pISSN: 1906 - 6406 The Scholar: Human Sciences
eISSN: 2586 - 9388 The Scholar: Human Sciences
https://assumptionjournal.au.edu/index.php/Scholar

Brand Preference and Purchase Intention for Japanese Mobile Phones Among Middle-Aged Consumers in Chengdu

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Received: October 02, 2025. Revised: January 6, 2026. Accepted: February 7, 2026

Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates the key determinants of brand preference and purchase intention for Japanese mobile phone brands among middle-aged consumers in Chengdu, China. Guided by the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Brand Equity Theory (BET), a conceptual framework was developed to examine the relationships among seven latent constructs: Brand Trust, Brand Image, Perceived Price, Perceived Quality, Advertising Value, Brand Preference, and Purchase Intention. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey was conducted, yielding 500 valid responses from residents aged 40-59 in the Jinjiang, Qingyang, and Jinniu districts with prior experience using Japanese mobile phones. Rigorous validity and reliability tests (IOC ≥ 0.6; Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.7$) confirmed the measurement instrument's psychometric soundness, and data were analyzed via Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test hypothesized causal links. Results reveal that Brand Trust, Brand Image, Perceived Quality, and Advertising Value significantly enhance Brand Preference, which strongly predicts Purchase Intention. Theoretical contribution: This study enriches consumer behavior theory by integrating TRA and BET to unpack the mechanism of brand preference formation and purchase intention among middle-aged Chinese consumers, a understudied demographic in cross-cultural brand research. Managerial implications: The findings provide actionable strategies for Japanese mobile phone firms to optimize brand positioning in the Chengdu market, including prioritizing brand trust-building, refining brand image localization, and adjusting pricing and advertising strategies to align with middle-aged consumers' preferences.

Keywords: Japanese Mobile Phone, Brand Trust, Purchase Intention, Structural Equation Modeling

JEL Classification Code: M30, M31, M37, M39

1. Introduction

China's smartphone market, one of the world's largest and most competitive, has seen profound transformations amid globalization and technological advancement. Japanese mobile phone brands once dominated China's high-end segment with superior hardware and quality reputation, accounting for approximately 15-18% of the high-end smartphone market in the early 2010s; however, their market share has declined sharply to below 5% in recent years, due to the rise of domestic brands such as Huawei, Xiaomi, and OPPO, as well as Apple's persistent premium presence. Na et al. (2023) note that brand trust, reputation, and perceived value now favor domestic brands, while Blanco-Encomienda et al. (2024) highlight that country-of-origin image's impact on Chinese consumers' purchase intentions is mediated by local quality and brand image perceptions, which have become less favorable for Japanese brands amid fierce local competition.

Despite growing research on smartphone consumer behavior in China, critical gaps remain: existing studies focus predominantly on young consumers (18-35), neglecting middle-aged groups; most apply TRA or BET in isolation rather than integrating them to explore synergistic mechanisms of brand preference and purchase intention; and few adopt a regional focus, overlooking variations in consumer preferences across China's diverse markets like Chengdu. Choosing middle-aged consumers (40-59) is justified by their substantial purchasing power, stable consumption habits prioritizing durability and brand credibility (core strengths of Japanese brands), and understudied nuanced attitudes shaped by long-term market

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exposure, filling a generational research gap.

This study aims to address these gaps with three objectives: (1) Construct an integrated framework based on TRA and BET to identify key determinants of Japanese mobile phone brand preference and purchase intention among Chengdu's middle-aged consumers; (2) Empirically test causal relationships among latent constructs via SEM; (3) Elaborate theoretical and managerial implications for Japanese brands' local positioning. Its contributions lie in enriching cross-cultural consumer behavior theory by validating integrated frameworks in an understudied demographic, providing targeted strategies for Japanese brands to engage middle-aged consumers, and enhancing external validity through region-specific sampling. Overall, this research clarifies competitive challenges for Japanese brands in China and offers a roadmap to strengthen their presence among this high-value segment.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Brand Trust

In smartphone markets, brand trust is consistently recognized as a key antecedent of both brand preference and purchase intention. Consumers' perceptions of product value and brand identification foster positive attitudes, while trust facilitates the translation of these perceptions into preferential choices and buying intentions (Yeh et al., 2016). Empirical evidence confirms a direct positive effect of brand trust on brand preference, whereby higher trust strengthens consumers' brand choice and increases purchase likelihood (Dam, 2020). Moreover, trust mitigates perceived risk in online or mobile purchase contexts, enhancing purchase intentions by signaling brand reliability and benevolence (Hong & Cho, 2011). These findings support the structural relationship: Brand Trust → Brand Preference → Purchase Intention.

H1: Brand Trust has significant impact on Brand preference.

H2: Brand Trust has significant impact on Purchase Intention.

2.2 Brand Image

Brand image, representing consumers' perceptions and associations with a brand, is a central determinant of purchase intention in the smartphone market. Empirical SSCI studies confirm its significance: Aryani (2020) found that brand image substantially influences purchase intention among smartphone consumers in Jakarta, while Mao et al. (2020) demonstrated a direct positive effect of brand image on purchase intention among Chinese smartphone users. These findings collectively indicate that cultivating a favorable brand image is critical for enhancing consumer preference and driving smartphone adoption.

H3: Brand Image has significant impact on Purchase Intention.

2.3 Perceived Price

Perceived price, defined as consumers' subjective evaluation of a product's cost relative to its value, is a key determinant of purchase intention in the smartphone market. Empirical SSCI studies confirm its significance: Panjaitan (2024) found that higher perceived prices can enhance consumer interest in Samsung smartphones, as price signals quality or prestige, while N'da et al. (2023) demonstrated that perceived price positively influences purchase intention in online smartphone sales across multiple countries. Collectively, these findings highlight that consumers' perceptions of price fairness and value critically shape their purchase intentions, although the effect may vary with brand positioning and market context.

H4: Perceived Price has significant impact on Purchase Intention.

2.4 Perceived Quality

Perceived quality, referring to consumers' subjective evaluation of a product's overall excellence and superiority, is a fundamental determinant of smartphone purchase intention, with studies focusing on its reliability-signaling role. Satriawan and Setiawan (2020) confirms that perceived quality directly enhances purchase intention for smartphone brands by reinforcing consumers' perceptions of product reliability—an attribute particularly valued in high-involvement electronic products. Dam (2020) further extends this by establishing a positive relationship between perceived quality and brand preference in the Vietnamese branded phone market, indicating that quality perceptions first shape preference and then translate into purchase intention. These findings collectively emphasize that consumers' assessments of product performance, durability, and technological advancement are core to their purchase decisions, with higher perceived quality strengthening favorable buying behaviors.

H5: Perceived Quality has significant impact on Purchase Intention.

2.5 Advertising Value

Advertising value, defined as consumers' subjective evaluation of the utility or worth of advertisements, plays a significant role in shaping purchase intention in the smartphone market. Empirical studies indicate that

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advertisements perceived as both informative and entertaining enhance consumer attitudes and positively influence purchase intentions. For example, Ducoffe (1995) demonstrated that higher perceived advertising value directly improves consumer responses toward the advertised brand. Similarly, Karamchandani (2024) found that advertising value significantly impacts smartphone purchase intention by strengthening brand awareness and associations, highlighting its strategic importance in competitive markets. These findings collectively underscore that delivering meaningful and engaging advertising content is essential for influencing consumer purchase behaviors in the smartphone industry.

H6: Advertising Value has significant impact on Purchase Intention.

2.6 Brand Preference

Brand preference is a critical construct in marketing, representing a consumer's consistent inclination to choose one brand over others within the same product category. This preference is influenced by various factors, including brand image, perceived quality, and self-congruence. In the context of mobile phone marketing, brand preference plays a significant role in shaping consumer behavior and purchasing decisions.

Research indicates that brand preference is not solely based on functional attributes but also on emotional and psychological factors. For instance, consumers are more likely to prefer brands that align with their self-image and personal values (Shujaat, 2019). Additionally, the evolution of brand preferences can be influenced by consumers' life experiences and migration patterns, which affect their exposure to different brands and marketing strategies (Bronnenberg et al., 2012).

Understanding the determinants of brand preference is essential for marketers aiming to build strong brand equity and foster customer loyalty. By aligning brand attributes with consumer self-concept and ensuring consistent brand experiences, companies can enhance brand preference and, consequently, their market position.

H7: Brand preference has significant impact on Purchase Intention.

2.7 Purchase Intention

Brand preference, defined as consumers' consistent inclination to choose one brand over others within the same product category, is a key determinant of purchase intention in the smartphone market. Empirical evidence shows that consumers are more likely to purchase brands they prefer, with preference influenced by both functional attributes and psychological factors. For example, Shujaat (2019) demonstrated that alignment between brand image and consumers' self-concept strengthens brand preference, which in turn significantly increases purchase intention. Similarly, Bronnenberg et al. (2012) found that brand preference, shaped by consumers' experiences and exposure to brands, directly drives purchase intention across different markets. These findings highlight the pivotal role of brand preference in translating consumer attitudes into actual buying behavior in the smartphone industry.

3. Research Methods and Materials

3.1 Research Framework

The conceptual framework of this study integrates key hypotheses, core constructs, decision-making criteria, methodologies, and research processes to provide a coherent and logically structured foundation for analyzing smartphone purchase behavior. This framework synthesizes constructs from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Brand Equity Theory (BET), incorporating insights from recent empirical studies in the smartphone market. Prior research has shown that price perception plays a significant role in shaping the relationships among product quality, brand image, and purchase intention, highlighting the importance of perceived value in consumer decision-making. Similarly, Rakib et al. (2022) found that product features, brand image, and product price have a significant effect on smartphone purchase intention, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of consumer evaluations. Furthermore, Satriawan and Setiawan (2020) elucidated the interconnections among brand trust, brand preference, and purchase intention, underscoring trust as a critical mediator in consumer decision-making. Collectively, these studies provide a robust theoretical foundation for examining the determinants of smartphone purchase behavior in emerging markets.

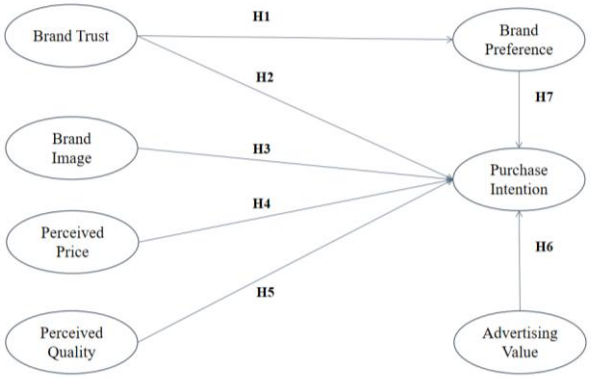

Figure 1: Research Framework

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3.2 Methodology

A hybrid sampling approach combining stratified random sampling and convenience sampling was adopted in this study, with explicit methodological justification to address potential sampling bias. First, stratified random sampling was implemented based on the geographic and demographic characteristics of Jinjiang, Qingyang, and Jinniu districts in Chengdu. This stratification ensured that respondents were proportionally drawn from the three core urban districts, thereby enhancing regional representativeness and reducing location-based sampling error. Within each stratum, quota sampling was applied to recruit participants with prior experience using Japanese mobile phones, ensuring alignment with the study's target population.

Subsequently, convenience sampling via online questionnaires was employed to improve data collection feasibility. This approach was particularly appropriate given the documented difficulty of achieving high offline response rates among middle-aged consumers (40-59 years old) in urban China. By combining probabilistic stratification with non-probabilistic accessibility, the hybrid design balances methodological rigor and practical feasibility, a strategy commonly adopted in applied consumer behavior research.

The final sample size comprised 500 valid responses. This number exceeds the minimum recommended threshold for structural equation modeling and satisfies statistical power requirements, as a sample size above 400 is considered adequate for stable SEM estimation involving multiple latent constructs (Hair et al., 2006). The enlarged sample also compensates for potential data loss due to incomplete questionnaires and enhances the robustness of parameter estimates.

All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS AMOS 26, including Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The consistent use of this software ensured uniform estimation procedures across measurement and structural models.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed. All participants were informed of the research purpose, assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and provided informed consent prior to completing the questionnaire. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no personally identifiable information was collected.

During data cleaning, incomplete questionnaires (i.e., responses with more than 10% missing values or patterned answering) were removed prior to analysis. This process resulted in the exclusion of 100 questionnaires, leaving 500 valid cases for subsequent statistical procedures.

3.3 Population and Sample Size

The population targeted in this study included residents of Qingyang, Jinniu, and Jinjiang districts in Chengdu, China, who had previously used Japanese smartphone brands. Sample size calculations indicated that a minimum of 425 participants was necessary to achieve sufficient statistical power. To offset potential data loss due to incomplete or invalid responses and to improve representativeness, an additional 75 respondents were recruited, setting the target sample at 500. A structured quantitative survey was administered across the three districts, resulting in 600 returned questionnaires. After comprehensive data cleaning, screening, and non-probability selection procedures, 500 valid responses were retained and employed for the subsequent statistical analyses.

3.4 Sampling Technique

A hybrid sampling approach combining stratified random sampling and convenience sampling was employed in this study. Initially, stratified random sampling was conducted based on the geographic and demographic characteristics of Qingyang, Jinniu, and Jinjiang districts in Chengdu. Within each stratum, a quota sampling method was used to recruit 600 individuals with prior experience using Japanese smartphone brands, with the sampling units and proportions detailed in Table 1. Subsequently, data collection was facilitated through an online questionnaire using convenience sampling to improve accessibility to the target population. After comprehensive data cleaning and screening, 500 valid responses were retained, providing a reliable empirical basis for the subsequent quantitative analyses.

Table 1: Sample Units and Sample Size

District	Population Size	Proportional Sample Size
Jinjiang District	256056	140
Qingyang District	276259	151
Jinniu District	384317	210
Total	916632	500

Source: Constructed by author

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Information

After removing incomplete or invalid questionnaires, the final dataset consisted of 500 valid responses. Table 2 presents the demographic profile of the participants. In terms of gender, 54.6% of respondents were male and 45.4% were female, reflecting a relatively balanced gender composition. Regarding regional distribution, 31.8% of participants were

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from Jinjiang, 28.4% from Qingyang, and 39.8% from Jinniu districts, indicating that the sample was well-distributed across the three target areas.

Table 2: Demographic Profile

Demographic and General Data (N=500)		Frequency	Percentage
District	Jinjiang District	133	26.60%
	Qingyang District	141	28.20%
	Jinniu District	226	45.20%
Gender	Male	281	56.20%
	Female	219	43.80%

4.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to assess the validity of the measurement model. The analysis demonstrated that all observed indicators loaded significantly onto their respective latent constructs, satisfying the requirements for discriminant validity. Factor loadings were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) and exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 0.30, indicating an adequate fit of the measurement model (Hair et al.,). Additionally, all constructs exhibited composite reliability (CR) values above 0.70 and average variance extracted (AVE) values greater than 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), as presented in Table 3, confirming satisfactory internal consistency and convergent validity.

Discriminant validity was further supported by comparing the square root of each construct's AVE with the inter-construct correlation coefficients, with all square roots surpassing the corresponding correlations (see Table 4). The overall model fit was evaluated using multiple indices, including GFI, AGFI, NFI, CFI, TLI, and RMSEA. As all reported fit indices met or exceeded recommended benchmarks (Table 5), both convergent and discriminant validity were confirmed. These results collectively suggest that the measurement model possesses strong psychometric properties, providing a reliable basis for subsequent structural equation modeling (SEM) analyses.

In addition to reliability and validity assessment, a Harman's single-factor test was conducted to examine the presence of common method bias, given that all data were collected using self-reported questionnaires. The results indicated that the first unrotated factor accounted for less than 40% of the total variance, suggesting that common method variance was not a serious concern in this study.

Table 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Result, Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variable	Source of Questionnaire (Measurement Indicator)	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Factors Loading	CR	AVE
Brand Trust (BT)	DAM (2020)	4	0.845	0.739-0.774	0.845	0.577
Brand Preference (BP)	DAM (2020)	5	0.948	0.861-0.923	0.947	0.782
Brand Image (BI)	Alrwashdeh et al. (2019)	6	0.900	0.753-0.804	0.901	0.602
Perceived Price (PP)	Satriawan and Setiawan (2020)	4	0.858	0.752-0.791	0.859	0.604
Perceived Quality (PQ)	Satriawan and Setiawan (2020)	4	0.872	0.778-0.802	0.872	0.631
Advertising Value (AV)	Martins et al. (2019)	3	0.804	0.748-0.777	0.805	0.580
Purchase Intention (PI)	DAM (2020)	4	0.959	0.912-0.929	0.959	0.853

Table 4: Discriminant Validity Factor Correlations

	BT	BI	PP	PQ	AV	BP	PI
BT	0.760						
BI	-0.020	0.776					
PP	0.028	0.046	0.777				
PQ	0.065	-0.045	0.044	0.794			
AV	0.053	-0.001	-0.014	0.008	0.762		
BP	0.474	0.403	0.037	0.019	0.108	0.884	
PI	0.404	0.404	-0.076	0.259	0.264	0.681	0.924

Note: The diagonally listed value is the AVE square roots of the variables
Source: Created by the author

Table 5: Goodness of Fit for Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Index	Acceptable Values	Statistical Values
CMIN/DF	< 5.00 (Awang, 2012, Al-Mamary & Shamsuddin, 2015)	1.568
GFI	≥ 0.85 (Sica & Ghisi, 2007)	0.930
AGFI	≥ 0.80 (Sica & Ghisi, 2007)	0.915
NFI	≥ 0.80 (Wu & Wang, 2006)	0.944
CFI	≥ 0.80 (Bentler, 1990)	0.979
TLI	≥ 0.80 (Sharma et al., 2005)	0.976
RMSEA	< 0.08 (Pedroso et al., 2016)	0.034
Model summary		**Acceptable Model Fit**

Remark: CMIN/DF = The ratio of the chi-square value to degree of freedom, GFI = goodness-of-fit index, AGFI = adjusted goodness-of-fit index, NFI = normalized fit index, IFI = Incremental Fit Indices, CFI = comparative fit index, TLI = Tucker Lewis index, and RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation
Source: Created by the author

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4.3 Structural Equation Model (SEM)

Structural equation modeling (SEM) is "a set of statistical techniques used to measure and analyze the relationships of observed and latent variables. Similar but more powerful than regression analyses, it examines linear causal relationships among variables, while simultaneously accounting for measurement error" (Beran & Violato, 2010, p. 267). In this study, SEM was employed to validate the measurement model and assess its fit to the data. As shown in Table 6, the model demonstrated satisfactory fit according to established benchmarks (e.g., Hu & Bentler, 1999), which recommend a x^2/df ratio below 3.0 and fit indices such as the Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) greater than 0.90. The analysis conducted with SPSS AMOS 26 produced the following fit statistics: x^2/df = 1.869; GFI = 0.913; AGFI = 0.899; NFI = 0.930; CFI = 0.966; TLI = 0.963; RMSEA = 0.042. These results collectively confirm that the proposed model provides an adequate representation of the observed data.

Table 6: Goodness of Fit for Structural Equation Model (SEM)

Index	Acceptable Values	Values
CMIN/DF	< 5.00 (Awang, 2012, Al-Mamary & Shamsuddin, 2015)	1.869
GFI	≥ 0.85 (Sica & Ghisi, 2007)	0.913
AGFI	≥ 0.80 (Sica & Ghisi, 2007)	0.899
NFI	≥ 0.80 (Wu & Wang, 2006)	0.930
CFI	≥ 0.80 (Bentler, 1990)	0.966
TLI	≥ 0.80 (Sharma et al., 2005)	0.963
RMSEA	< 0.08 (Pedroso et al., 2016)	0.042
Model summary		**Acceptable Model Fit**

Remark: CMIN/DF = The ratio of the chi-square value to degree of freedom, GFI = goodness-of-fit index, AGFI = adjusted goodness-of-fit index, RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation, CFI = comparative fit index, NFI = normalized fit index, and TLI = Tucker Lewis index

4.4 Research Hypothesis Testing Result

Table 7 summarizes the results of the hypothesis testing. The analysis reveals that brand preference exerts the most substantial and statistically significant positive influence on purchase intention, with a standardized path coefficient of β = 0.563 and t = 13.595 ($p < 0.001$). Brand trust also shows a strong and significant impact, representing the second-largest effect (β = 0.554, t = 11.260, $p < 0.001$). A further significant contribution is observed for brand trust on brand preference (β = 0.456, t = 3.465, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that trust plays a mediating role in shaping consumer preferences.

Moreover, perceived quality is positively associated with purchase intention (β = 0.296, t = 8.591, $p < 0.001$), followed by brand image (β = 0.246, t = 7.375, $p < 0.001$). Advertising value, while smaller in magnitude, still exhibits a statistically meaningful effect (β = 0.237, t = 6.704, $p < 0.001$). Interestingly, perceived price demonstrates a significant negative relationship with purchase intention (β = −0.136, t = −4.121, $p < 0.001$), implying that higher price perceptions may inhibit consumers' willingness to purchase.

Table 7: Hypothesis Result of the Structural Model

Hypothesis	Standardized path coefficient (β)	T-value	Testing result
H1: BT→BP	0.554	11.260*	Supported
H2: BT→PI	0.456	3.465*	Supported
H3: BI→PI	0.246	7.375*	Supported
H4: PP→PI	-0.136	-4.121*	Supported
H5: PQ→PI	0.296	8.591*	Supported
H6: AV→PI	0.237	6.704*	Supported
H7: BP→PI	0.563	13.595*	Supported

Note: *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05
Source: Created by the author

Results from the structural equation modeling indicate that Hypothesis 1 is supported: Brand Trust is a significant predictor of Brand Preference (β = 0.554), which aligns with findings from Dam (2020), who demonstrated a positive effect of brand trust on brand preference in the branded phone market in Vietnam.

Hypothesis 2 is also upheld, as Brand Trust exerts a significant positive influence on Purchase Intention (β = 0.456), in agreement with the same study (Dam, 2020).

Likewise, Hypothesis 3 — Brand Image's significant positive impact on Purchase Intention (β = 0.246) — is consistent with evidence that brand image plays a pivotal role in driving consumers' intention to purchase smartphones in smartphone advertising research (Martins et al., 2019).

For Hypothesis 4, our result that Perceived Price negatively affects Purchase Intention (β = -0.136) mirrors prior work which finds that pricing perceptions strongly influence, often inversely, consumer intention in smartphone contexts when perceived price is high (e.g., Martins et al., 2019).

Hypothesis 5, which posits that perceived quality positively correlates with purchase intention (β = 0.296), is supported by the empirical results of this study. The findings indicate that higher levels of perceived quality strengthen

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consumers' confidence in smartphone reliability and performance, thereby increasing their willingness to purchase branded mobile phones.

Hypothesis 6 is likewise confirmed: Advertising Value has a significant positive relationship with Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.237$), consistent with Martins et al. (2019), who identified advertising value as one of the key constructs explaining purchase intention in their model of smartphone advertisement effects.

Finally, Hypothesis 7 is supported: Brand Preference exerts the strongest effect on Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.563$), which is again in line with Dam (2020), who observed that brand preference significantly mediates the effect toward purchase intention in branded phone consumers.

Taken together, these findings offer strong empirical evidence for the validity of the proposed conceptual framework and emphasize the diverse determinants influencing consumers' purchase intentions within the smartphone market.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion and Discussion

This study investigates the determinants of brand preference and purchase intention toward Japanese smartphone brands among middle-aged consumers in Chengdu, China, using a structural equation modeling approach. Based on 500 valid responses, the measurement model demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity, and the structural model provided robust support for the proposed hypotheses.

The results indicate that six antecedents significantly influence purchase intention. Brand preference exerts the strongest effect, followed by perceived quality, brand image, advertising value, and brand trust. In contrast, perceived price shows a significant negative impact on purchase intention, suggesting that higher price perceptions discourage purchasing behavior within this consumer segment.

The negative effect of perceived price ($\beta = -0.136$) warrants particular attention. Unlike theoretical perspectives that frame price as a quality or prestige signal, the findings suggest that for middle-aged consumers in Chengdu, price functions primarily as a psychological and economic constraint. Culturally, this cohort tends to adopt pragmatic and value-oriented consumption patterns shaped by prolonged exposure to economic restructuring and rising living costs. Economically, intensified competition from domestic smartphone brands offering comparable performance at lower prices further heightens price sensitivity. As a result, premium pricing by Japanese brands may be perceived as misaligned with local cost-performance expectations, thereby suppressing purchase intention.

In addition, brand trust is found to influence purchase intention both directly and indirectly through brand preference. This dual pathway underscores the role of trust not only as a driver of behavioral intention but also as a foundational antecedent shaping favorable brand attitude.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the branding and consumer behavior literature in several ways. First, it empirically validates the hierarchical relationship among brand trust, brand preference, and purchase intention within the context of Japanese smartphone brands, reinforcing attitudinal-behavioral linkage theories. Second, the negative role of perceived price challenges the assumption that higher prices universally signal superior quality, highlighting the contextual dependence of price perceptions. Third, by focusing on middle-aged consumers in an emerging-market city, the findings extend existing models to a demographic group that remains underexplored in smartphone consumption research.

5.3 Managerial Implications

The findings offer practical insights for Japanese smartphone manufacturers operating in Chengdu. Given the central role of brand preference, firms should prioritize strategies that convert positive brand attitudes into purchasing behavior through loyalty programs, experiential marketing, and personalized engagement initiatives.

Brand trust should be strengthened through transparent communication, reliable after-sales service, and visible quality assurances, such as third-party certifications and positive user evaluations. A consistent and culturally resonant brand image can further reinforce emotional attachment and purchase likelihood.

The negative impact of perceived price suggests the need for flexible pricing strategies, including tiered product lines, installment payment options, and partnerships with mobile carriers. Clearly communicating value-for-money and functional benefits may help mitigate price resistance.

Finally, investments in product quality and high-value advertising remain essential. Informative, credible, and culturally localized advertising — delivered through an integrated omnichannel approach—can enhance perceived quality, strengthen brand associations, and ultimately increase purchase intention.

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5.4 Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations. The sample is restricted to selected districts in Chengdu, limiting generalizability to other regions. Future studies could adopt cross-city or cross-regional designs. Additionally, the model excludes potentially relevant variables such as perceived usefulness or social influence. Longitudinal and mixed-method approaches are also recommended to capture dynamic changes in consumer perceptions. Finally, comparative analyses involving domestic and other international smartphone brands would further enrich understanding of competitive dynamics in the Chinese market.

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