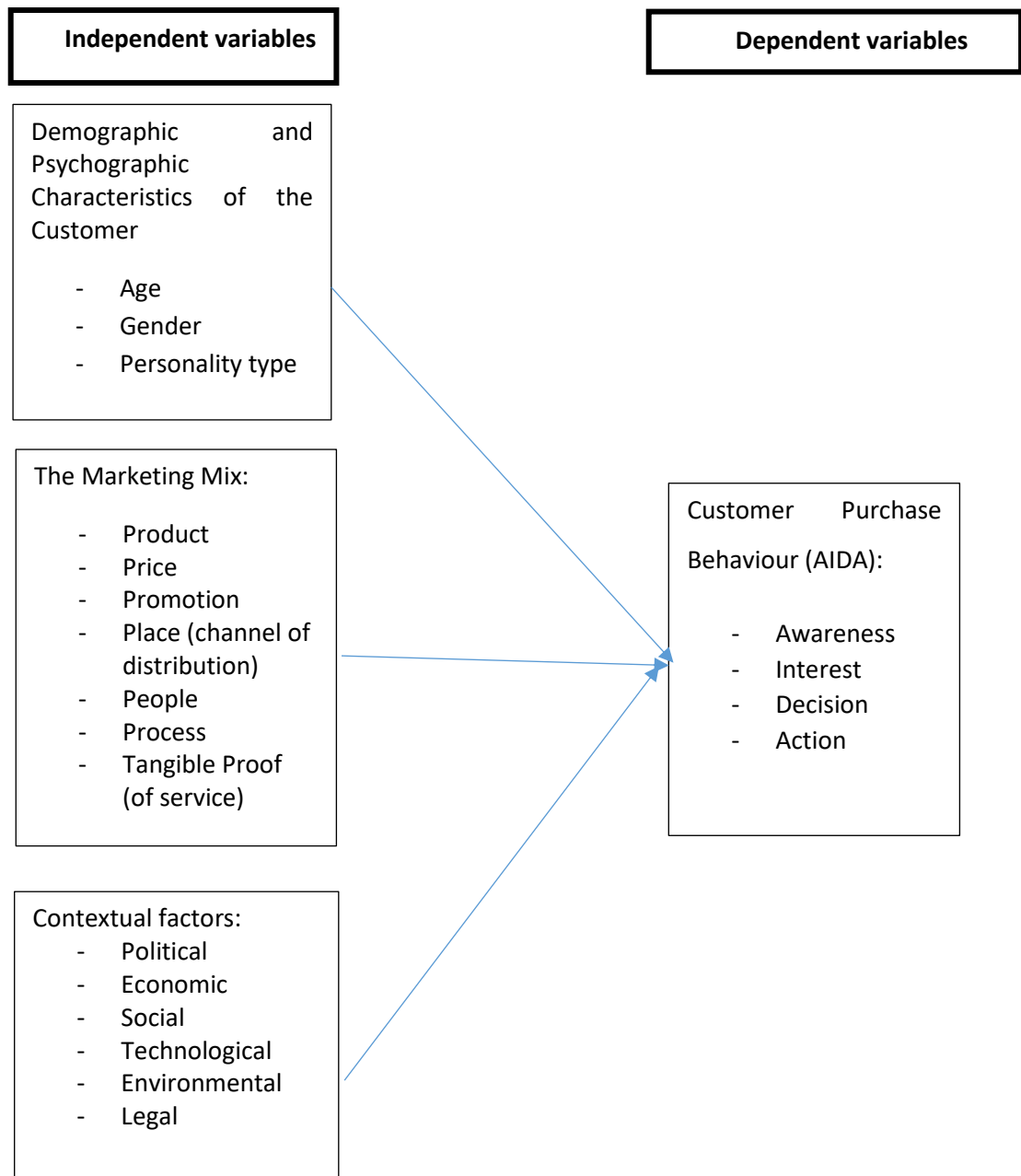


Figure 2.2: Conceptual framework of the study

Source: Author's Own Construct (2025)

2.6 Strategies for Optimising Consumer Purchases

Developing effective strategies to enhance consumer purchase activities is essential for business growth. These strategies may include the following:

2.6.1 Service Quality

Providing exceptional customer service and creating a pleasant shopping environment can increase customer satisfaction and loyalty, leading to higher purchase rates (Homburg et al., 2017). Delivering exceptional customer service and cultivating a welcoming shopping environment are pivotal in boosting customer satisfaction and fostering loyalty, which can lead to increased purchase rates. Homburg et al. (2017) emphasise that a positive customer experience significantly influences consumer behaviour and purchase intentions. research Guan et al. (2024). indicates that various dimensions of customer experience, including sensory, emotional and social aspects, positively affect consumer purchase intentions. Furthermore, a study by Klaus and Maklan (2013) highlights that superior customer experience management leads to enhanced customer loyalty and advocacy. In the Zimbabwean context, businesses that prioritise customer-centric strategies, such as personalised service and attentive staff, have observed increased customer retention and sales growth

2.6.2 Personalised Marketing

Utilising data analytics to understand consumer preferences allows businesses to tailor marketing efforts, making them more relevant and effective (Liu & Shih, 2005). Leveraging data analytics to comprehend consumer preferences enables businesses to customise their marketing efforts, rendering them more pertinent and

effective. Liu and Shih (2005) discuss how personalised marketing strategies can enhance customer engagement and satisfaction. Empirical research corroborates this; Tarifi & Bakhsh (2024), concludes that personalised marketing strategies positively impact consumer perceptions, engagement and loyalty, with respondents expressing favourable attitudes towards tailored offers and communications. Additionally, a study by Montgomery and Smith (2009) demonstrates that personalised marketing efforts lead to increased consumer responsiveness and sales. In Zimbabwe, companies employing personalised marketing, such as targeted promotions based on purchasing history, have reported improved customer engagement and higher conversion rates.

2.6.3 Competitive Pricing Strategies

Implementing pricing strategies that offer value while remaining competitive can attract price-sensitive consumers and boost sales (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Adopting pricing strategies that deliver value while maintaining competitiveness can attract price-sensitive consumers and stimulate sales. Kotler and Keller (2016) highlight the importance of pricing in influencing consumer purchase decisions. Empirical studies support this perspective; research by Munnukka (2008) indicates that consumers are highly responsive to price changes and competitive pricing can enhance market share and profitability. Furthermore, a study by Chen et al. (2012) found that dynamic pricing strategies, which adjust prices based on market demand and competition, can effectively increase sales and customer satisfaction. In the Zimbabwean market, businesses that implement strategic pricing, such as discounts and value-based pricing, have experienced increased customer acquisition and retention, particularly in price-sensitive segments.

2.6.4 Product Quality Improvement

Ensuring high product quality meets consumer expectations and fosters trust, encouraging repeat. Delivering products that consistently meet or exceed consumer expectations is fundamental to building trust and encouraging repeat purchases. High-quality offerings not only satisfy customers but also foster loyalty, as consumers are more likely to return to brands they perceive as reliable. Empirical studies support this notion; for instance, research by Solomon, Russell-Bennett and Previte (2019) demonstrates that brand trust, cultivated through consistent product quality, significantly enhances customer loyalty and repeat purchase behaviour. Similarly, a study by Nguyen et al. (2021) found that trust, developed via positive product evaluations, plays a crucial role in influencing consumers' purchasing decisions and fostering long-term relationships. In the context of online shopping, maintaining high product quality is vital, as consumers often rely on reviews and ratings to assess trustworthiness. A study by Suki and Suki (2022) highlights that positive online reviews, indicative of superior product quality, enhance consumer trust and increase the likelihood of repeat purchases. Therefore, businesses prioritising product quality improvement are better positioned to cultivate consumer trust, leading to sustained customer loyalty and increased sales.

2.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the theoretical and empirical foundation upon which the study is built. It opened with a discussion of the Black Box Model of Consumer Behaviour, which forms the study's core framework for explaining how external marketing stimuli and internal consumer traits come together to shape purchasing

decisions. The chapter then outlined several well-established models and theories relevant to consumer behaviour, justifying their applicability to Zimbabwe's urban health retail sector. The review then moved to examine literature in line with the study's objectives. It explored a wide range of behavioural patterns. Each subsection combined theoretical reasoning with empirical evidence from Zimbabwe, Southern Africa and wider international studies. The chapter closed with an identification of the research gap, highlighting how Zimbabwean studies have not sufficiently investigated in-store consumer behaviour in pharmacy settings using locally relevant models. With this foundation established, the next chapter turns to the methodology employed to generate and interpret the data that speaks to these behavioral patterns.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the processes and procedures that guided data collection for the study. It begins with a discussion of the research design, explaining how the structure of inquiry supports the exploration of consumer purchase behaviour in Harare's retail pharmacies. It then describes the target population and explains the sampling procedures adopted to draw participants from the population. The chapter proceeds to justify the sample size and outlines the research instruments used to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Ethical protocols observed during the study are also addressed. The chapter ends with a summary that brings together its key components, paving the way for the presentation and interpretation of findings in the next chapter.

3.2 The Research design

This study adopted an explanatory research design, which seeks to investigate cause-and-effect relationships between variables (Yin, 2014). The primary purpose of this design is to explain why and how certain phenomena occur by identifying the factors that influence or predict a particular outcome. In the context of consumer purchase behavior, an explanatory research design sought to understand how factors such as age, price, promotion, and place influence buying decisions, providing evidence on which factors have significant impact and the nature of their effects. Thus, in this study, the explanatory design was used to examine the factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour at Pharmarite Pharmacy and to determine how these factors interact to affect purchasing

decisions. This approach allowed for the establishment of relationships between independent variables (such as price, service quality, product availability, and promotional strategies) and the dependent variable (consumer purchase behaviour).

The study combined both quantitative and qualitative data, achieving methodological triangulation, which strengthened the validity of the findings and offered a more holistic understanding of consumer purchasing behaviour in a retail pharmacy setting. To effectively address the research questions on factors influencing consumer purchase behavior in retail pharmacies in Harare, quantitative data was primarily needed. This data captured measurable information such as demographics (age, gender), purchasing patterns (frequency, types of products bought), and perceptions of price, promotion, product quality, and accessibility. The choice of design was intended to uncover not only observable consumer behaviour patterns but also the deeper explanations behind purchasing decisions within a pharmacy context. Creswell and Clark (2018) highlighted that mixed methods provided a structured framework for collecting both statistical and experiential data, enabling a balanced interpretation of behavioural trends. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) stated that merging data types offered better insights than either approach alone.

3.3. Population and Sampling

In this study, the population consisted of both customers and staff members of Pharmarite to ensure that the data reflected not only consumer experiences but also operational insights from within the pharmacy. These two groups together allowed for a well-rounded interpretation of behavioural trends, decisions, and challenges

observed within the chosen case study site. The study population included customers who visited and made purchases at the retail pharmacy, as well as the pharmacy staff involved in day-to-day service delivery and product handling. Pharmacy staff, including pharmacists, dispensary assistants, and floor managers formed the second component of the study population. Their involvement was critical as they provided insight into trends observed from behind the counter, customer queries, and the perceived effectiveness of marketing and stocking strategies. On average, Pharmarite has 76 customers on a daily basis, and its staff register shows a staff compliment of 18. These were selected for the study.

Table 3.1: Total Population

Group of Respondents	Target Population
Pharmacy Customers	76
Pharmacy Staff	18
Total	94

Source: Researcher (2025)

3.3.1 Sampling Technique

The researcher used purposive and convenience sampling techniques, allowing the inclusion of individuals who were directly involved in the pharmacy retail experience either as customers or staff. Pharmacy customers were approached immediately after completing a transaction and invited to participate based on their availability and willingness. Staff were purposively selected based on their roles and interactions with customers, with preference given to those in dispensing, customer service, and sales management.

In purposive sampling, members were selected from the population on the basis of their knowledge, relationships, and expertise regarding the research subject (Saunders et al., 2009). Purposive sampling was highly suitable for this study because it allowed the researcher to intentionally select participants who possessed specific knowledge or experience relevant to the study.

3.3.2 Sample Size

In calculating the sample size, the study adopted the Yamane (1973) statistical formula and the sample size was calculated as below;

n=	N
	$(1 + Ne^2)$

Where; n = required sample size

N = size of the population

e = alpha level, that is, allowable error e = 0.10 at 5% confidence interval

n=	94
	$(1 + 94(0.05*0.05))$

n= 76

Therefore, a sample size of 76 respondents was determined using Yamane's formula from a total population of 94, with a 5% margin of error.

This sample size was deemed appropriate for data analysis, as in similar studies of urban consumer behaviour, researchers had found sample sizes in the range of 50–100 adequate for detecting meaningful behavioural patterns and supporting statistical modelling at the descriptive and inferential levels (Guest, Namey & Chen, 2020). Therefore, the chosen sample size for this study was sufficient to balance analytical depth, feasibility, and statistical relevance in a single-site, pharmacy-based investigation.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

The study made use of multiple data collection techniques, including structured questionnaires, key informant interviews, and observation, to generate evidence that reflected both statistical patterns and contextual reasoning. This combination allowed for robust analysis while preserving the nuanced realities of consumer decision-making in a health retail environment.

3.4.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire served as the primary instrument for collecting quantitative data from customers at the selected retail pharmacy. It was administered in person immediately following a purchase, with support from pharmacy staff to coordinate participation and ensure minimal disruption to store operations. Administering the survey at this moment allowed customers to reflect on their recent decision with clarity, increasing the accuracy of the information provided. According to Hair, Page, and Brunsveld (2019), in-person surveys administered soon after a transaction often yielded high response quality due to the immediacy of recall.

The questionnaire included a combination of closed-ended and Likert-scale questions to collect data on consumer behaviours such as purchasing frequency, product awareness, pricing sensitivity, in-store service perception, and responsiveness to promotional material. These metrics aligned with the study's objectives and provided data needed for statistical testing, including correlation and regression analysis. Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019) affirmed that structured questionnaires were well suited for behavioural research where comparability and quantifiability were key.

In addition to structured questions, a small number of open-ended questions were included to allow participants to express perceptions or influences not captured in predefined categories. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) noted that integrating open responses helped surface motivations or challenges that researchers might not anticipate. This hybrid format supported the interpretivist dimension of the study by incorporating the customer's voice in their own words, providing richer insight into purchasing decisions.

3.4.2 Key Informant Interview Technique

In addition to numerical data, qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with staff members, including pharmacists and front-desk employees. These interviews explored themes such as staff perceptions of consumer behaviour, communication strategies, and challenges encountered during customer interactions. Observational notes were also taken within the store to capture non-verbal cues, customer flow, and engagement at various service points. The qualitative data provided rich, contextual insights that helped explain the

underlying motivations and experiences behind the patterns observed in the quantitative findings.

Key informant interviews were conducted with selected members of the pharmacy staff, including pharmacists, dispensary assistants, and managers. These individuals possessed intimate knowledge of customer trends, stock movements, promotional outcomes, and recurring service challenges, insights that could not be fully captured through structured surveys alone. The interviews were semi-structured, guided by a flexible interview schedule developed around the study objectives. This format allowed the interviewer to explore emerging topics through probing questions while maintaining focus on behavioural determinants.

All interviews took place in pre-arranged quiet spaces within the pharmacy or its offices, preferably during non-peak hours to reduce interruptions. Andrew, Pedersen and McEvoy (2019) recommended this practice in applied behavioural studies to ensure participants were both comfortable and candid. Participants were informed of their right to confidentiality, and audio recordings were made only with explicit consent. Interview content was later transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis to uncover recurring themes or behavioural patterns, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Each staff participant was identified through coded labels to preserve anonymity.

3.5 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to detect possible flaws or errors in the measurement procedures and to identify unclear or ambiguously formulated items in the research instruments. The pilot study was also conducted to pre-test the practicability of the research instruments. The questionnaire was pretested with 5

respondents, while the interview guide was pretested with 3 respondents from the selected sample. The pretesting of interview guides and piloting of research instruments aimed to enhance the reliability of the instruments and ensure that relevant and reliable information was gathered.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

Questionnaires were distributed to a selected sample of 76 respondents. The purpose of the study was explained to the respondents, and all other ethical protocols were followed. Questionnaires were distributed physically and online through Google Forms, and respondents were given a maximum of 72 hours to complete and return them. The researcher followed up with respondents through telephone calls.

The researcher scheduled ten interviews, with each session lasting at least 20 minutes. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and Microsoft Teams. In addition, secondary data including internal sales and revenue reports, customer churn, and count reports were also reviewed.

3.7 Analysis and Organisation of Data

3.7.1 Data analysis

For analysing quantitative data, descriptive statistics were used. These included mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions. Thematic, content, and narrative analysis methods were employed to analyse qualitative data by examining all the questions to identify common themes, patterns, and relationships.

3.7.2 Data Presentation

Tables, pie charts, bar charts, and graphs were used in the presentation of the data. Data were also presented according to common themes, patterns, and relationships.

3.7.3 Validity and Reliability of Data

Reliability was ensured through a test-retest method where questionnaires were administered to a sample of respondents selected during piloting. All questions on the questionnaire were developed in alignment with the study objectives. Multiple data sources (triangulation) were used to enhance the validity and reliability of the data in this study. Both primary and secondary data collection methods were employed to gather more reliable and relevant information. Unnecessarily long and ambiguous questions were removed from the questionnaire to simplify the research process. For reliability, a Cronbach' s alpha coefficient of ≥ 0.7 was used to confirm a satisfactory level.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

This study upheld the highest standards of ethical conduct in line with academic research protocols and social responsibility. All participants were approached with full transparency about the nature, purpose, and voluntary basis of the study. Before data collection, informed consent was obtained in writing, with each respondent given the right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without explanation or penalty. In line with recommendations by Bryman (2016), the principle of autonomy was strictly respected.

Confidentiality was guaranteed. Participants' identities were not disclosed in any part of the research findings, and all collected data were anonymised during transcription and storage. Names of the pharmacy or its staff were also omitted from the final reporting unless express permission was granted. All data were stored securely, with access restricted to the researcher only. Ethical clearance was sought from the relevant university review board prior to the commencement of fieldwork. The study also ensured cultural sensitivity, avoiding intrusive questioning or assumptions about participants' health conditions or economic status. Given the study's engagement with customers in a healthcare retail setting, the research was conducted with heightened care to avoid psychological discomfort or embarrassment during questioning.

3.9 Summary

This chapter has explained the methodology to be adopted in investigating buyer behaviour at Pharmarite pharmacy. The research design was justified as a single case study and a mixed method, integrating both quantitative and qualitative elements to provide a deeper understanding of consumer patterns, influencing factors and effective strategies. The chapter outlined the study's population, sampling techniques, data collection tools and the planned methods of data analysis. It also detailed the ethical considerations guiding the conduct of the research, from informed consent to confidentiality, autonomy and protection of participants. The next chapter (Chapter 4) presents the findings from the fieldwork, beginning with a descriptive analysis of questionnaire responses and then exploring themes emerging from the interviews.

CHAPTER 4 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data collected during the study, followed by an analysis and discussion of the findings in relation to the research objectives and questions. The data is presented using tables and descriptive summaries where appropriate, and analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. This chapter also highlights significant trends, patterns and relationships that emerged from the data and discusses their implications in the context of the study.

4.2 Data Presentation and Analysis

4.2.1 Response rate

The response rate obtained from both the questionnaires and interviews is presented in table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Response Rate

Data Collection Method	Number Targeted	Number Responded	Response Rate (%)
Questionnaires	76	54	71%
Interviews	15	11	74%

The study recorded a response rate of 71% for questionnaires, with 54 out of 76 distributed questionnaires successfully completed and returned. Additionally, 11 out of 15 scheduled interviews were conducted, yielding a 74% response rate. The high response rate from questionnaires indicates that the topic was considered relevant and important by the majority of respondents. Similarly, the 74% response rate from

interviews, which typically require more time and involvement, demonstrated a willingness among participants to contribute detailed and meaningful insights to the study. These figures reflect a strong level of participant engagement and provide a solid foundation for the credibility of the research.

4.2.2 Demographic Data

The demographic profile of all the participants who took part in the study is presented in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	24	44.4
	Female	30	55.6
Age	18-25 Years	12	22.2
	26-35 Years	20	37.0
	36-45 Years	10	18.5
	46-55 Years	8	14.8
	55-65 Years	4	7.4
Category	Customer	46	85.2
	Employee of Pharmarite	8	14.8
Duration as Customer/Employee	Less than 5 years	30	55.6
	6-10 years	15	27.8
	More than 10 years	9	16.7
Level of Education	Secondary Education	10	18.5
	Diploma	12	22.2
	Undergraduate Degree	22	40.7
	Postgraduate	10	18.5

Source: Field Data (2025)

The data shows that 55.6% of respondents were female and 44.4% were male, indicating a fairly balanced gender distribution, with a slight female majority. This

suggests that opinions and responses are representative of both genders, reducing gender bias in the findings.

The majority of respondents (37%) were between 26–35 years, followed by 22.2% aged 18–25 years. Smaller proportions were in the 36–45 years (18.5%), 46–55 years (14.8%), and 55–65 years (7.4%) categories. Most respondents are young adults in their productive years, likely to be active consumers and more responsive to modern business practices or marketing strategies.

A large proportion (85.2%) of respondents were customers, while 14.8% were employees of Pharmarite. The data largely reflects customer perspectives, which is valuable for understanding consumer satisfaction, preferences and service perceptions. However, employee feedback, though smaller in number, provided an internal viewpoint for comparison.

Over half (55.6%) of respondents have been associated with Pharmarite for less than 5 years, 27.8% for 6–10 years, and 16.7% for more than 10 years. A majority of respondents were relatively new to Pharmarite, suggesting recent growth or customer acquisition. However, the presence of long-term customers added credibility and depth to satisfaction assessments.

The respondents were generally well educated, with 40.7% holding undergraduate degrees, 22.2% diplomas and 18.5% postgraduate qualifications. Only 18.5% had secondary education as their highest level. Since the majority of respondents possessed tertiary education, they were likely to have a good understanding of the survey questions and could provide informed and reliable responses. This strengthened the validity of the research data.

4.2.3 Assessment of the patterns of buyer behaviour at Pharmarite Pharmacy

The first objective of the study sought to assess the buying patterns of customers at Pharmarite. The findings are presented in table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3: Consumer Buying patterns at Pharmarite

No.	Buying Pattern	N	Mean	Std. Dev
1	End of the month, paydays, weekends	54	4.45	0.55
2	Seasonality – school holidays	54	3.80	0.90
3	Monthly purchases for chronic diseases	54	4.30	0.65
4	More purchases during Weather changes	54	3.50	1.00
5	Emotional triggers – buying due to stress, fear, urgency	54	3.90	0.85
6	Women buying more than men	54	4.10	0.70
7	Payment method – cash or medical aid	54	4.00	0.75
Valid (listwise)		54		

The responses from 54 respondents shows that end of the month, paydays, and weekends as buying periods received the highest agreement (mean = 4.45), reflecting common buying peaks likely linked to salary cycles and free time availability. Similarly monthly purchases for chronic diseases scored highly with a mean score of 4.30 and low standard deviation (0.65), indicating strong consensus that consumers regularly buy medications for ongoing conditions. Similarly, the pattern of women buying more than men was also notable with a mean of 4.10, suggesting a perceived gender difference in pharmacy purchasing behavior. Seasonality related to school holidays (mean = 3.80) and emotional triggers like stress or urgency (mean = 3.90) were moderately agreed upon, indicating some influence on purchasing behavior but with more variability among respondents. Weather received the lowest mean (3.50) and the highest standard deviation (1.00), implying that while weather influences some consumers'

purchases, it is not a consistent factor for everyone. Lastly, payment method preference such as cash or medical aid showed agreement (mean = 4.00), highlighting that most consumers buy using medical aid in preference of cash.

Interview questions revealed the following responses:

Response 1: *“I usually visit Pharmarite about twice a month. Most of my visits happen around salary periods because that is when I can afford to restock my medication and buy a few health-related items like vitamins and painkillers.”*

Response 2: *“I visit Pharmarite almost every week, mostly to refill my prescriptions and sometimes to pick up over-the-counter products. My visits are usually prompted by medical needs or when I notice my regular supplies, like blood pressure tablets, are running low.”*

Response 3: *“I tend to shop more frequently at the end of the month, right after I get paid. That is when I buy most of my essential medications and personal care items. During the cold and flu season, I also make extra visits to stock up on cough syrups and immune boosters.”*

Response 4: *“I usually visit more during the beginning of the school term because I like to get basic first-aid supplies and vitamins for my children. I also go more often during the festive season, as I like to prepare for any health emergencies that might come up when clinics are closed.”*

Response 5: *“Yes, I have noticed I tend to shop more during salary periods and around holidays. During salary time, I have more disposable income, so I restock*

everything at once. During festive seasons, I usually buy extra medication and health supplies just in case of emergencies.”

Response 6: *“My visits increase around the winter and rainy season because my children often catch colds and flu. I also find myself going to Pharmarite more often in June and December, when I buy vitamins and painkillers in bulk”*

Response 7: *“Weather and seasonal changes affect my shopping habits a lot. For instance, during cold or rainy weather, I visit Pharmarite more often to get flu medicine, cough syrups, and other remedies. During the hot season, I buy more skin care products and rehydration salts.”*

Response 8: *“External factors definitely influence when I buy from Pharmarite. During school holidays, I buy more first-aid items and vitamins because the kids are home and more active. Seasonal illnesses like malaria outbreaks also prompt me to visit for mosquito repellents and anti-malarial drugs.”*

4.2.4 Factors that contribute to either high or low purchase activity

The second objective of the study investigated the factors that contribute to either high or low purchase activity at Pharmarite. Identifying these factors would provide a base for crafting strategies to optimise consumer purchases. Findings from the questionnaires are presented in Table 4.4 overleaf:

Table 4.4: Factors that contribute to either high or low purchase activity

No. Influencing Factor	N	Mean	Std. Dev
8 Special offers or discounts	54	4.10	0.72
9 Availability of a wide variety of products	54	4.60	0.65
10 Pricing	54	4.55	0.70
11 Attitude and helpfulness of the staff	54	4.40	0.68
12 Income level	54	4.50	0.72
13 Cleanliness – pharmacy environment	54	4.30	0.70
14 Long waiting times	54	3.20	1.10
15 Product recommendations or in-store promotions	54	4.00	0.80
16 Pharmacy’s location and ease of access	54	4.35	0.66
17 Payment method (cash, mobile, card, insurance)	54	4.05	0.75
18 Brand loyalty – preference for specific brands/products	54	3.95	0.85
Valid (listwise)	54		

The responses from the questionnaires revealed that several key factors positively influence purchase activity at Pharmarite Pharmacy. The findings indicate that among the factors influencing customers’ purchasing decisions at Pharmarite, pricing, product availability and income level emerged as the most significant. The results shows that customers highly value the availability of a wide variety of products, which recorded the highest mean score of 4.60. This indicates that customers prefer pharmacies where they can conveniently find different brands and product types under one roof. Product availability ensures customer satisfaction by reducing the need to visit multiple outlets to fulfill their pharmaceutical needs. The result implies that maintaining consistent stock levels and offering a diverse range of medicines and health-related products enhances customer trust and loyalty. It also signals reliability, which is a key determinant of repeat purchases in the pharmaceutical sector.

Equally important is the pricing, which had a mean score of 4.55. This suggests that customers are sensitive to price differences and are likely to patronize pharmacies that offer reasonable and competitive prices. In many cases, pricing determines whether a customer perceives a product as accessible or out of reach, especially in markets where disposable income varies widely among consumers.

The income level of customers also had a high mean score (4.50), showing that economic capacity significantly affects purchasing behavior. Customers' ability to buy specific medicines or health products is directly tied to their income, meaning that Pharmarite's pricing strategy must align with the income distribution of its customer base. This suggests that offering flexible price ranges, discounts, and loyalty programs could encourage sustained patronage, particularly among lower and middle-income customers.

Other factors such as the attitude and helpfulness of staff (Mean = 4.40) and the pharmacy's location and ease of access (Mean = 4.35) also scored highly, reflecting customer appreciation for good service and convenience. These elements enhance the overall shopping experience and can reinforce positive perceptions of the business. Conversely, long waiting times (Mean = 3.20) received the lowest rating, suggesting that some customers experience delays before being served. This points to a need for improved efficiency in service delivery, such as introducing queue management systems or increasing staff during peak hours.

Interview responses revealed the following:

Response 1: *"I usually buy more from Pharmarite when there are special offers or discounts. Promotions like "buy one, get one free" or price reductions on*

supplements really encourage me to stock up on products I use regularly. On the other hand, if there are no offers or the prices are slightly higher than other pharmacies, I might limit my purchases to only what I urgently need.”

Response 2: *“For me, the availability of a wide variety of products is a big factor. Pharmarite normally has everything from prescription drugs to personal care items, so it’s convenient to shop there. When I know I can get all I need in one place, I tend to buy more. However, if they run out of certain brands or items, I sometimes reduce my purchases or go elsewhere.”*

Response 3: *“Pricing and my income level affect how much I buy. I tend to purchase more when prices are reasonable or when I’ve just received my salary. During tight months, I only buy essential medication. Pharmarite’s prices are generally fair, but affordability still determines whether I buy additional products like vitamins or beauty items.”*

Response 4: *“The attitude and helpfulness of the staff also play a major role. When the pharmacists are friendly, take time to explain medications, and give good product recommendations, I feel more confident buying from them. If the service is rushed or the staff seem uninterested, I usually buy less and leave quickly. Good service definitely increases my spending there.”*

There was clear convergence between the interview and questionnaire responses regarding the factors influencing purchase activity at Pharmarite Pharmacy. Both data sources consistently highlighted that affordable pricing, product availability, helpful staff, and special offers significantly increase customer purchases, while long waiting times and income constraints tend to reduce them. Respondents in

both the survey and interviews emphasized that they buy more when prices are reasonable, discounts are available, and service is efficient. Similarly, the friendly attitude of staff and the convenience of finding all needed products in one place were strong motivators for higher spending. Therefore, the alignment between the two sets of findings confirms that economic factors, customer service quality, and operational efficiency are the primary drivers of purchase behavior at Pharmarite Pharmacy.

4.2.5 Strategies for optimising consumer purchases at Pharmarite Pharmacy

Having identified the factors that contribute to either high or low purchase activity the study further went on to identify the strategies for optimising consumer purchases at Pharmarite pharmacy. The findings from the questionnaires are presented in Table 4.5 below.

Table 4.5: Strategies for optimising consumer purchases

No.	Strategy	N	Mean	Std. Dev
19	Promotional Strategies	54	4.40	0.70
20	Improve Pricing and Payment Options	54	4.35	0.65
21	Improve Product Availability	54	4.25	0.75
22	Customer Experience Enhancement	54	4.20	0.72
23	Improve Environment & Accessibility	54	4.10	0.80
24	Improve Marketing & Communication	54	4.00	0.85
	Valid (listwise)	54		

The responses from the questionnaires presented in Table 4.5 above indicated strong overall support for a variety of strategies aimed at enhancing consumer purchase behaviour at Pharmarite Pharmacy. The highest-rated strategy was Promotional Strategies which includes timed promotions, loyalty programs, referral discounts, flash sales, and weekend specials, with a mean score of 4.40

and a relatively low standard deviation of 0.70. This suggests strong agreement among respondents that promotions are a powerful motivator for consumer purchases. It reflects the importance of financial incentives and limited-time offers in driving customer engagement and increasing sales volume.

Closely following was the strategy of Improving Pricing and Payment Options, which also received significant support, with a mean score of 4.35 and a standard deviation of 0.65. This highlights that consumers appreciate flexible pricing structures and convenient payment methods, such as mobile money or instalment payments. It also points to price sensitivity among customers and the role affordability plays in their purchasing decisions.

Improving Product Availability, such as stocking seasonally relevant items or expanding the range of product categories, was also viewed favourably with a mean of 4.25. This indicates that respondents see value in variety and relevance of stock, suggesting that Pharmarite could increase sales by aligning inventory with seasonal needs and diversifying offerings

Customer Experience Enhancement, received a mean score of 4.20. This not only confirms that participants value the shopping experience but also indicates strong consensus on its importance. Improvements in staff interaction, reduced waiting times, and efficient service delivery appeared to be key elements customers associated with a positive shopping experience, which in turn influences their willingness to return and spend more.

The strategy related to Improving Environment and Accessibility which includes enhancing store layout, adding signage, and extending opening hours received a mean score of 4.10. While still positively received, the slightly lower score and a

higher standard deviation of 0.80 suggest more variability in responses, possibly due to differing customer preferences or experiences with store navigation and accessibility.

Improving Marketing and Communication, such as through social media engagement and health awareness campaigns, as a strategy received the lowest mean score of 4.00 and the highest standard deviation of 0.85 among the six strategies. This indicates moderate agreement and a wider range of opinions. While many respondents recognized the importance of communication, especially in today's digital age, others did not see it as immediately impactful on their purchasing behavior compared to more tangible factors like pricing or promotions.

Interview Questions

From the interviews, respondents were asked on other strategies that can be adopted to optimise buyer behaviour at Pharmarite. The following common themes emerged in relation to other strategies that can be adopted to optimise buyer behaviour. Table 4.6 overleaf presents the findings.

Table 4.6: Common Themes- Strategies for optimizing consumer purchases

Theme	Description	Linked Interview Questions
Development of Mobile App	A mobile app or SMS-based ordering system to allow customers to pre-order medications and reduce in-store wait times.	Q10, Q12
Personalised customer engagement approach	Tailored discounts based on purchase history to increase loyalty.	Q11
Health Consultation Services	Health consultation services (e.g., with a pharmacist or nurse), which can enhance trust and position Pharmarite as a one-stop health solution.	Q10, Q12
Regular customer feedback surveys	Conducting regular customer feedback surveys and acting on the insights can help continuously refine the shopping experience to better meet customer needs.	Q10, Q12
Partnerships with local clinics or health programs	Partnerships with local clinics or health programs help to expand the pharmacy's reach and attract new customers through community engagement.	Q10, Q12

These themes are discussed below:

Theme 1: Development of Mobile App

Pharmarite can adopt additional strategies to strengthen its customer engagement and operational efficiency, starting with the development of a mobile app or SMS-based ordering system. This digital innovation would allow customers to pre-order medications, schedule deliveries, and receive reminders for refills. By offering a

convenient digital ordering option, Pharmarite can reduce in-store waiting times and improve customer satisfaction. The app could also include features such as real-time stock updates, secure payment options, and push notifications for new promotions. For customers without smartphones, an SMS-based alternative would ensure inclusivity. Adopting such technology would position Pharmarite as a modern and customer-focused pharmacy that values convenience and accessibility.

Theme 2: Personalised Customer Engagement

Another strategy is the implementation of a personalised customer engagement approach. This involves using customer data such as purchase history and prescription records to offer tailored services and promotions. For example, customers who frequently purchase chronic medications could receive personalized discounts, refill reminders, or health tips relevant to their condition. Through such individualised engagement, Pharmarite can build stronger relationships with customers and enhance brand loyalty. Personalised interactions make customers feel valued and understood, encouraging repeat visits and improving long-term retention. This approach not only boosts sales but also differentiates Pharmarite from competitors who offer more generic customer service.

Theme 3: Health Consultation Services

Pharmarite could also introduce health consultation services as part of its effort to provide holistic healthcare solutions. These consultations, conducted by pharmacists or nurses, could include medication management advice, health screenings, nutritional guidance, and chronic disease monitoring. By offering

these services in-store or virtually through the mobile app, Pharmarite would transform from a traditional pharmacy into a one-stop health and wellness provider. This would strengthen trust and credibility among customers, positioning the brand as a reliable healthcare partner. Additionally, consultation services could create new revenue streams and attract health-conscious individuals seeking convenient and trustworthy medical advice.

Theme 4: Regular Customer Feedback Surveys

To ensure that the company continues to meet customer needs effectively, Pharmarite should conduct regular customer feedback surveys. These surveys can be distributed online, through the mobile app, or in-store to gather insights about customer satisfaction, service quality, and potential areas for improvement. Through actively listening to customers and addressing their concerns, Pharmarite can enhance its service delivery and maintain high standards of customer care. This process also fosters transparency and accountability, showing customers that their opinions are valued and that the company is committed to continuous improvement.

Theme 5: Partnerships with other service providers

As another strategy, Pharmarite can expand its community presence and customer base through partnerships with local clinics and health programs. Collaborating with clinics allows for mutual referrals, joint health campaigns, and initiatives such as vaccination drives or health awareness events. These partnerships would not only attract new customers but also demonstrate Pharmarite's commitment to improving community health outcomes. Through partnerships, Pharmarite can build a strong reputation as a socially responsible and community-oriented

pharmacy. Such collaborations can enhance visibility, strengthen public trust, and open doors for future business opportunities within the healthcare sector.

4.3 Discussion and Interpretation

The current study showed that most respondents regularly purchased medications for ongoing conditions, indicating a routine and habitual pattern of buying. These findings on buyer patterns at Pharmarite Pharmacy align with those found by Kotler and Keller (2016), who noted that habitual buying behaviour often drives repeated purchases of essential goods, especially for low-involvement products such as chronic disease medication. Similarly, the frequent purchases around salary periods and month-end mirror the observations of Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019), who highlighted that purchasing peaks often coincide with income cycles when consumers have higher purchasing power. This consistency suggests that Pharmarite customers' buying habits are largely habitual and financially driven, shaped by predictable patterns of need and affordability.

Furthermore, the study's finding that women tend to buy more than men (mean = 4.10) concurs with research by Parment (2013) and Ivanova et al. (2019), who established that female consumers often display greater involvement in health-related purchases due to their nurturing roles and higher attention to family wellbeing. The observed gender difference reflects broader generational and socio-cultural influences where women, particularly in urban settings, manage most household health expenditures. Additionally, moderate influences from seasonal illnesses, school holidays, and emotional triggers resonate with Muruganantham and Bhakat (2013), who found that emotional and situational factors can stimulate impulse buying behaviour, especially when urgency or stress

is involved. This supports the view that while habitual purchasing dominates, situational and emotional cues also contribute to spontaneous pharmacy visits.

However, some divergence emerged regarding external influences such as weather, which had the lowest mean (3.50) and high variability, suggesting mixed perceptions among consumers. This contrasts with Meng and Leung (2023), who reported that environmental factors such as climate and background stimuli can significantly affect consumer decisions. In the case of Pharmarite, weather appears to play a less consistent role, possibly due to the predominance of necessity-driven purchases rather than mood-driven ones. These findings confirm that buyer behaviour at Pharmarite is primarily shaped by habitual and income-dependent patterns, partially influenced by emotional and situational factors, while less affected by environmental conditions supporting much of the existing consumer behaviour literature.

A comparison of the findings from the Pharmarite Pharmacy study with existing literature reveals strong alignment across several dimensions of consumer behaviour. Consistent with Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019) and Kevrekidis et al. (2022), the Pharmarite results confirm that demographic and economic factors, particularly income level and affordability, are critical determinants of purchase activity. The high mean scores for pricing (4.55) and income level (4.50) mirror the literature's emphasis on the role of financial capacity in shaping purchase frequency and volume, especially in low-to-middle income contexts like Zimbabwe.

Similarly, the finding that product availability (mean 4.60) drives high purchase activity aligns with Nakambale et al. (2024) and Munyoro et al. (2023), who noted

that consistent stock levels and access to trusted brands build customer loyalty and increase spending. The importance of staff helpfulness and attitude (mean 4.40) echoes the marketing mix framework of Kotler and Keller (2016), which highlights service quality and interpersonal interaction as essential components of customer satisfaction and repeat patronage. The interview responses further reinforce this by showing that friendly and knowledgeable staff directly encourage higher purchasing.

In line with Pappas (2016) and Haji Ahmad et al. (2020), promotional activities such as discounts and special offers were also found to stimulate purchasing behaviour, especially among price-sensitive consumers. Conversely, long waiting times (mean 3.20) were identified as a deterrent to sales, corresponding with Bitner's (1992) servicescape model, which associates environmental and operational factors with consumer satisfaction. Both the literature and the Pharmarite findings converge on the conclusion that economic, psychological, and operational factors particularly pricing, income, product variety, service quality, and efficiency collectively determine the level of consumer purchase activity in retail pharmacies, confirming that affordability, accessibility, and positive in-store experiences are the strongest drivers of customer loyalty and spending behaviour in the Harare context.

The findings shows that Pharmarite Pharmacy can significantly optimise consumer purchases by focusing on promotions, customer experience, and pricing strategies, which have received the most consistent and strongest support from customers. The study results showed that Promotional Strategies (Mean = 4.40) and Improving Pricing and Payment Options (Mean = 4.35) were the highest-rated strategies for enhancing purchase activity. These findings strongly correspond

with Kotler and Keller (2016) and Munnukka (2008), who argue that competitive and value-driven pricing directly attracts price-sensitive consumers and boosts sales. The respondents' emphasis on promotional offers also echoes Chen et al. (2012), who found that dynamic and time-based pricing strategies effectively increase purchase frequency.

Similarly, Improving Product Availability (Mean = 4.25) and Customer Experience Enhancement (Mean = 4.20) resonate with the literature on service quality and product reliability. According to Homburg et al. (2017) and Guan et al. (2024), a positive customer experience driven by product consistency, attentive staff, and a pleasant environment significantly enhances satisfaction and repeat purchases. The Pharmarite findings reinforce this, as respondents valued helpful staff, shorter waiting times, and efficient service, which align with Klaus and Maklan's (2013) observation that superior experience management leads to stronger customer loyalty.

The study's themes of personalised customer engagement and regular feedback surveys align with the literature on personalised marketing. Tarifi and Bakhsh (2024) highlight that using customer data to tailor services, offers, and communication increases engagement and retention. Pharmarite's proposed use of digital tools, such as mobile apps and refill reminders, mirrors these findings, showing that leveraging technology and analytics can create stronger customer connections. Moreover, Health Consultation Services and Community Partnerships, identified as emerging strategies in the study, align with Solomon, Russell-Bennett and Previte (2019) and Nguyen et al. (2021), who note that trust built through expert guidance and consistent quality encourages repeat purchases and brand loyalty.

Improving Environment and Accessibility (Mean = 4.10) and Marketing and Communication (Mean = 4.00) are consistent with the service quality framework proposed by Bitner (1992), which emphasises the importance of store layout and physical ambiance (servicescape) in shaping customer experience. Pharmarite's plan to enhance layout, signage, and accessibility therefore aligns with global best practices for creating welcoming retail environments.

Both the literature and the Pharmarite findings converge on the conclusion that a multi-dimensional strategy integrating promotional incentives, competitive pricing, excellent service quality, personalised engagement, and consistent product availability optimises consumer purchase activity. While the literature provides theoretical grounding for these strategies, the Pharmarite study contextualises them within Zimbabwe's retail pharmacy environment, highlighting that affordability, trust, and customer experience remain the most decisive factors driving purchase behaviour.

4.4 Summary

This chapter presented and discussed the key findings from the investigation into strategies for optimising consumer purchase behaviour at Pharmarite Pharmacy. The study revealed strong support for promotional strategies, competitive pricing and payment options, product availability, and customer experience enhancements as major drivers of consumer purchases, while improvements in marketing, communication, and store environment received moderate support. Despite the recognized benefits of these strategies in increasing customer engagement, loyalty, and sales, variability in customer preferences and differing perceptions of impact were noted. Additional strategies such as developing a mobile app or SMS-

based ordering system, implementing personalised customer engagement, offering health consultation services, conducting regular feedback surveys, and forming partnerships with local clinics were identified as key measures to strengthen convenience, trust, and community engagement. The following chapter (Chapter 5) presents the study's summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the study, highlights the key conclusions, offers practical recommendations, presents the implications and identifies potential directions for future research. The conclusions and recommendations presented in this chapter are informed by the findings discussed in the preceding chapter (Chapter 4) and remain closely aligned with the research objectives outlined in Chapter 1.

5.2 Discussion

Chapter One of this study introduced the study by presenting the background, the statement of the problem, the objectives, the research questions, the significance and the scope of the study. The main objective of the study was to investigate factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour in retail pharmacies in Harare with specific reference to Pharmarite Pharmacy. This was further broken down into three specific objectives: to assess patterns of buyer purchase behaviour at Pharmarite Pharmacy, to examine factors that contribute to either high or low purchase activity and to recommend strategies for optimising consumer purchases. Chapter Two reviewed relevant literature, establishing the theoretical, conceptual and empirical foundations of the study. The theoretical framework was based on the Black Box Model of Consumer Behaviour, which conceptualises consumer decisions as responses to external stimuli processed through internal psychological mechanisms. The chapter also critiqued existing literature, identified gaps and contextualised the relevance of the study within the retail

pharmacy sector. Chapter Three detailed the methodology adopted for the research. An explanatory research design was employed to gain a comprehensive understanding of consumer behaviour at Pharmarite Pharmacy. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews from a population comprising both customers and staff members. Chapter Four presented and analysed the findings obtained through the research instruments. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis and presented through narrative explanations and illustrative tables. The analysis provided insights into the objectives of the study and informed the conclusions and recommendations discussed in this chapter.

The major findings were as follows:

5.2.1 Patterns of buyer behaviour at Pharmarite Pharmacy

The findings showed that most customers tend to make purchases at the end of the month, during paydays, and on weekends, reflecting buying patterns linked to salary cycles and disposable income. Many visits are driven by the need to restock chronic medications, refill prescriptions or seek advice from pharmacy staff. Seasonal factors, such as school holidays, cold and flu periods, and festive seasons, also influence shopping behavior, prompting customers to stock up on medicines and health supplies. Women were observed to shop more frequently than men, and medical aid was often preferred over cash for payments.

5.2.2 Factors that contribute to either high or low purchase activity

The study found that purchase activity at Pharmarite Pharmacy is primarily driven by product availability, competitive pricing, and customers' income levels, with

additional positive influences from helpful staff, convenient location, cleanliness, and flexible payment options. Conversely, long waiting times and limited income negatively affect purchasing behaviour. Thus, economic factors, service quality, and operational efficiency are the key determinants of consumer purchase behaviour at Pharmarite.

5.2.3 Strategies for optimising consumer purchases at Pharmarite Pharmacy

The study found that strategies for optimising consumer purchases at Pharmarite Pharmacy are primarily driven by promotional activities, competitive pricing and payment options, and product availability, with additional positive influences from enhanced customer experience, improved store environment, and marketing communication. Both questionnaire and interview data consistently showed that customers respond positively to loyalty programs, flash sales, tailored discounts, efficient service, and convenient access, while limited promotions, stock shortages, or poor service reduce purchase activity. Additional strategies such as mobile app ordering, personalised engagement, health consultation services, and partnerships with local clinics were also identified as effective ways to increase customer purchases.

5.3 Conclusions

From the findings obtained, the following conclusions were drawn:

5.3.1 Patterns of Buyer Behaviour at Pharmarite Pharmacy

The study concluded that consumer purchasing at Pharmarite Pharmacy is shaped by a combination of personal, financial, and seasonal factors, which include

income cycles, recurring health needs and seasonal trends. Most customers shop at the end of the month, during paydays, weekends, and festive periods, often to restock chronic medications, refill prescriptions or seek advice from pharmacy staff.

5.3.2 Factors Contributing to High or Low Purchase Activity

The study found out that purchase activity at Pharmarite Pharmacy is primarily driven by product availability, competitive pricing, and customers' income levels, with additional positive influences from helpful staff, convenient location, cleanliness, and flexible payment options. The study therefore concluded that customers are more likely to buy when products are available, prices are reasonable, promotions are offered, and service is efficient, while stock shortages or service delays reduce purchase activity.

5.3.3 Strategies for Optimising Consumer Purchases at Pharmarite Pharmacy

The study concluded that to enhance consumer purchases there is need to focus on promotional activities, competitive pricing and payment options, and maintaining product availability. Thus, financial incentives, quality service, product variety, and customer-focused innovations are central for optimizing purchasing behavior at Pharmarite.

5.4 Implications

The study has provided valuable insights into the factors influencing consumer purchase behavior at Pharmarite Pharmacy, highlighting the critical roles of

product availability, pricing, promotions, customer service, and operational efficiency. These findings underscore the importance for pharmacy owners and managers to adopt strategies that enhance stock management or product availability, optimize pricing structures, and improve service delivery to maximize customer purchases. Understanding these drivers enables Pharmarite to make informed decisions about inventory planning, promotional campaigns, staff training, and customer engagement, ultimately fostering customer loyalty and increasing sales. The study also has broader implications for the retail pharmacy sector in Zimbabwe, suggesting that effective combination of economic incentives, service quality, and digital engagement can strengthen consumer relationships and business performance. Furthermore, the findings can guide policymakers, industry regulators, and support organizations in developing initiatives that encourage innovation, digital adoption, and customer-centric practices within the pharmaceutical retail environment.

5.5 Recommendations

From the findings and conclusions made, the following recommendations were made:

5.5.1 Patterns of Buyer Behaviour at Pharmarite Pharmacy

To respond to the observed buying patterns, Pharmarite Pharmacy should prioritize timely stock replenishment, particularly for chronic medications and high-demand items around paydays, weekends and festive seasons. Seasonal demand should be anticipated, such as stocking flu remedies during cold or rainy periods and skincare or rehydration products during hot seasons. The pharmacy

should also offer convenient service options, including flexible payment methods like medical aid processing and mobile payments, to align with customer preferences. Additionally, targeted communication and promotional activities aimed at women, who tend to shop more frequently, could help increase engagement and repeat purchases.

5.5.2 Factors Contributing to High or Low Purchase Activity

To address factors that influence purchase activity, Pharmarite Pharmacy should maintain a wide variety of products and ensure consistent availability to meet diverse customer needs. Competitive pricing and periodic promotions can help attract and retain customers, while staff training should be prioritized to improve service quality, reduce waiting times, and provide helpful guidance. Operational efficiency can be enhanced through organized shelving, faster checkout systems, and effective inventory management, which would reduce delays and mitigate the negative impact of service bottlenecks.

5.5.3 Strategies for Optimising Consumer Purchases at Pharmarite Pharmacy

To optimize consumer purchases, Pharmarite Pharmacy should implement targeted promotional strategies such as loyalty programs, flash sales, and tailored discounts to incentivize repeat purchases. Investment in digital solutions, including mobile apps or SMS ordering systems, can enhance convenience and customer engagement. Expanding customer-focused services, such as personalized engagement, health consultations, and partnerships with local clinics, can strengthen trust and loyalty. Finally, improving the overall shopping environment and communication strategies, through clear signage, accessible

layouts, and regular health awareness campaigns, will further enhance the customer experience and encourage consistent purchasing behaviour.

5.6 Suggestions for Further Research

One limitation of this study is that it focused on a single pharmacy, Pharmarite, which could have limited the generalizability of the findings. Future research could expand the scope to include multiple pharmacies across different regions, both urban and rural, to capture a wider range of consumer behaviours and operational practices. Comparative studies could explore how factors such as product availability, pricing strategies, and promotional activities differ across various pharmacy sizes and locations. Additionally, further studies could examine the long-term impact of digital engagement tools, mobile apps, and personalized customer services on consumer purchase behaviour. Research could also investigate how seasonal, economic, and environmental factors interact with operational strategies to influence purchasing patterns.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Rutendo Nderere, a final year EMBA student from Africa University (AU). I am carrying out a study titled “**FACTORS AFFECTING CONSUMER PURCHASE BEHAVIOR IN RETAIL PHARMACIES IN HARARE: A CASE OF PHARMARITE PHARMACY.**” I am kindly asking you to participate in this study by filling in the questionnaire.

The purpose of the study is to examine the factors that influence consumer purchase behaviour at Pharmarite Pharmacy. If you decide to participate you will be given 3 days to fill in the questionnaire.

You may have discomfort in giving out information perceived confidential with fear of victimisation, or inconveniences in own time allocation-these are normal feelings. However, the researcher guarantees confidentiality and to add on to that, no mention of own name will be requested and will remain anonymous. The requested information will not take long to fill in but ample time is given so that it does not put pressure on the part of the participant.

The information requested for is expected to be given on a willing basis without expectation of payment in return. However, should the participant want to know the results of the survey the researcher is willing, after completion, to share the results with the participants.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If, as a participant you decide not to participate in this study, this will not affect the future relationship with the researcher. If you chose to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation without any harm or penalty.

Before you sign this form, please feel free to ask any questions on any aspect of this study that may seem not clear to you.

If you have decided to participate in this study, please sign this form in the space provide below as an indication that you have read and understood the information provided above and have agreed to participate.

Name of Research Participant (please print)

Date

Signature of Research Participant or legally authorised representative

Should you have any questions concerning this study or consent form beyond those answered by the researcher including questions about the research, your rights as a research participant, or if you feel that you have been treated unfairly and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, please feel free to contact the Africa University Research Ethics Committee on telephone (020) 60075 or 60026 extension 1156 email aurec@africau.edu.

Name of Researcher –Rutendo Nderere

APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION A: Demographic Information

Kindly tick in the appropriate box.

Gender

Male

Female

Age

18-25 Years

26-35 Years

36-45 Years

46-55 Years

55-65 Years

Category

Customer

Employee of Pharmarite

For how long have you been a customer or employee of Pharmarite?

Less than 5 years

6-10 years

More than 10 years

A.4 Level of Education

Secondary Education

Diploma

Undergraduate Degree

Postgraduate

SECTION B

To assess patterns of consumer purchase behaviour at Pharmarite Pharmacy

Rate the following on the scale of 1 to 5 where; 1 = strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = disagree 5 = strongly disagree. Indicate by ticking (√) the appropriate box.

Number	Influencing Factor	(1) SA	(2) A	(3) N	(4) D	(5) SD
1	Most sales occur during end of the month, paydays, weekends					
2	Most purchases occur Seasonally e.g. during school holidays					
3	Most purchases occur monthly-purchases for chronic diseases					
4	Most purchases follow weather patterns					
5	Most customers buy as a result of emotional triggers – buying due to stress, fear, urgency					
6	Women buy more than men					
7	Most people prefer medical aid than cash as a payment method					

To examine the factors that contribute to either high or low purchase activity at Pharmarite Pharmacy

Rate the following on the scale of 1 to 5 where; 1 = strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = disagree 5 = strongly disagree. Indicate by ticking (√) the appropriate box.

Number	Influencing Factor	(1) SA	(2) A	(3) N	(4) D	(5) SD
8	Special offers or discounts.					
9	The availability of a wide variety of products					
10	Pricing					
11	The attitude and helpfulness of the staff at Pharmarite influences me to buy					

12	Income- purchase more frequently from Pharmarite at the end of the month or after receiving my salary					
13	The cleanliness and organization of the pharmacy environment					
14	Long waiting times at Pharmarite reduce my willingness to purchase					
15	I often buy more when I see product recommendations or in-store promotions.					
16	The pharmacy's location and ease of access affect how often I shop there.					
17	Payment method (cash, mobile, medical aid)					
18	Brand loyalty-preference for specific brands/products					

Strategies for optimising consumer purchases at Pharmarite Pharmacy

Using the five-point rating scale where; 1 = strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = disagree 5 = strongly disagree. Indicate by ticking (v) the appropriate box.

Number	Strategies for optimizing consumer purchases at Pharmarite Pharmacy	(1) SA	(2) A	(3) N	(4) D	(5) SD
19	Promotional Strategies (Run Timed Promotions, Loyalty Programs, Referral Discounts, Flash Sales & Weekend Specials)					
20	Customer Experience Enhancement					
21	Improve Pricing and Payment Options					
22	Improve product availability- Stock Seasonally Relevant Products or Expand Product Categories					
23	Improve Environment & Accessibility (Improve Store Layout, Create Clear Signage & Product Labels, Extend Hours)					
24	Improve Marketing & Communication (Social Media Engagement, Health Awareness Days)					

Thank you for your co-operation.

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. How often do you purchase from Pharmarite Pharmacy?
2. What types of products do you usually buy from Pharmarite Pharmacy?
3. What time of day or days of the week do you typically visit the pharmacy?
4. What influences your decision to buy from Pharmarite Pharmacy instead of other pharmacies?
5. Are there any reasons that discourage you from making frequent purchases at Pharmarite Pharmacy?
6. How does product availability affect your buying decisions?
7. How does pricing affect your buying decisions pricing at Pharmarite Pharmacy
8. How does place affect your buying decisions pricing at Pharmarite Pharmacy
9. How does Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal affect your buying decisions at Pharmarite Pharmacy
10. What improvements would make you more likely to shop more frequently at Pharmarite Pharmacy?
11. Would loyalty programs or promotions encourage you to buy more from the pharmacy? Why or why not?
12. What other strategies can be adopted to optimise buyer behaviour at Pharmarite Pharmacy?

THANK YOU

APPENDIX 4: AUREC APPROVAL



AFRICA UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (AUREC)

P.O. Box 1320 Mutare, Zimbabwe, Off Nyanga Road, Old Mutare-Tel (+263-20) 60075/60026/61611 Fax: (+263 20) 61785 Website: www.africau.edu

Ref: AU3414/25

5 August, 2025

RUTENDO WHITNEY NDERERE

C/O Africa University
Box 1320
MUTARE

RE: **FACTORS INFLUENCING BUYER BEHAVIOR IN RETAIL PHARMACIES IN HARARE: A CASE OF PHARMARITE PHARMACY**

Thank you for submitting the above-titled proposal to the Africa University Research Ethics Committee for review. Please be advised that AUREC has reviewed and approved your application to conduct the above research.

The approval is based on the following.

- a) Research proposal
- **APPROVAL NUMBER** AUREC 3414/25
This number should be used on all correspondence, consent forms, and appropriate documents
 - **AUREC MEETING DATE** NA
 - **APPROVAL DATE** August 5 2025
 - **EXPIRATION DATE** August 5, 2026
 - **TYPE OF MEETING:** Expedited
After the expiration date, this research may only continue upon renewal. A progress report on a standard AUREC form should be submitted a month before the expiration date for renewal purposes.
 - **SERIOUS ADVERSE EVENTS** All serious problems concerning subject safety must be reported to AUREC within 3 working days on the standard AUREC form.
 - **MODIFICATIONS** Prior AUREC approval is required before implementing any changes in the proposal (including changes in the consent documents)
 - **TERMINATION OF STUDY** Upon termination of the study a report has to be submitted to AUREC.



Yours Faithfully

MARY CHINZOU
FOR CHAIRPERSON
AFRICA UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE