

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND PURCHASING DECISIONS IN SELECTED SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN GASABO DISTRICT

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Abstract: The general objective of this study was to analyze consumer behavior and purchasing decisions in selected Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Gasabo District, Rwanda. The findings showed that complex buying behavior, habitual buying behavior, and variety-seeking buying behavior had positive and statistically significant effects on purchasing decisions. Habitual buying behavior produced the strongest effect, showing that repeat purchase routines, brand familiarity, and store loyalty strongly shape customer decisions in the selected SMEs. The study concluded that purchasing decisions in Gasabo District SMEs are influenced by both rational evaluation and repeated consumption habits, while variety seeking also encourages product exploration and brand switching. The study recommends that SME managers should provide clear product information, strengthen customer loyalty practices, maintain reliable product quality, and introduce controlled product variety to respond to different consumer behavior patterns.

Keywords: consumer behavior, complex buying behavior, habitual buying behavior, variety-seeking buying behavior, purchasing decisions, SMEs

1. INTRODUCTION

Consumer behavior remains a central issue in marketing because customers make purchase decisions after evaluating product information, price, quality, convenience, trust, and past experience. In SME markets, these decisions are important because small firms depend on repeat customers, quick product acceptance, and customer loyalty to survive in competitive environments. Consumer behavior therefore helps explain why some customers compare products carefully, why others buy familiar brands repeatedly, and why some switch brands to try new products. In this study, consumer behavior was examined through complex buying behavior, habitual buying behavior, and variety-seeking buying behavior in relation to purchasing decisions in SMEs in Gasabo District (Schmitt, 2024).

Digital marketing and online communication have changed how customers search for information before purchasing products from small enterprises. Customers increasingly use websites, social media pages, online reviews, and mobile platforms to assess product quality, price fairness, seller reliability, and convenience before making decisions. This has made information clarity and trust more important for SMEs because poorly communicated product value can discourage purchase decisions even when products are available. Studies in online and small enterprise markets show that trust, usability, communication, and convenience influence customer choice and willingness to purchase (Ologunbe *et al.*, 2024).

In African SME markets, consumer behavior is strongly affected by price sensitivity, trust, service quality, and the level of information provided by sellers. Customers often require assurance that products are reliable, prices are fair, and sellers can respond to their needs before they commit to a purchase. For high involvement purchases, customers compare alternatives and seek enough information to reduce perceived risk. For routine purchases, customers rely on familiarity and repeated experience, while variety-seeking customers switch products or brands to satisfy curiosity and novelty interests (Mumba, 2023).

Rwanda's SME sector continues to expand in retail, services, hospitality, and trade, especially in urban districts such as Gasabo. Customers in these markets interact with SMEs through physical shops, social media platforms, mobile communication, and word-of-mouth referrals. Their purchasing decisions are shaped by product usefulness, communication quality, service experience, pricing clarity, and brand recognition. Rwandan studies indicate that customer engagement and product communication influence the way customers perceive and choose SMEs (Habimana, 2022).

Gasabo District is a relevant area for this study because it has many SMEs serving different categories of customers. Customers in the district face many product choices, which makes their decision-making behavior important for SME growth and competitiveness. Some customers evaluate quality and information before buying, others purchase from familiar sellers because of habit, while others look for new products and brands. Understanding these behaviors helps SMEs design marketing practices that match customer needs and improve purchasing decisions.

Purchasing decisions in selected SMEs in Gasabo District remain unstable because many customers are uncertain about product quality, price fairness, information clarity, service reliability, and brand value. This weakens customer confidence and affects repeat purchases, product selection, and brand uptake in small enterprises. Although SMEs are important for employment creation and local income generation, many of them still face challenges in attracting and retaining customers in competitive markets. This problem is linked to limited market research, weak customer communication, and poor understanding of how consumers behave before making purchase decisions (Economic Policy Research Network, 2021).

Recent studies in Rwanda show that marketing communication, product strategies, pricing practices, and customer perception influence consumer preferences and business outcomes in SME-related markets. However, most available studies focus on general marketing practices, accounting practices, financial literacy, or business performance, rather than the specific behavioral patterns that guide purchase decisions. Studies from Huye, Musanze, and Kayanza Districts provide useful evidence, but they do not adequately explain how complex buying behavior, habitual buying behavior, and variety-seeking buying behavior jointly affect purchasing decisions in SMEs in Gasabo District (Bizimana & Irechukwu, 2023; Majaliwa et al., 2024; Muhongerwa & Tarus, 2025; Wach & Tarus, 2021).

The knowledge gap is that limited empirical evidence exists on how local consumer psychology influences purchasing decisions among customers of SMEs in Gasabo District. Without this evidence, SME managers may continue using marketing approaches that do not match customer decision patterns, leading to weak loyalty, poor brand uptake, and reduced competitiveness. This study addressed the gap by analyzing the effect of complex buying behavior, habitual buying behavior, and variety-seeking buying behavior on purchasing decisions in selected SMEs in Gasabo District.

The purpose of this study was to analyze consumer behavior and purchasing decisions in selected Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Gasabo District.

The specific objectives of the study were:

- i. To examine the effect of complex buying behavior on purchasing decisions in SMEs in Gasabo District, Rwanda.
- ii. To determine the effect of habitual buying behavior on purchasing decisions in SMEs in Gasabo District, Rwanda.
- iii. To assess the effect of variety-seeking buying behavior on purchasing decisions in SMEs in Gasabo District, Rwanda.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents the theoretical and empirical literature that guided the study variables and supported the interpretation of consumer behavior and purchasing decisions.

2.1 Theoretical Review

The theoretical review explains the theories used to connect complex buying behavior, habitual buying behavior, and variety-seeking buying behavior with purchasing decisions in selected SMEs in Gasabo District.

2.1.1 Consumer Decision-Making Theory

Consumer Decision-Making Theory first appeared in Dewey (1910), with a five-stage model of problem recognition, information search, evaluation, purchase and post-purchase. Howard and Sheth (1969) extended this into a model that considered psychological and sociological factors. Recent studies emphasise the importance of sustainability and changing contexts in decision-making (Pappas, 2021). New research stresses decision-making's complexity with digital

environments. Information processing merged with behavioural decision making and is changing retail and marketing strategies through insights about how discontinuous online shopping trips have upended earlier assumptions of consumer decision making, so businesses must rethink targeting strategies to accommodate multi-channel behaviour (Schmitt, 2024).

Existing models are criticised for their linear nature, as impulse and habitual buying do not always follow rationality, thus extending the original five-stage model to explain current decision-making (Soni, 2021). Social media also distorts decision-making as the opinion of others and online communities take precedence over rational choice, complicating the individualistic framework of previous models (Kumar & Srivastava, 2022). Artificial intelligence predicts consumer behaviour based on browsing patterns, enabling brands to impact decision-making at various stages (Gupta, 2023). Digital marketing based on predictive analytics through personalization strategies boost consumer loyalty by matching promotions to behavioural trajectories, as personalisation is crucial for maintaining interest in a world of fragmented markets (Tan & Lim, 2022).

Consumer Decision-Making Theory was relevant to this study because it explains how customers recognize needs, search for information, compare alternatives, make purchases, and evaluate decisions after purchase. In the current study, the theory guided analysis of complex buying behavior because customers who are highly involved in purchasing decisions require information, assess risks, compare quality, and evaluate alternatives before buying products from SMEs in Gasabo District.

2.1.2 Habit Formation Theory

Habit Formation Theory was originally developed by James (1890), who defined habits as automatic responses that are formed through repetition. This theory was refined by Hull (1943) and Skinner (1953) with reinforcement learning. Recent research instills focus on cues and automaticity. Habits and goals are distinct but related systems; repetition in consistent contexts leads to automaticity and studies reveal habits can remain unbroken despite changing goals (Wood et al., 2021).

Practical guidelines for measuring habit development in the wild underline the role of context and response associations, and show that habit strength can be measured by frequency and automaticity measures. The approach is criticised for undermining free will in regard to passive humans trapped in repetition, and failing to account for motivation and reflection. The struggle to overcome bad habits suggests the approach might underestimate the role of emotions, social processes and cognition in influencing behaviour (Gardner et al., 2022). It is used widely in health and sustainability interventions, making use of apps and wearable technologies to reinforce repetition for long-term change. Technology is increasingly employed to provide cues and rewards into our daily lives, facilitating long-term change (Oxford Research Encyclopedias, 2023).

Habit Formation Theory was used because it explains how repeated behavior in stable conditions becomes automatic. In this study, the theory guided the analysis of habitual buying behavior by showing how routine purchasing, brand familiarity, low engagement, pattern repetition, and store loyalty influence purchasing decisions among customers of SMEs in Gasabo District.

2.1.3 Optimal Stimulation Level Theory

Hebb (1955) and Leuba (1955) first introduced Optimal Stimulation Level Theory, which suggests consumer behaviour is driven by an optimal level of stimulation. OSL was then extended to business and consumer settings by Driver and Streufert (1969-1971). OSL is related to personality and exploratory behaviour of consumers, where people with high OSL seek novelty and risk-taking, while people with low OSL prefer routines. It also affects variety-seeking and brand switching, showing that OSL affects consumer loyalty and product choice (Raju, 2021).

It has been criticised for being static, not considering individual variability and cultural diversity, hampering its effectiveness. Personality traits are over-generalized with little empirical differentiation, limiting its specificity (Baumgartner, 2022). Combining OSL with digital consumption reveals how stimulation levels impact web browsing, video games and social media, and the theory can be applied in market segmentation. The current approaches link OSL with personality psychology and online behavior to allow marketers to engage novelty enthusiasts while assuring low-OSL consumers with stability (Springer, 2023).

Optimal Stimulation Level Theory was relevant to this study because variety-seeking customers in selected SMEs may search for novelty, new brands, and different product options when their stimulation needs are high. The theory therefore supported the analysis of brand switching, product exploration, curiosity, and change preference in purchasing decisions.

2.2 Empirical Review

The empirical review summarizes previous studies related to the three specific objectives of the study and shows how earlier findings connect with the present research.

2.2.1 Complex Buying Behavior and Purchasing Decisions

Alkaabi (2022) investigated complex buying behavior for home based SME products using a questionnaire survey with 117 respondents in the United Arab Emirates. The study found 83% rated product quality as good or above, which enhanced careful judgment and evaluation of high involvement products. Convenience was 21.1% and was an extended decision process through accessibility, delivery, and speedy services. The satisfaction with parking layout was 50.4% and dissatisfaction was 33.9%. Correlation tests established a significant correlation at 95% between complex buying behaviour and convenience, ease of use of websites and availability of supporting service facilities.

Mumba (2023) examined complex buying behaviour of SME consumers in Kafue District through a mixed method using 67 respondents (20 SME owners and 47 consumers). The results suggested that consumers needed to make value, justice, and trust assessments for high involvement products. Poor customer service and confusing pricing led to negative perceptions, which involved prolonged evaluation steps. The research illustrated that customers slowed their decisions when they had perceptions of uncertainty about service reliability, which led to customer churn. As such, complex buying behaviour influenced preference choice, as consumers chose SMEs that provided more information and reliable engagement during the buying process.

Majaliwa et al. (2024) assessed complex buying behavior using the Huye Complex Market to understand the impact of marketing communication on consumer preferences and buying behavior. The study found that there was a very strong relationship ($r=0.739$, $p=0.000$) between advertisements and customers' preferences ($n=355$). The study revealed that customers evaluated advertisements through extended processing, focusing on emotional, clear and informative messages, and powerful product explanation. These elements directed subsequent assessment by high involvement customers. The results supported complexity in the purchasing process that matched the advertisements that expressed benefits and unique attributes.

2.2.2 Habitual Buying Behavior and Purchasing Decisions

Sawaharani (2025) examined habitual buying behavior in augmented reality cosmetic shade matching among Generation Z consumers. The study used an online survey of 260 women and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling. The findings showed that habit was the strongest predictor of purchase intention in the UTAUT2 model, indicating that repeated use of digital cosmetic try-on tools reduced the need for long evaluation. The study confirmed that repetition and familiarity can make purchase decisions quicker and more automatic.

Huang et al. (2023) investigated habitual mobile shopping among older adults using an extended UTAUT2 model. The findings showed that habit had an important influence on purchase intention and continued mobile shopping use. Frequent exposure to mobile shopping features created repeated shopping patterns, strengthened perceived usefulness, and increased customer confidence in mobile transactions. This evidence shows that habit can support purchasing decisions when customers repeatedly interact with convenient shopping channels.

Maduku (2023) studied mobile shopping continuance in South Africa and found that habit directly influenced continued mobile shopping use. The study also showed that habit strengthened the relationship between satisfaction and repeat buying. This means that customers who repeatedly use the same shopping platform or seller become more likely to continue purchasing from that source. The findings are relevant to SMEs because repeated positive experience can build store loyalty and predictable customer behavior.

2.2.3 Variety-Seeking Buying Behavior and Purchasing Decisions

Priscilla and Rufaidah (2023) studied the influence of variety seeking on consumer switching intention. The findings from the partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS SEM) revealed that variety seeking led to substantial increases in switching intention, and it was partially mediated by customer engagement. High-scoring variety seeking consumers sought out new brands during product purchase cycles, despite satisfaction with previous brands. The results showed that variety seeking redirected consumer attention to other options and directed their choices away from familiar options. These findings supported the impact of novelty-seeking tendencies on buying intention in product categories.

Menidjel et al. (2023) explored variety seeking in service switching intention. Structural equation modelling with service customers showed an increase in novelty preference resulted in increased switching intention. Engagement was a mediator and moderator, amplifying the impact of variety seeking on service choice adaptation. Service consumers with high novelty preference switched their consumption to new service providers. These findings showed that variety seeking guided cross-service movements, influencing consumer choices in the ever-changing service scenes.

Haryanto (2024) assessed variety seeking among instant noodle brand switchers among 100 consumers. Using multiple regression, variety seeking significantly affected $\beta = 0.344$ and $p = 0.005$. Lemonilo noodles were chosen over past brands because of novelty seeking. Consumers were motivated to try new flavours and healthier alternatives and made choices accordingly. The results suggested that novelty seeking behaviours were important in the brand choice decision making of repeat purchases.

2.3 Research Gap

The reviewed studies show that complex buying behavior is strongly linked to information search, quality judgment, value comparison, and risk reduction. Alkaabi (2022) and Mumba (2023) focused on SME and community-based products, while Majaliwa et al. (2024) and Muhongerwa and Tarus (2025) provided evidence from Rwandan and regional contexts. However, these studies did not specifically examine how complex buying behavior affects purchasing decisions among customers of selected SMEs in Gasabo District, which created a contextual gap for the current study.

The reviewed studies agree that habitual buying behavior reduces cognitive effort and encourages repeat purchasing. However, most of them focused on digital shopping platforms, mobile commerce, or cosmetic products, while limited evidence exists on how habitual behavior affects purchasing decisions in selected SMEs in Gasabo District. The current study addressed this gap by examining routine purchasing, brand familiarity, low engagement, pattern repetition, and store loyalty among SME customers.

The reviewed studies show that variety-seeking behavior increases brand switching, product exploration, and curiosity-driven purchasing. Priscilla and Rufaidah (2023), Menidjel et al. (2023), Haryanto (2024), and Dalziel and Sharp (2023) demonstrate that customers often try new products even when they are satisfied with previous choices. However, these studies mainly focused on service switching, instant noodles, and beauty products, while the current study examined variety-seeking behavior in the context of SMEs in Gasabo District.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section summarizes the research design, target population, sample size, sampling technique, data collection instruments, validity and reliability procedures, data analysis, and ethical considerations used in the study.

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-method approach supported by descriptive and correlational research designs. The descriptive design was used to summarize respondents' views on consumer behavior and purchasing decisions, while the correlational design was used to determine the relationship between complex buying behavior, habitual buying behavior, variety-seeking buying behavior, and purchasing decisions. The mixed-method approach was appropriate because the study required both numerical evidence from questionnaires and documentary information to support interpretation of the findings.

This design was suitable because the study sought to explain how consumer behavior dimensions' affect purchasing decisions in selected SMEs without manipulating the study variables. It also allowed the researcher to test hypotheses and establish the predictive effect of the independent variables on purchasing decisions.

3.2 Target Population

The target population consisted of customers purchasing from SMEs and SME managers operating in Gasabo District. Customers were included because they make purchasing decisions and provide direct information on buying behavior, while SME managers were included because they understand customer responses, product strategies, and business practices. The total target population was 10,850 respondents.

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study employed Yamane's formula to determine a representative sample from the total population of 10,850. The representative sample size for the study was 385 respondents.

The study used simple random sampling to select respondents from the two population categories. This technique was appropriate because it gave customers and SME managers an equal chance of being selected and reduced researcher bias in respondent selection. The sample was distributed proportionately across consumers and SME managers to ensure fair representation of the study population.

A random selection process ensures that every individual in the population has an equal opportunity to be chosen. This study used stratified random sampling, beginning with division of the population into two strata: consumers and SME managers. A fair and unbiased selection of responders was made within each stratum using basic random sampling. The goal of this approach is to guarantee that the sample accurately reflects the population as a whole.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires, while secondary data were obtained through documentation. The questionnaire collected responses from customers and SME managers on the study variables, while documentation was used to support the background, literature review, and interpretation of findings.

The study used questionnaires and documentation as data collection instruments. The questionnaire was structured according to the study variables and contained closed-ended items that measured complex buying behavior, habitual buying behavior, variety-seeking buying behavior, and purchasing decisions.

The questionnaire contained sections on demographic information and Likert-scale statements related to the independent and dependent variables. Respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement with each statement, and the responses were later coded for statistical analysis using SPSS.

Documentation involved reviewing relevant academic studies, policy documents, SME-related reports, and records that supported the study. This method helped to contextualize the findings and compare the results with previous empirical evidence.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

A pilot study was conducted before the main data collection to test the clarity, relevance, and consistency of the questionnaire. The pilot sample represented about 10% of the study sample and was not included in the final data analysis. Feedback from the pilot study helped the researcher refine unclear statements and improve the quality of the instrument.

Validity was tested using expert judgment and the Content Validity Index. The supervisor and selected academic experts reviewed the questionnaire to confirm whether the items measured the intended constructs.

The Content Validity Index (CVI) regarding 0.83 was obtained. This result indicates a high-level regarding content validity for the research instrument used within the current study. Most regarding the questions are appropriate and measure the constructs regarding interest because this result exceeds the widely accepted mark regarding 0.7.

Reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each variable. The reliability results presented in Chapter Four show that all study variables had coefficients above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating that the questionnaire items were internally consistent and reliable for analysis.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted according to the study objectives and hypotheses. Quantitative data were coded and analyzed using SPSS Version 29, while documentary information was used to support interpretation and discussion of the findings.

Descriptive statistics included frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. These statistics were used to summarize demographic characteristics and respondents' views on complex buying behavior, habitual buying behavior, variety-seeking buying behavior, and purchasing decisions.

Inferential statistics included diagnostic tests, correlation analysis, and multiple linear regression analysis. Correlation analysis tested the strength and direction of relationships between the independent variables and purchasing decisions. Regression analysis tested the effect of complex buying behavior, habitual buying behavior, and variety-seeking buying behavior on purchasing decisions at a significance level of 0.05.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + e$$

Where: Y = Purchasing Decision; X1 = Complex Buying Behavior; X2 = Habitual Buying Behavior; X3 = Variety-Seeking Behavior; β_0 = constant; β_1 , β_2 , β_3 = coefficients of the model; and e = error term.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical safeguards were applied during access to sites, participant recruitment, data collection, data storage, and reporting. Official permission was obtained before fieldwork, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, and participation remained voluntary.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the response rate and inferential findings used to determine the relationship and effect of complex buying behavior, habitual buying behavior, and variety-seeking buying behavior on purchasing decisions in SMEs in Gasabo District.

The response rate findings show that 380 out of 385 questionnaires were filled and returned, representing 98.7%, while 5 questionnaires were unreturned or incomplete, representing 1.3%. This response rate provided adequate data for analysis.

4.1 Response Rate

The response rate indicates the number of questionnaires returned and the adequacy of the data used for statistical analysis.

Table 1: Response Rate

Questionnaire Status	Frequency	Percent
Filled and Returned	380	98.7
Unreturned / Incomplete	5	1.3
Total	385	100.0

Source: Field data, 2026

Table 1 shows the response rate of questionnaires distributed to consumers and SME managers in Gasabo District. The findings indicate that 380 questionnaires were filled and returned, representing 98.7% of the total sample. Only 5 questionnaires were unreturned or incomplete, representing 1.3%. This high response rate indicates strong participation from respondents and provides a reliable basis for analyzing purchasing decisions in Gasabo District.

4.2 Inferential Findings

This section presents the results regarding inferential statistics used to determine the relationship and effect of complex buying behavior, habitual buying behavior, and variety-seeking buying behavior on purchasing decisions in SMEs in Gasabo District. The analysis includes Pearson correlation to assess the strength of relationships and multiple regression analysis to test the research hypotheses and predict the dependent variable.

4.2.1 Diagnostic Test

The diagnostic test assessed whether multicollinearity could affect the regression model used in the study.

Table 2: Collinearity Diagnostics

Model	Dimension	Eigenvalue	Condition Index	Variance Proportions			
				(Constant)	Complex Buying Behavior	Habitual Buying Behavior	Variety Seeking Behavior
1	1	3.988	1.000	.00	.00	.00	.00
	2	.006	26.917	.65	.12	.01	.27
	3	.004	31.873	.01	.84	.18	.28
	4	.003	37.041	.33	.04	.81	.46

a. Dependent Variable: Purchasing Decision

Source: Field data, 2026

The collinearity diagnostics in Table 2 are used to diagnose the problem of multicollinearity among the independent variables, Complex Buying Behavior, Habitual Buying Behavior and Variety Seeking Behavior. The findings reveal that Dimension 1 has a large eigenvalue (3.988) and a condition index of 1.000, suggesting that there is no multicollinearity

issue at this level as the variance proportions are all zero. But Dimension 2, 3 and 4 have low eigenvalues (.006, .004 and .003) and relatively high condition indices (26.917, 31.873 and 37.041). A condition index larger than 30 can be considered to have a multicollinearity problem.

Looking into the variance proportions, we can see that in Dimension 3, Complex Buying Behavior has a high variance proportion (.84), while in Dimension 4, Habitual Buying Behavior (.81) and Variety Seeking Behavior (.46) have relatively high variance proportions. This suggests that some independent variables are sharing variance in the same dimensions, and thus moderate multicollinearity exists.

However, the fact that several variables do not show very high variance proportions (greater than 0.90) in the same dimension indicates that the level of multicollinearity is not high. Thus, the multicollinearity assumption is not violated severely in the model and independent variables can be kept for regression analysis.

4.2.2 Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis evaluates the strength and direction of the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable, providing a basis for understanding consumer behavior in Gasabo District SMEs.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis

		Complex Behavior	BuyingHabitual Behavior	BuyingVariety Behavior	SeekingPurchasing Decision
Complex Buying Behavior	Pearson Correlation	1	.535	.626	.661
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	380	380	380	380
Habitual Buying Behavior	Pearson Correlation	.535	1	.619	.823
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	380	380	380	380
Variety Seeking Behavior	Pearson Correlation	.626	.619	1	.749
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	380	380	380	380
Purchasing Decision	Pearson Correlation	.661	.823	.749	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	380	380	380	380

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field data, 2026

Table 3 presents the relationship between complex buying behavior and purchasing decisions, showing a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.661. This result indicates a strong positive relationship since the significance value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level. The data shows that as consumers engage in more detailed product evaluation, their purchasing choices in SMEs in Gasabo District become more defined.

The relationship between habitual buying behavior and purchasing decisions shows a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.823. This value indicates a very strong positive relationship given that the significance value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level. The finding indicates that routine-based shopping patterns and brand familiarity are major drivers for acquisition choices among the studied population.

The relationship between variety-seeking buying behavior and purchasing decisions shows a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.749. This result indicates a strong positive relationship since the significance level of 0.000 is lower than 0.05. The evidence shows that the search for new experiences and brand switching significantly connects with the final purchasing actions taken within the district.

The general findings from the correlation analysis show that all independent variables have significant positive relationships with purchasing decisions. Habitual buying behavior recorded the strongest relationship, suggesting that routine purchasing,

brand familiarity, and store loyalty are highly important in SME markets. Complex buying behavior and variety-seeking behavior also showed strong relationships, meaning that both careful evaluation and novelty interest contribute to customer decisions in Gasabo District.

4.2.3 Regression Analysis

The regression analysis determines the extent to which the independent variables predict the dependent variable through the Model Summary, ANOVA, and Coefficient tables.

Table 4: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.889 ^a	.790	.789	.16837	1.611

a. Predictors: (Constant), Variety Seeking Behavior, Habitual Buying Behavior, Complex Buying Behavior

Source: Field data, 2026

Table 4 presents the model summary showing the predictive capacity of the independent variables on purchasing decisions. The R-value of 0.889 indicates a strong positive correlation between the predictors and the dependent variable. The R Square value of 0.790 shows that 79% of the variation in purchasing decisions in Gasabo District SMEs is explained through complex, habitual, and variety-seeking behaviors. The adjusted R Square of 0.789 shows the model is a good fit for the data after adjusting for the number of variables. The standard error of the estimate remains low at 0.16837, indicating that the regression model provides accurate predictions. The Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.611 is close to 2, indicating no serious autocorrelation problem. Overall, the model is strong and reliable for prediction.

Table 5: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	40.153	3	13.384	478	.000b
	Residual	10.659	376	.028		
	Total	50.812	379			

a. Dependent Variable: Purchasing Decision

b. Predictors: (Constant), Variety Seeking Behavior, Habitual Buying Behavior, Complex Buying Behavior

Source: Field data, 2026

Table 5 presents the ANOVA results indicating the statistical significance of the regression model. The F-statistic value of 478 shows that the independent variables collectively predict the dependent variable. The significance value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level, indicating that the regression model is statistically significant. This finding shows that the variation explained through the model is not due to chance. The model provides a statistically valid framework for analyzing consumer behavior and purchasing decisions in Gasabo District.

Table 6: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	.258	.110		2.345	.020		
1							
Complex Buying Behavior	.166	.028	.186	5.929	.000	.573	1.746
Habitual Buying Behavior	.538	.031	.538	17.355	.000	.581	1.721
Variety Seeking Behavior	.239	.027	.300	8.852	.000	.495	2.022

a. Dependent Variable: Purchasing Decision

Source: Field data, 2026

The multiple linear regression model used in the study is expressed as:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = Purchasing Decisions

X₁ = Complex Buying Behavior

X₂ = Habitual Buying Behavior

X₃ = Variety-Seeking Behavior

α = Constant (intercept)

β₁, β₂, β₃ = Coefficients indicating the strength of influence

ε = Error term

$$\text{Purchasing Decisions} = 0.258 + 0.166(\text{Complex Behavior}) + 0.538(\text{Habitual Behavior}) + 0.239(\text{Variety-Seeking}) + 0.16837$$

The unstandardized coefficient for complex buying behavior is 0.166, indicating that a one-unit increase in complex buying behavior results in a 0.166-unit increase in purchasing decisions (β = 0.166, t = 5.929, p = 0.000). This significant finding indicates that complex buying behavior positively affects purchasing decisions. The findings resonate with Majaliwa et al. (2024) who emphasized that consumers process promotional messages through extended reflection and attention to emotional content to guide deeper evaluation. Their study confirmed that complex buying processes align with advertisements that communicate unique features and meaningful value through structured explanation.

The unstandardized coefficient for habitual buying behavior is 0.538, indicating that a one-unit increase in habitual buying behavior results in a 0.538-unit increase in purchasing decisions (β = 0.538, t = 17.355, p = 0.000). This significant finding indicates that habitual buying behavior positively affects purchasing decisions. The findings are consistent with Sawaharani (2025) who emphasized that frequent use of specific tools created automation in decision pathways which strengthened repeated preference for digital choices. Their study showed that once routines formed, consumers displayed limited evaluation of alternatives, indicating that habitual behavior directed the decision flow toward platforms. This literature relates to the current study because the high coefficient value confirms that repetition and routine patterns are the strongest factors directing purchasing decisions through consumers in Gasabo District SMEs.

The unstandardized coefficient for variety-seeking buying behavior is 0.239, indicating that a one-unit increase in variety-seeking buying behavior results in a 0.239-unit increase in purchasing decisions (β = 0.239, t = 8.852, p = 0.000). This significant finding indicates that variety-seeking buying behavior positively affects purchasing decisions. The results are in line with Priscilla and Rufaidah (2023) who highlighted that novelty seeking led to significant increases in brand switching intention by directing attention towards alternative brands. They found that consumers with higher exploratory scores switched brands even if they were satisfied with the selected brands to experience stimulation. In terms of multicollinearity, all VIF values are below 10 and tolerance values are above 0.1, indicating no multicollinearity problem.

The general findings from the coefficient summary show that all three independent variables are significant predictors of purchasing decisions. Habitual buying behavior remains the dominant predictor, followed by variety-seeking buying behavior and complex buying behavior. This means that SMEs in Gasabo District can improve purchasing decisions by strengthening repeat purchase routines while also supporting information clarity and product variety.

Table 7: Decision on Null Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis	P-Value	Decision
H01: There is no statistically significant effect of complex buying behavior on purchasing decisions in SMEs in Gasabo District, Rwanda.	.000	Rejected
H02: There is no statistically significant effect of habitual buying behavior on purchasing decisions in SMEs in Gasabo District, Rwanda.	.000	Rejected
H03: There is no statistically significant effect of variety-seeking buying behavior on purchasing decisions in SMEs in Gasabo District, Rwanda.	.000	Rejected

Source: Field data, 2026

Table 7 presents the decision on the null hypotheses based on the regression results. Since the p-values for complex buying behavior, habitual buying behavior, and variety-seeking buying behavior are all 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 significance level, all null hypotheses are rejected. The evidence indicates that there is a statistically significant effect of each independent variable on purchasing decisions. This confirms that consumer behavior types are critical factors in determining the outcome of acquisition processes in SMEs in Gasabo District.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents the conclusion, recommendations, and suggestions for future researchers based on the study findings.

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that consumer behavior has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions in selected SMEs in Gasabo District. The findings addressed the problem by showing that weak purchasing decisions can be improved when SMEs understand how customers evaluate products, repeat familiar purchases, and seek new product experiences.

Complex buying behavior positively influences purchasing decisions because customers require clear information, quality assurance, and risk reduction before making choices. The study therefore concludes that SMEs which provide reliable product details and transparent communication are more likely to influence careful buyers.

Habitual buying behavior has the strongest influence on purchasing decisions because repeated positive experience creates customer familiarity, trust, and store loyalty. The new knowledge gained is that in Gasabo District, routine and familiarity are more powerful than simple product exposure in shaping customer purchasing decisions.

Variety-seeking buying behavior positively influences purchasing decisions because customers are attracted to novelty, product exploration, and brand switching opportunities. The study concludes that SMEs can influence exploratory customers by introducing new product options, improved packaging, and clear communication about new arrivals.

5.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations were drawn from the findings of the study.

SME managers should provide clear and complete product information to support customers who show complex buying behavior. Product details, prices, quality features, and return conditions should be communicated through both physical shops and digital platforms.

SME owners should strengthen quality assurance and customer service practices to reduce perceived risk. Customers should receive consistent product quality, accurate descriptions, and quick responses to their questions before purchase.

SMEs should establish loyalty practices such as customer records, repeat buyer rewards, after-sale communication, and consistent brand messages. These practices can strengthen habitual buying behavior and increase repeat purchases.

SMEs should introduce controlled product variety through new designs, new packages, new sizes, seasonal products, and promotional offers. This can attract variety-seeking customers without confusing habitual customers who prefer consistency.

5.3 Suggestion for Future Researchers

Future researchers are suggested to examine the effect of digital marketing on purchasing decisions in SMEs. Future studies may also investigate the influence of service quality, price transparency, brand image, and customer satisfaction on SME performance in other districts of Rwanda. Researchers may further compare consumer behavior across urban and rural SME markets to identify wider national patterns.

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