Understanding Algerian customers' purchase intentions regarding smartphones *Made in China*: an exploratory study

فهم نوايا الشراء لدى الزبائن الجزائريين فيما يتعلق بالهواتف الذكية التي تحمل شعار" صنع في الصين": دراسة استكشافية

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Abstract:

The present study aims to explore the determinants of Algerian costumers' purchase intentions regarding smartphones *Made in China*. For this purpose, a qualitative approach was adopted. The data collected during the smartphones sellers interviews' were analyzed implementing Braun & Clarke (2006) thematic analysis and MAXQDA 24 software. The results suggest that customers' purchase intentions are conditioned by six factors: price, intrinsic quality, perceptual quality, attitudes, trust and brand loyalty. The research findings provide companies with actionable insights to optimize their production and communication strategies. Furthermore, they can serve as inputs for future studies to examine the determinants' relative impact on costumers' purchase intentions.

Keywords: Purchase intention; Determinants; *Made in China ;* Smartphones ; Algeria.

Jel Classification Codes : D12 ; M31; N75

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I- Introduction :

A smartphone is a type of mobile phone that allows communication, internet access and app usage. Within a few years, it has become an integral part of users' daily lives and has changed the way they interact, work, entertain, shop, etc. The number of smartphones sold worldwide is constantly increasing. According to Business Research Insights (2026), the global smartphone market, valued at $2.32 billion in 2026, is expected to reach $3.68 billion by 2035. Firms operating in this industry evolve in an oligopolistic market where fierce competition implies a perpetual innovation.

In this dynamic context, China has emerged as a major player reshaping the global market structure through competitive pricing, technological innovation and product variety. Thus, Chinese brands such as Xiaomi, Vivo and OPPO have managed to position themselves in an extremely competitive market traditionally dominated by Apple and Samsung. In fact, the government's unwavering support and the massive investments in critical information technologies development have turned the country into a leading innovator.

Recently, the Algerian smartphone market has witnessed a steady growth characterized by a significant increase in users number. The country is projected to add 18,6 million users by 2029 (Statista, 2026). This tendency is driven by digital transition acceleration supported by internet coverage expansion and investments in telecommunication infrastructure. Currently, market sales assessments reveal that smartphones *Made in China* hold the largest share. The country's socio-economic environment has undoubtedly been propitious to the ascendancy of this device.

Although some descriptive quantitative studies have identified the factors affecting smartphones purchase, there is a lack of qualitative research in this field, particularly in the Algerian context. This study endeavors to fill this gap adopting and attempts to understand the logic underlying Algerian customers' purchase behavior regarding smartphones *Made in China* from the sellers' perspective, raising the following question: ''what are the determinants of algerian customers' purchase intentions toward smartphones *Made in China?*''. In other words, this research aims at exploring the drivers and barriers of smartphone purchase intention, considering China as the country of origin.

The following section of this paper reviews the theoretical background related to the studied subject. The methodology adopted to address the issue is thoroughly examined, including how the interviewees were selected and approached, the techniques used, and the data collection process. The investigation results are then reported and discussed. Finally, the research limitations, implications and perspectives are presented.

II– Literature review :

The study of consumer behavior has become increasingly important as it helps to answer fundamental questions related to the factors influencing consumer choices. Currently, it faces a double challenge stemming from the changing and unpredictable consumers' behavior and

the complexity of the environment in which he operates. This insight highlights the necessity of a constant reevaluation of consumer behavior models and implies ongoing research in this field.

Purchase intention has been defined by Bressoud (2008) as a purchase subjective probability based on the degree of purchase planning. In fact, this concept is essential for businesses as it permits, at a certain degree, the prediction of consumers' behavior while giving them the opportunity to insure their strategies' pertinence and success. The smartphone purchase is not a purely technical decision. It is a compound one, encompassing economic, technical, psychological and social dimensions. Thus, general models are applied to explain and predict consumers' behavior in various situations. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) developed by Ajzen (1991) is an outstanding example. According to this theory, the constructs of attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control directly affect intention.

Depending on the context, previous studies have identified various variables determining smartphones purchase intention. For instance, Blanco-Encomienda et al., (2024) maintained that brand image and attitude have a substantial impact on purchase intention while country of origin has an indirect effect. Fan et al., (2025) found that perceptual quality, intrinsic quality and brand equity are prominent. (Zollinger, 1993) mentioned that price is also important. Actually, it serves as a primary indicator of perceived value and sacrifice acceptance. Customers often rely on it to deduce the product quality. Social influence, advertising and online information equally affect purchase intention. Consumers, generally, rely on friends, family members and social media to forge their opinion about a product.

The roots of the label 'Made in' go back to the *Merchandise Marks Act* enactment in 1887. The latter mandated imported products' country-of-origin identification in order to protect British businesses from foreign competition, particularly Germany. In other words, 'Made in' was initially used as protectionist trade policy instrument. The association of country-of-origin to consumer behavior was established, for the first time, by Schooler (1965). He has, in fact, demonstrated the existence of a relationship between consumers' attitudes toward a country and its products' perception. Yang et al., (2018) asserts that there is a positive correlation between country-of-origin perception and product evaluation. Indeed, it is worth saying that country-of-origin effectively impacts purchase intention.

Nevertheless, the relevance of the label 'Made in'', commonly used to indicate a product's country-of-origin, has been questioned rejecting the claim that a product's country-of-origin incontestably influences consumers' behavior (Usunier, 2006). Indubitably, intensifying internationalization has caused a significant global value chains fragmentation making it hard to identify the product's country-of-origin. The smartphone industry is accurately concerned as a smartphone's production process implies several countries participation.

Considering the ambiguity surrounding the impact of country-of-origin on consumer behavior and the variety factors influencing smartphones' purchase intention further research

is required. The Algerian context has not yet been investigated and would certainly enrich the findings concerning the studied topic.

III-Methodology:

Qualitative and quantitative research approaches are used, either separately or in combination, to understand consumer behavior. This research, however, adopts a qualitative approach as far as it aims to explore the determinants of customers' purchase intentions. According to Poisson (1983), this approach is appropriate to explain human behavior as it focuses on participants' experiences. To conduct the interviews, a semi-structured interview guide was designed. This qualitative technique fits with the exploratory nature of the research, allowing a thorough understanding of the participants' responses in relation to the addressed issue.

III-1 Selection of interviewee sample:

Smartphones sellers were interviewed in the study. They represent a rich and relevant source of information due to their direct and continuous interaction with customers that enables them to closely observe their behaviour.

A restricted and homogenous sample was selected to ensure internal diversification that aligns with the research aim centered on an in-depth description of customer's behavior. Pires (1980) maintains that internal diversification leads to empirical saturation. Bertaux (1980) asserts that saturation is achieved once exceeding a certain number of participants without learning anything new about the subject. Relying on this method, it was decided that sufficient number of participants and data were included in the study. The sample size was, then, guided by the empirical saturation achievement. An identifier, comprising the letter 'S' and a number was attributed to each interviewee, respectively, to respect their privacy (see table 1).

Table (1) : interview participant's characteristics

Participants	Age	Gender	Experience	Education_background	Interview_duration
S1	26	Male	2 years	Student	14 min 11sec
S2	22	Male	5years	Middle school	10min 48 sec
S3	42	Male	22years	High school	12min 55 sec
S4	22	Male	5years	student	15min 20 sec
S5	24	Female	6years	Master's Degree	11 min 33sec
S6	30	Female	2years	Licene Degree	16 min 42 sec
S7	34	Male	16years	Middle school	21 min 27 sec

S8	41	Male	7years	High school	18 min 23 sec
S9	30	Male	8years	Higher National Diploma (HND) in	35min35 sec

Source : authors' own creation

III-2 Interview procedure:

The interviews were conducted face-to-face in the Wilaya of Tizi-Ouzou (Algeria) from February 2026 to March 2026. The participants were asked the questions included in the interview guide and were given the opportunity to elaborate on them. Each interview lasted between 18 and 35 minutes for completion. The interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy. The collected data were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents before importing them into MAXQDA 24, a computer –assisted qualitative data analysis software program.

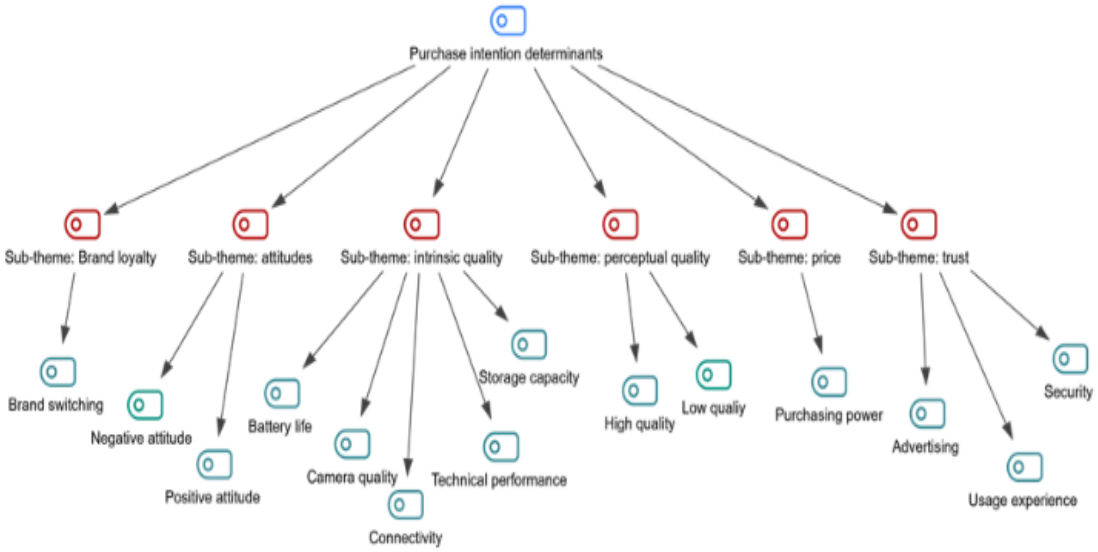
IV- Results and discussion:

IV-1 Data analysis:

The data analysis was conducted using the thematic-analysis approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involves working through the dataset, identifying patterns, systematically coding data, deriving themes, and producing the report. This process is not, however, linear; it is iterative and recursive, as it requires moving back and forth between the different phases.

Inductive thematic analysis was utilized in this research. Consequently, no explanatory theoretical framework was referenced to in order to avoid preconceptions in data interpretation (Denis et al., 2019). This approach is recommended when a ‘’new terrain is explored’’ (Clarke and Braun, 2017). In fact, the qualitative research enables the identification of the determinants influencing smartphones *Made in China* purchase intention. These determinants are represented in a thematic map in figure(1). Finally, six sub-themes and fourteen codes were identified. The explanation of these results was supported by excerpts from the interviewees' responses. An overview of the themes and their frequencies is also provided in table (2) in appendices.

Figure (1): the thematic map of smartphones *Made in China* purchase intention determinants



Source : authors' own creation

All the respondents stated that price is one of the key drivers of customers' smartphones purchase. S7 points out, ''*First and foremost, it is price that prevails . It is the first criterion. The remaining ones come after''*. To support this, *S6 asserts, ''It's mainly mid-range products […] that suit the customer's budget. If you raise the price even slightly, they can't afford it because of their limited purchasing power''.*

The interviewees, unanimously, concurred that intrinsic quality is a key factor influencing smartphone purchase intention. Technical performance, storage, camera quality, connectivity and battery life were frequently referred to. V7 declares, *''They look for battery, stockage, RAM, camera, and device smoothness (processor) ''.* S9 add, *'' Samsung halted imports of smartphones Made in India as it is incompatible with the local network antenna'*

Regarding perceptual quality, the majority of the interviewees maintained that customers perceive smartphones *Made in China* as good quality products**.** As mentioned by S3, *''They used to consider it as a poor-quality product. Now they know that Made in China doesn't mean poor quality – not like it used to be''.* As per 2, *''When I tell them that the smartphone is made in China, the customers replies that China dominates everything*.'' Nevertheless, S8 asserts, ''*there is a minority of customers who still consider products Made in China, especially smartphones, as being of low quality*''. S5 states ''*Some customers say it's Chinese, so it's not sturdy* ''.

Costumers' attitudes largely depend on customers' knowledge and Chinese products use. According to S4**, ''***Customers respond positively, they are receptive to smartphones Made in China buying because they know that everything is Made in Chia''.* S6 indicated that, '' *Many customers avoid India. They, rather, look for smartphones Made in Vietnam and Made in China*' . S8, however, maintained, *''There is a minority of customers, not all of them, when you tell them that it is Made in China, they say that it is not good because they don't know that ,nowadays, all the mobile phones are Made in China''.*

Trust appears to be a prominent factor when a customer purchase a smartphone *Made in China*. According to the interviewees, this feeling results from usage experience, security and

advertising. S2 claims, *''There is not a problem, as they've [smartphones Made in China] proven to be good products ''*, while S1 notices that, ''*It's a product that has a warranty. So they don't worry. They buy it*''. S5 attests, *''Advertising in social media rises people trust in the smartphone Made in China''.*

Brand loyalty is a significant component in smartphone purchase decision. S6 affirms, *"concerning the customer, it's hard to convince them once they've set up their minds, especially if they're already using Samsung—nothing but Samsung. If he uses Oppo and you suggest to him to buy Realme instead, he won't accept it; even though they belong to the same product range''.*

IV-2 Discussion:

The present study explored the smartphones *Made in China* purchase intention determinants' among Algerian customers living in the Wilaya of Tizi-Ouzou. The findings are generally consistent with previous studies; however, certain specificities related to the Algerian context were underlined.

In fact, identifying price as critical factor influencing purchase intention is widely acknowledged in the literature. According to Fan and Yang (2020), consumers' decisions remain significantly influenced by price. The customers view smartphones *Made in China* as affordable products because they correspond to their purchasing power. Walker (2025) maintains that affordability is one of the main competitive advantages of Chinese smartphone industry. According to the study findings, Algerian customers are particularly sensitive to price variations. The country's socioeconomic conditions, marked by declining purchasing power resulting from inflationary pressures, are likely to affect consumers' behavior. The smartphones' *Made in China* prices appear to be appropriate to the Algerian context.

Product quality is another major driver of purchase intention. This result aligns with Fan et al., (2025) findings. As reported by the interviewees, customers generally perceive smartphones *Made in China* as good quality products. Their intrinsic quality meets users' individual needs and satisfies their requirements due to product range variety. China is no longer a source of cheap labor. Henceforth, it relies on a technology sector supported by massive investments in R&D, as illustrated by the *Made in china 2025* plan. Nowadays, China is a leading innovator. The image of products *Made in China* has evolved and consumers are aware of this change. Nevertheless, the quality of Chinese products continues to suffer, at some extent, from bad reputation. Indeed, chinese products are negatively perceived by consumers owing to numerous scandals that have tarnished their image (Cheng et al., 2014). There is a minority of customers who consider products *Made in China* as poor quality products. Previous negative usage experience as well as negative product reputation can explain the negative perception.

Customers have, rather, a positive attitude regarding *Made in China*. Some of them have a negative attitude and join Uyar (2018) findings. This negative evaluation is often related to preconceived ideas or stigma related to chinese products that are viewed as low quality and counterfeit ones. Indeed, the luck of information about China's actual technological and economic progress can be put forward to explain this negative attitude. Han (1989) explains that when customers have a limited knowledge about a brand, they often draw conclusions about product attributes in reference to their understanding of the country of origin.

Furthermore, customers' dissatisfaction during previous usage experiences of a specific product builds a negative attitude regarding products *Made in China*.

An important result concerns trust as a paramount driver of purchase intention. Previous studies confirm these findings, demonstrating that trust effectively influences smartphones purchase intention (Indawati Lestari et al., 2019; Aditya and Wayan, 2020). The data analysis allowed the identification of a set of factors that foster customers' trust in smartphones *Made in China*. At first, the existence of a warranty reduces uncertainty and perceived risk while providing after-sales services. Then, advertising, especially online advertising including social media, fosters customers' awareness about product functionalities and reinforces their trust. Finally, a positive usage experience, instigated by the conformity between real value and perceived value, enhances customer satisfaction and trust.

Brand loyalty is also an important determinant of purchase intention. As matter of fact, brand loyalty among product users can be understood as the degree of consumers' attachment and loyalty to a given brand. Data analysis showed that customers tend to stick to their choices and continue purchase the same brand even when similar competitors' offers exist. This result supports Simon (2000) assertion that loyal consumers tend to stay committed to a brand and continue purchasing it even when numerous alternatives are available. Brand loyalty, in the studied context, is conditioned by positive experience with a specific brand.

V- Conclusion:

This study examines the determinants of customers' purchasing intentions regarding smartphones *Made in China* interviewing with nine smartphones sellers located in the Wilaya of Tizi-Ouzou. Results of thematic analysis of qualitative data highlighted six constructs: price, intrinsic quality, perceived quality, attitudes, brand loyalty and trust. Overall, the smartphones *Made in China* continue to gain ground in the Algerian market, offering better value for money compared with their competitors. The reputation of Chinese products has also improved significantly.

From a theoretical perspective, this study helps improve the understanding of the factors influencing the purchase of smartphones *Made in China* in a developing country using a qualitative approach. The resulting thematic map provides a comprehensive view of the different determinants. The findings may also help marketers design communication and service strategies that are better adapted to customers' requirements. Chinese companies should enhance advertising investment to strengthen products' *Made in China* image. The achievements need to be regularly communicated to keep costumers informed, indeed.

VI- Limitations and perspectives

Despite the interesting findings, they may not apply to other areas of the county, as the study was qualitative and conducted only in the Wilaya of Tiz-Ouzou. In addition, the number of interviewees was limited, even if it complies with the principle of theoretical saturation. Furthermore, the emerging determinants from the sellers' perspective are not enough to explain customers' purchasing intentions as they only reflect a fragment of the reality.

Nevertheless, future research is encouraged to be carried out in different settings to compare the results. A quantitative study based on statistical sampling would provide

statistically sound representation of the population and help validate the results. Including customers as part of investigation would certainly enlarge knowledge about their purchasing behavior.

Appendices:

Table (2) : overview of themes and codes frequencies

Theme	Code	Frequency
Price	Purchasing power	11
Intrinsic quality	Technical performance	12
	Camera quality	9
	Battery life	5
	Storage capacity	8
	Connectivity	4
Perceptual quality	High quality	4
	Low quality	2
Attitudes	Positive attitude	11
	Negative attitude	5
Brand loyalty	Brand switching	1
Trust	Usage experience	6
	Security	6
	Advertising	1

Source : author's own creation

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