

# Study on the Mechanism of Mobile Phone Brand Preference Switching based on the Push-Pull-Mooring Framework

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## Abstract

Against the background that the smartphone market is shifting from incremental expansion to stock based competition, consumers' brand preference switching has become an important issue affecting user retention, market share, and brand competitiveness of mobile phone enterprises. Drawing on the Push Pull Mooring framework, this paper analyzes the influencing factors and mechanism of mobile phone brand preference switching in the context of digital and intelligent consumption. The study argues that brand satisfaction and brand quality constitute the push factors that drive consumers away from their original brands; brand promotion, brand competitiveness, country of origin, price performance ratio, and brand awareness constitute the pull factors that attract consumers to alternative brands; and brand uniqueness constitutes an important mooring factor affecting whether consumers actually switch brands. The findings provide references for mobile phone enterprises to optimize brand positioning, enhance user loyalty, and carry out refined user operations.

## Keywords

**Brand Preference Switching; Push Pull Mooring Framework; Consumer Behavior; Mobile Phone Brand.**

## 1. Introduction

The smartphone industry is shifting from competition based on functional popularization to competition for existing users. According to statistics released by the International Data Corporation, global smartphone shipments reached 1.2388 billion units in 2024, representing a year on year increase of 6.4%, which indicates that the global smartphone market recovered after two consecutive years of decline. In addition, in the fourth quarter of 2024, the combined shipments of major Chinese smartphone manufacturers accounted for 56% of global smartphone shipments, suggesting that the competitiveness and influence of Chinese smartphone manufacturers in the global market continued to increase [1]. Against the background of the high penetration of 5G smartphones and the increasing homogenization of intelligent terminals, consumers' replacement decisions are no longer confined to comparisons of basic hardware parameters. Instead, they pay greater attention to system fluency, imaging capability, AI experience, after sales service, brand image, and ecosystem synergy.

Data from the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology show that domestic mobile phone shipments reached 60.805 million units in the first quarter of 2026, down 12.7% year on year. Among them, 5G mobile phone shipments reached 55.468 million units, accounting for 91.2% of total shipments in the same period; shipments of domestic brand mobile phones reached 52.216 million units, accounting for 85.9% of total shipments [2]. These figures indicate that China's mobile phone market has entered a new stage characterized by the comprehensive popularization of 5G, the dominant position of domestic brands, and increasingly prominent stock based competition. Accordingly, the competitive focus of

enterprises has shifted from acquiring new users to competing for replacement users and maintaining existing users.

Mobile phone brand preference switching is a consumer behavior that deserves close attention in the stage of stock based competition. Mobile phone brand preference switching refers to the process in which consumers transfer their original preference for one mobile phone brand to another competing brand under the joint influence of prior brand use experience, external brand stimuli, and changes in personal needs. For the original brand, consumer preference switching means weakened user loyalty and loss of market share. For the alternative brand, it means potential user inflow and market growth opportunities. Therefore, identifying why consumers leave the original brand, why they choose an alternative brand, and which factors strengthen or inhibit such switching behavior is an important foundation for mobile phone enterprises to conduct brand management and user operations.

## **2. Influencing Factors and Mechanisms of Mobile Phone Brand Preference Switching under the Push Pull Mooring Framework**

The Push Pull Mooring framework provides a relatively clear theoretical basis for explaining consumers' brand preference switching. The framework was initially used to explain individual migration behavior and was later introduced into consumer switching behavior research to explain the internal mechanism through which consumers move from an existing service or product provider to an alternative object. Its core argument is that consumer switching behavior is not determined by a single factor but is jointly shaped by push factors, pull factors, and mooring factors. Specifically, push factors explain why consumers leave the original object, pull factors explain why consumers turn to an alternative object, and mooring factors explain the inertia, costs, habits, and contextual constraints that consumers encounter during the switching process [3]. In recent years, relevant studies have applied this framework to the context of smartphone brand switching and confirmed that it can effectively explain consumers' smartphone brand switching intentions and behaviors [4-6].

Push factors mainly refer to consumers' negative experiences with and dissatisfaction toward the original brand. Consumers' evaluations of mobile phone brands are usually formed during long term use. If the original brand fails to continuously satisfy consumers' needs in terms of system fluency, battery life, hardware stability, after sales response, software updates, and privacy security, consumers are likely to develop negative perceptions of the original brand, thereby weakening their willingness to continue using it. More specifically, brand satisfaction and brand quality constitute the core push factors in mobile phone brand preference switching. Brand satisfaction reflects consumers' overall evaluation of their experience with the original brand, while brand quality covers hardware performance, system stability, software ecosystem, after sales support, and long term maintenance capability. As mobile phones are high frequency use products, their user experience has a cumulative nature. Problems such as system lag, battery degradation, obvious overheating, screen malfunction, and inadequate after sales service may appear to be partial defects, yet they can be continuously amplified in high frequency usage scenarios and ultimately affect consumers' overall judgment of the brand. Existing studies show that dissatisfaction, functional defects, insufficient service perception, product durability, and user experience all promote smartphone users' intentions to switch brands.

Pull factors mainly refer to the external attractiveness generated by alternative brands. Unlike push factors, which emphasize why consumers leave the original brand, pull factors focus on why consumers choose a new brand. In the smartphone market, alternative brands often attract consumers through price discounts, technological innovation, brand image, product performance, system ecosystems, and differentiated functions. Therefore, mobile phone brand

preference switching is not merely the result of dissatisfaction with the original brand. It may also stem from the more attractive choices provided by alternative brands in terms of performance, price, service, or image. Specifically, brand promotion, brand competitiveness, country of origin, price performance ratio, and brand awareness jointly constitute the main pull factors that attract consumers to alternative brands. Among them, brand promotion reduces consumers' perceived costs through coupons, interest free installment payments, trade in programs, and platform subsidies, thereby increasing the possibility that consumers will try new brands. Domestic research on e-commerce promotional activities shows that promotional activities not only influence consumers' current purchase decisions but also have a sustained effect on their subsequent purchase behavior [7].

Brand competitiveness is mainly reflected in comprehensive advantages such as processor performance, imaging capability, screen display, battery life and fast charging, system fluency, AI functions, and ecosystem interconnection. As the smartphone industry enters a mature stage, inter-firm competition has shifted from single hardware competition to competition in system experience, intelligent ecosystems, and service capabilities. Price performance ratio affects consumers' judgment of the match between price and functionality. This is especially true in the mid-range and mass markets, where consumers usually compare price, configuration, durability, system experience, and after-sales support comprehensively. Brand awareness enhances consumers' attention to alternative brands through advertising communication, new product launches, social media visibility, user word of mouth, and brand reputation.

Country of origin is also an important pull factor with emotional and identity-related attributes. Against the background of the continuous improvement of domestic mobile phone brands in technological capability, product quality, and market visibility, country of origin is no longer merely information about product source. It has gradually become an important basis for consumers' brand judgment and value identification. When choosing mobile phone brands, some consumers not only consider product performance, price level, and user experience, but also incorporate domestic brand identification, technological autonomy, national image, and national brand sentiment into the decision-making process. Relevant research shows that patriotic brand image can enhance consumers' purchase intentions toward local brand products. This indicates that country of origin and local brand identification can, to a certain extent, strengthen consumers' preference for domestic mobile phone brands [8].

Mooring factors are key variables that determine whether consumers actually switch brand preferences. Unlike push and pull factors, mooring factors do not directly appear as leaving or attracting forces. Rather, they influence consumers' hesitation, inertia, and constraints during the switching process. Even if consumers are dissatisfied with the original brand, they may delay switching because of system habits, account systems, data migration, application ecosystems, cloud services, smart home connections, and cross-device collaboration. Conversely, when an alternative brand demonstrates stronger uniqueness and novelty, it may encourage consumers to break away from their existing usage path and generate willingness to try a new brand. Therefore, brand uniqueness is the most representative mooring factor in mobile phone brand preference switching. When uniqueness comes from the original brand, it may enhance user stickiness. When uniqueness comes from the alternative brand, it may stimulate consumers' novelty-seeking psychology and encourage them to try a new brand choice.

Overall, mobile phone brand preference switching is the result of the joint action of push, pull, and mooring factors. Push factors weaken consumers' satisfaction with and loyalty to the original brand, pull factors enhance consumers' attention to and willingness to try alternative brands, and mooring factors affect consumers' final trade-off between maintaining the original brand and switching to a new one. When consumers' dissatisfaction with the original brand is relatively high and the alternative brand has obvious advantages in technology, price, brand

image, and unique experience, brand preference switching is more likely to occur. Conversely, if consumers have developed strong system dependence, usage inertia, and ecosystem stickiness toward the original brand, switching behavior may be delayed or inhibited even when the alternative brand is somewhat attractive.

### 3. Research Conclusion

Based on the Push Pull Mooring framework, this paper analyzes the influencing factors of mobile phone brand preference switching. The study finds that consumers' mobile phone brand preference switching is not determined by a single factor but results from the joint action of push, pull, and mooring factors. Brand satisfaction and brand quality constitute the push factors that drive consumers away from the original brand; brand promotion, brand competitiveness, country of origin, price performance ratio, and brand awareness constitute the pull factors that attract consumers to alternative brands; and brand uniqueness affects consumers' final decisions through usage inertia and novelty seeking psychology.

Against the background of pressure on total market volume, the dominant position of domestic brands, the high penetration of 5G, and the continuous upgrading of intelligent functions, mobile phone enterprises should shift from selling products to managing user relationships and from short term promotion to long term value creation. On the one hand, enterprises should continuously improve product quality, system stability, after sales service, and long term maintenance capability so as to reduce the possibility that consumers will leave the original brand due to dissatisfactory experiences. On the other hand, enterprises should strengthen brand differentiation advantages and enhance the attractiveness of alternative brands around AI experience, imaging capability, ecosystem interconnection, country of origin identification, and price performance advantages. At the same time, enterprises should also pay attention to user migration costs, system habits, and ecosystem stickiness, and strengthen user relationship stickiness through account services, data migration, cross device collaboration, and membership benefits. Only by accurately identifying changes in consumers' brand preferences and continuously improving product experience and brand uniqueness can enterprises maintain stable user stickiness and market competitiveness in stock based competition.

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