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The Impact of Macro-control of State Subsidies on Consumer Preferences in China's Mobile Phone Market

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Abstract: As the economy develops, the sales volume of the market will inevitably change with the changes in the economic cycle. The government hopes to use macroeconomic regulations to alleviate the negative impact of economic downturn on sales volume. Through literature research, data collection, and questionnaire surveys, this study examines the impact of national subsidy policies on the marketing strategies and consumer behavior of mobile phone industry companies. The results show that subsidies significantly affect market dynamics by stimulating short-term demand and reshaping the competitive advantages between brands. Mid-range and low-end smartphone brands such as Xiaomi, OPPO, vivo, and Honor benefited the most because most of their products were within the subsidized price range, which increased consumer enthusiasm and higher sales growth. Therefore, companies adjusted their marketing strategies to emphasize cost-effectiveness, promote eligible models, and use discounts to attract price-sensitive consumers. On the consumer side, subsidies clearly affected purchase decisions, increasing demand for subsidized models, while reducing interest in high-end devices that were not within the subsidy range, as well as products with a certain brand premium. The policy encouraged many consumers to speed up their purchase time and boosted overall market activity, but did not produce long-term sustained growth. This highlights the temporary nature of the subsidy-driven demand surge.

Keywords: customer behavior, subsidy policy, marketing strategies.

1. Introduction

In China, the government regulates the market through various economic policies and subsidy measures to enhance the competitiveness of domestic brands and encourage consumer preference for domestic products. Apple, as a globally recognized high-end smartphone brand has long held a significant position in the Chinese market. However, with increasing government support for domestic smartphone brands and growing consumer focus on cost-effectiveness, Apple's competitiveness in China is facing huge challenges.

According to the Kitchin cycle theory, combined with the existing data on GDP, interest rates, unemployment rate, commodity inventory, etc., we can analyze that China's current economy is experiencing a recession, characterized by a slowdown in economic growth, weak market activity, and sluggish consumer spending. Money is idling in the financial system, and a small amount enters

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the real economy, which reflects the decline in market sales. At the same time, with the weakening of the overall economy, it will also affect the consumption psychology of the masses. Negative consumption performance further weakens economic recovery. To reduce or reverse this phenomenon, the Chinese government introduced the "Implementation Plan for Subsidies for New Purchases of Mobile Phones, Tablets, and Smart Watches (Bracelets)" on January 20, 2025. Under this policy, consumers purchasing products priced at no more than 6,000 yuan can receive a 15% subsidy, with a maximum subsidy of 500 yuan per product type per person. The Chinese government hopes to strengthen and stimulate the electronic consumer market and activate consumer motivation through this move.

This article seeks to analyze how China's macroeconomic regulation policies impact consumer preferences in the Apple smartphone market. By examining changes in market sales data, consumer responses, and platform dynamics, it aims to quantify the effectiveness of the subsidy policy and its influence on purchasing decisions. Furthermore, this study will better explore whether such policies shift consumer preferences toward domestic brands snf providing valuable insights for businesses and platforms in formulating marketing and pricing strategies under future macroeconomic policies.

2. Literature review

2.1. The influence of macroeconomic regulation policies on consumer behavior

Government subsidies significantly incentives consumer demanding by decreasing product price and increasing disposable income. For example, the government will pay a part of the money for people when they purchase new energy vehicles or applications [1]. maintain that Subsidy policies directly affect consumers' purchase intentions through the "price effect". For instance, China's new energy vehicle subsidy policies significantly increase consumers' preference for domestic brands. What's more, government subsidies also collaborate with creative technology to promote the influence of new function products such as 5G telecommunication. However, this study is predominantly focused on home appliances and automobiles and lacks study on national subsidy policies for the mobile phone market.

2.2. Characteristics of consumer preference in mobile phone market

Brand, Brand, price, function and after-sales service are all essential factors for consumer purchase preference. By using conjoint analysis [2], analyze some consumer behavior and find that brand utility occupies 42.3% of the consumer preference, which far exceeds price [4] and function [5]. Furthermore, demographic segmentation also has a huge impact. For example, young consumers may pay more attention to creative functions, while the elderly focus more on practicality and durability [3]. also provide plausible instances for market stratification and brand effect. The growing preference of mainland Chinese consumers for local brands such as Huawei and Xiaomi is partly due to government policy support. Likewise, Apple and Samsung dominate the high end of the market, but Chinese brands grab the middle and low end with cost-effective and localized features such as cameras optimized for dark skin tones. Nevertheless. There is little discussion in the paper about how policies indirectly affect purchasing preferences through psychological mechanisms, and we will present it in further detail below.

2.3. The specific impact of state subsidy policy on the mobile phone market

The government subsidies lower purchase cost in order to enhance the willingness for low-income groups to consume high-end products [1]. In addition [3], provides an example that Huawei has risen rapidly with policy support and improved its market competitiveness through technological

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breakthroughs. These factors make it still keep its competitiveness after sanctions. On the contrary, over relying on government subsidies may cause the inefficiency of a company's creativity. Samsung needs to balance a price war with research and development as it faces competition from Chinese brands [1].

2.4. Data collection and analysis

We use data collection and literature research methods to analyze corporate sales data. By consulting databases such as Counterpoint and Statista, we can obtain the overall sales data of the Chinese mobile phone market. By looking at the financial report data of specific companies [6], sales volume, market share and other indicators before and after the implementation of subsidies, we can make the following comparative analysis.

2.4.1. Different affect brands (high-end vs. low-end)

By comparing the differences in sales growth rates of different brands during the subsidy policy period, we can study the effects of subsidy policies on different brands and thus study the impact of subsidy policies on corporate competitiveness and provide reference for the marketing direction of future companies, so that they can become beneficiaries of the policy [7].

2.4.2. Changes in overall sales growth in the market

By studying market changes before and after subsidies, we can quantify the impact of subsidies on the market and provide reference for the government to optimize subsidy plans. At the same time, it is also possible to study the duration of the impact of subsidy policies on the market and verify whether there is a long-term growth effect or only a short-term effect.

2.5. Conjoint analysis

This paper analyzes the current domestic mobile phone market sales data and related scales and develops a relevant questionnaire in combination with the purpose of this article. By analyzing the questionnaire, we can understand the impact of the current subsidy policy on consumer behavior preferences.

According to the existing research theories and the purpose of this study, this paper designed a questionnaire "Survey on the Impact of Subsidy Policy on Consumer Behavior Preferences". The questionnaire is divided into three parts. The first part is a basic situation survey, including basic information such as gender, grade, and average income. The second part is a joint analysis, which conducts variable analysis on the latest mobile phones launched by Apple, Huawei, and Xiaomi, and conducts different pricing combinations for different mobile phone memories. Through consumers' purchase choices, the impact of subsidies on consumer decisions, such as the impact on price sensitivity and brand preference, is analyzed. The third part is a supplementary question, which studies consumers' decision-making and purchasing factors in the absence of subsidy policies and conducts comparative analysis.

Table 1: Attributes of phone in China

Attributes	levels
Price	Range [2999, 8999]
Brands	Foreign high-end brands; Domestic high-end brands; Domestic low-end brands
Memory	128GB; 256GB; 512GB; 1TB

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The first attribute, price, refers to the cost of the product, which plays an important role in the purchase decision. Since subsidies directly affect prices, they will lead to a decrease in purchase prices, which means that there is a strong correlation between the two. In order to avoid the problem of multicollinearity in multiple regression analysis, this paper decided to use the price factor to represent the impact of the subsidy factor. [8] Price is an essential factor for consumers because it affects their perception of value and affordability. In order to fit the price positioning in reality, the price range is chosen to be used in this study, that is, the price is set between 2999 yuan and 8999 yuan, and the price increase is 100 yuan each time.

Second, brands affect consumer preferences and decisions based on consumers' familiarity with the brand and perceived quality. In this study, three levels of brands are considered: foreign high-end brands; domestic high-end brands; domestic low-end brands. Foreign brands usually have greater international appeal, high-end brands are usually considered to provide quality and exclusive products, while low-end brands are usually considered to provide suitable prices and high-cost performance.

Third, mobile memory refers to the storage capacity of mobile devices, which is an important feature for many consumers when choosing mobile phones. Mobile memory affects the user experience, especially for those who use their phones to install applications, play games, or perform large storage tasks [9]. For mobile memory, we considered four levels: 128GB, 256GB, 512GB, 1TB. These levels reflect common storage options in smartphones and allow consumers to make choices based on their storage needs and budget.

3. Results

This analysis employs a regression model to evaluate the relationship between market share averages and the proportion of high-end products for major smartphone brands. The data set encompasses market share values before and after the introduction of national subsidies, allowing for a comparative analysis of trends over time.

3.1. Data collection result

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of China smartphone market share

Main Mobile Vendor Market Share in China, Feb.2024-Feb.2025	Apple	Huawei	Xiaomi	Vivo	Oppo
24-Feb	24.48	20.88	12.07	5.72	4.62
24-Mar	24.39	19.99	12.09	5.68	4.42
24-Apr	22.4	20.59	13.02	6.37	5.78
24-May	22.17	21.01	13.8	6.56	6.24
24-Jun	22.66	20.34	14.57	6.49	6.28
24-Jul	23.21	20.19	13.54	6.2	5.9
24-Aug	24.4	19.85	14.05	7.64	6.17
24-Sep	21.92	19.05	14.38	11.81	7.67
24-Oct	24.19	17.98	13.63	10.78	6.99
24-Nov	23.02	18.13	13.89	10.45	6.81
24-Dec	22.36	18.58	13.37	10.4	6.81
25-Jan	23.71	18.27	13.75	9.81	6.66
25-Feb	21.02	16.19	11.96	8.69	6.06
Average Market Share Before Subsidy	23.2	19.69	13.49	8.01	6.14
Average Markt Share After Subsidy	22.365	17.23	12.855	9.25	6.36
Market Share Growth Rate	-3.60%	-12.49%	-4.72%	15.49%	3.66%
Average Market Share Growth Rate by Brand country of Origin	-3.60%	0.48%	0.48%	0.48%	0.48%

3.1.1. Data structuring

Population: Five dominant vendors (Apple, Huawei, Xiaomi, Vivo, Oppo)

Observation Window: 13-month panel data (February 2024-February 2025)

Period Segmentation:

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Baseline: Pre-intervention period (February 2024-December 2024)
Evaluation: Post-interve7ntion period (January 2025-February 2025)

3.1.2. Operational metrics

Average Market Share (MS)
Growth Rate (GR) by Vendor Origin
Results:

Market share analysis reveals significant performance divergence among smartphone vendors in China's competitive landscape. Domestic manufacturers collectively exhibited growth trajectories, with an aggregate average market expansion rate of 0.48% across local competitors. Notably, Vivo demonstrated an exceptional performance with a 15.49% growth rate in market penetration. Conversely, international vendors displayed inverse dynamics, particularly evidenced by Apple's 3.6% market share contraction. This decline persists despite the company's sustained brand leadership and established consumer base developed through prolonged market engagement.

From a market segmentation perspective, premium-tier device manufacturers experienced widespread share reduction, while mid-to-low-tier segment vendors showed consistent growth. This divergence may stem from differential subsidy impacts across market segments, wherein premium models generally operate outside subsidy frameworks, whereas budget-oriented devices benefit substantially from subsidy-driven demand stimulation.

3.2. Changes in smartphones market in China

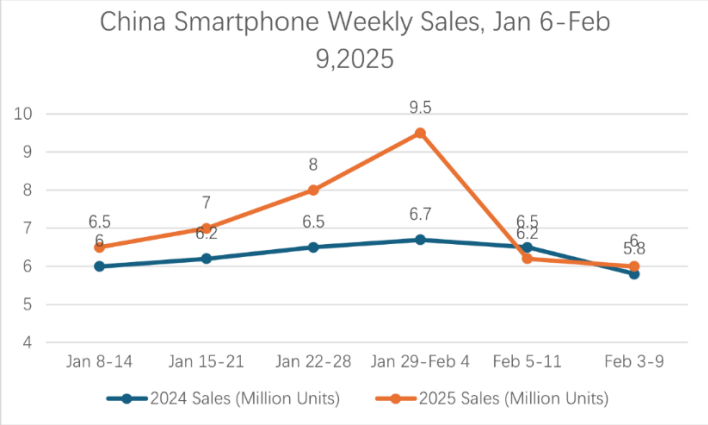

Figure 1: Changes in smartphone sales in China in 2024 and 2025
Source: Counterpoint China Weekly Tracker

After the implementation of the national subsidy policy in the Chinese mobile phone market in 2025, sales showed a clear growth trend compared with the same period in 2024. The specific changes are as follows: Slow growth in the early stage: January 6-12 (2025) compared with January 8-14 (2024), the sales volume was similar, and the growth rate was not large. It may be because the policy has not yet been implemented, and the marketing efforts of merchants and online platforms have not increased. Formal implementation, sales surge: During January 13-19 (2025), sales began to be significantly higher than the same period in 2024 (January 15-21). This period is the first week of the national subsidy policy, and it is also the peak of purchases before the Spring Festival. Enterprises and online platforms start marketing plans in combination with the sales cycle, and promotions stimulate market demand. The second week of policy implementation reached its peak: From January 20 to 26 (2025), sales increased significantly, far exceeding the same period in 2024 (January 22 to

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28). This is due to the strong demand for consumers to replace their phones before the Spring Festival, and the strong promotion of subsidy policies. Decline before the festival: From January 27 to February 2 (2025), sales began to decline but were still slightly higher than the same period in 2024 (January 29 to February 4). This shows that the market demand slowed down in the last week before the Spring Festival. Stabilization after the festival: Starting from February 3 to 9 (2025), sales were basically the same as the same period in 2024 (February 5 to 11), showing that the demand for replacement phones after the Spring Festival gradually decreased [10].

Overall, mobile phone sales in 2025 were significantly higher than the same period in 2024 driven by subsidy policies, especially from the first week of subsidy effectiveness to the week before the Spring Festival, when sales showed a significant increase.

3.3. Conjoint analysis result

The survey data of this study shows that government subsidies significantly affect consumers' purchasing decisions, especially in terms of brand selection and price sensitivity. Specifically, the subsidy policy makes consumers more inclined to buy products with higher cost performance, rather than relying solely on brand loyalty to make choices.

Table 3: Correlation

	Coefficients	Error	t Stat	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	Lower 95.0%	Upper 95.0%
Intercept	1.527806	0.11	13.77	0.00	1.31	1.75	1.31	1.75
price	-0.0002	0.00	-10.54	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Brands	-0.10686	0.03	-4.02	0.00	-0.16	-0.05	-0.16	-0.05
mobile memory	0.147201	0.02	7.51	0.00	0.11	0.19	0.11	0.19

$$PURCHASE = 1.527806 - 0.0002 \cdot Price - 0.1068 \cdot Brand + 0.147201 \cdot Memory$$

Adjust (Price in thousands):

$$PURCHASE = 1.527806 - 0.2 \cdot Price - 0.1068 \cdot Brand + 0.147201 \cdot Memory$$

According to the results of regression analysis, the coefficient of price is -0.0002, which means that as the price increases, consumers' purchasing tendency will show a downward trend. Specifically, for every 1 yuan increase in price, the probability of consumers choosing the product will decrease by 0.0002. Although the coefficient of price is relatively small, since the change in price is usually not a single-digit change, the impact of price changes will be greater than the coefficient. At the same time, the negative coefficient indicates that price has an inverse effect on consumer behavior. The higher the price, the less likely consumers are to choose the product. This result is also in line with consumer behavior theory. Usually, when consumers choose products, price is an important consideration. Higher prices may make consumers feel that the product is not cost-effective, thus affecting their purchasing decisions.

Through regression analysis, it can also be concluded that the coefficient of brand is -0.1068, indicating that brand factors have a certain negative impact on consumer preferences. This means that brand factors play a strong role in consumer decision-making. Although its coefficient is negative, consumers may not always prefer certain brands. The impact of brand loyalty may be interfered by other factors such as price and memory. Especially under the influence of national subsidy policies, consumers may pay more attention to the price and function of products rather than the brand itself.

Although brand loyalty has a certain impact on consumer choices, the impact of this factor may be relatively weakened in the context of subsidy policies. When enjoying subsidies, consumers may pay more attention to the actual functions of the product, such as whether the price is reasonable and whether the performance meets the needs and may not necessarily have a strong preference for the brand. Therefore, the influence of the brand may be weakened by factors such as price and memory, which is also an important conclusion we can draw from the regression analysis.

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At the same time, the coefficient of mobile phone memory is 0.147201, indicating that mobile phone memory has a significant positive impact on consumers' purchasing tendency. In the use of modern smartphones, memory is one of the important factors that affect consumers when buying mobile phones. Larger memory can improve the performance and user experience of mobile phones, especially for those consumers who need more storage space. The increase in memory is very attractive. Therefore, consumers tend to choose mobile phones with larger memory, especially when the budget allows.

4. Conclusion and discussion

Through our analysis of the research results, we have identified two major conclusions regarding the impact of the subsidy policy on smartphone sales.

First, it finds that there are obvious differences in the impact of the subsidy policy on different smartphone brands:

4.1. The subsidy policy effect on brands

This article's findings show a clear difference in how the subsidy policy affects different smartphone brands. For high-end brands like Apple, Samsung, and Huawei, the policy only led to a slight increase in sales for some lower-priced models. However, overall sales growth remained minimal or even declined during the subsidy period. In contrast, mid- and low-end brands such as Xiaomi, OPPO, vivo, and Honor have significant sales increase. These brands benefited the most from the policy, as consumer enthusiasm for their products surged because of the benefits they come with. This advantage of applying subsidy policy to mid- and low-end brands can be attributed to these three following key factors:

A. Strengthening price competitiveness

These brands are already known for their affordability and high value for their products. The subsidy policy further reduced purchase costs, which is making their products even more attractive compared to higher-end competitors. For example, as a phone that originally cost between 3,000-5,000 Yuan has a 500-Yuan price drop, consumers are more willing to buy a better-configured device within their budget.

B. Expanding brand reach and attracting new customers

The price reductions not only boost sales for the company but also introduced many first-time buyers to this tier of brands. Some consumers who had never considered Xiaomi, OPPO, or vivo before were drawn in by the discounts benefits and ended up making a purchase. In some cases, users who previously favored high-end brands switched to mid-range models due to the appealing price-performance ratio.

C. Increasing market share and competing more effectively

The implementation of the subsidy policy has greatly increased the sales of mid- and low-end brands in a short period of time. Since the subsidy applied only to models priced below 6,000-yuan, high-end flagship models—such as the iPhone 15 Pro and Samsung Galaxy S24 Ultra—were excluded, resulting them less competitive on price. This allowed mid-tier brands to capture a larger share of customers and strengthen their position in the phone market.

4.2. Impact on smartphones market in China

A threshold regression is used to detect the heterogeneous effects of the purchase subsidy on the cities with different levels of economic development and population. The purchase subsidy is found to be more effective in those more populous and more economically developed cities [18].

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From the sales data collected, we confirm that the subsidy policy had a strong initial impact, with smartphone sales surging the national subsidy policy successfully stimulated the consumer market and stimulated consumers' purchasing potential, resulting in a sharp increase in smartphone sales in the short term, especially in the first two weeks of implementation. The total sales volume in the first two months of 2025 increased significantly compared with the same period in 2024, indicating that the subsidy policy has a strong market stimulus effect. After the subsidy policy was implemented, the sales growth rate in 2025 far exceeded that in 2024, and smartphone sales increased by nearly 65% year-on-year, confirming the positive impact of government incentives on consumer purchasing decisions.

However, this effect was only temporary. Once the peak purchase period has passed, sales gradually start declining. The data suggests that the policy primarily accelerated purchases that consumers would have made later in the year rather than creating a lasting increase in overall demand. After the subsidy period ended, customers purchasing behavior returned to normal, indicating no sustained long-term impact on the overall market without the subsidy benefits.

4.3. The impact of subsidies on consumer behavior preferences

The price reduction brought about by the subsidy policy makes mobile phones with better specifications (such as more memory) more attractive, and consumers' attention is more turned to cost-effective products. Consumers are more willing to choose products with higher configuration and stronger functions within the same budget. Compared with high-end brands that do not enjoy subsidies (such as Apple and Samsung flagship models), consumers are more inclined to choose mid-range brands such as Xiaomi, OPPO, vivo, and Honor that enjoy subsidies and have higher cost performance. This shows that price subsidies, to a certain extent, guide consumers to pay more attention to the specific parameters and actual value of products, rather than just brand premium.

In the absence of subsidies, consumers are generally more inclined to choose brands that they are familiar with or have long trusted. However, when subsidies significantly reduce the prices of certain brands, consumers are more likely to make decisions based on cost-effectiveness rather than simply relying on brand loyalty. This means that consumers are more likely to try new brands rather than sticking to buying the brands they are accustomed to. For example, some consumers who have been using Apple phones for a long time chose flagship models of brands such as Huawei and Xiaomi under the subsidy policy because these products provide better cost-effectiveness after subsidies.

4.4. Discussion

Therefore, this essay makes the following recommendations to improve the effectiveness of future subsidy policy.

Firstly, instead of a one-time subsidy period that leads to a sharp rise and then a steep drop in sales, the government could consider distributing subsidies in different phases. This would help maintain steady consumer demand over time and efficiently prevent a market slump after the policy ends. Secondly, raising the subsidy limit from 6,000 yuan to 8,000 yuan could make the subsidy program more inclusive and benefit a broader range of smartphone models which will encourage greater participation from high-end brands like Apple and Samsung. Lastly, s well-structured trade-in program could encourage continuous upgrades while extending the positive effects of the subsidy policy. The new policy could offer discounts not just for new purchases but also for exchanging old devices. By fine-tuning the structure and type of subsidies, policymakers can maximize their effectiveness and ensure that both businesses and consumers benefit from a more balanced and sustained market stimulus.

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4.5. Limitations of the study

Despite the insights provided, this study has several limitations. First, the research primarily relies on short-term sales data, which may not capture the long-term impact of subsidy policies on market behavior. Second, the study is limited to the Chinese smartphone market, and results may not be generalizable to other countries with different economic structures and consumer preferences. Third, external factors such as global supply chain disruptions, brand-specific promotions, and technological advancements may have influenced sales trends, making it challenging to isolate the effect of subsidies. Future research could address these limitations by conducting longitudinal studies and cross-country comparisons.

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