

Influence of Social Media Engagement on Consumer Purchase Intention of University Students in the Federal University of Education, Zaria

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Abstract

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This study explored the impact of social media engagement on the purchase intentions of undergraduate students at the Federal University of Education, Zaria. Specifically, it examined how the frequency of interaction, time spent on social media, and engagement with brand-related content influenced students' likelihood to make a purchase. A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing a descriptive survey approach. The study's population consisted of 400 undergraduate students from the Department of Business Education, and a sample of 200 respondents was selected using Yamane's (1967) formula, with a 5% margin of error. Data was gathered through a structured questionnaire that utilized a five-point Likert scale, and the responses were analyzed using appropriate inferential statistical methods. The findings indicated that the frequency of interaction with social media content did not significantly impact purchase intention, suggesting that superficial interactions, regardless of frequency, do not effectively drive consumer purchasing decisions. In contrast, the amount of time spent on social media had the most substantial and positive effect on purchase intention. Additionally, engagement with brand-related content also positively influenced purchase intention, though this effect was less pronounced compared to the time spent on social media. The study concludes that the depth and duration of engagement with social media content are more influential than the mere frequency of interactions in shaping purchase intentions among university students. Based on these findings, it is recommended that marketers focus on creating engaging, brand-oriented content that can sustain users' attention and effectively influence their purchasing behavior.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the widespread adoption of social media has substantially transformed how individuals communicate, access information, and make purchasing decisions. Social media platforms now function not only as vehicles for brand messaging but also as interactive spaces that stimulate consumer engagement through likes, comments, and sharing, behaviors empirically linked to purchase outcomes (Alalwan, 2023; Shareef et al., 2023). Modern marketing practice recognizes social media as a pivotal component of integrated strategy, facilitating two-way dialogue between brands and consumers, rather than the unidirectional communication typical of traditional media (Ngai et al., 2023). This paradigm shift highlights the role of social media in enabling consumers to co-create content, influence peer perceptions, and shape market decisions.

In consumer behavior research, consumer purchase intention (CPI) is typically defined as an individual's likelihood or readiness to purchase a product or service following exposure to marketing stimuli, particularly interactive brand

content on social media (Hasan et al., 2023). CPI is widely regarded as a reliable predictor of actual purchase behavior and as a signal of consumers' preparedness to act on marketing cues (Alalwan, 2023). Recent empirical studies increasingly emphasize the mediating role of online involvement and self-disclosure on social platforms in the relationship between social media usage and CPI (Shareef et al., 2023).

In emerging economies such as Nigeria, rapid advances in internet access and mobile connectivity have positioned social media as a dominant touchpoint for consumer–firm interactions. As of early 2024, Nigeria had approximately 103 million internet users, with 36.75 million active social media users, representing over one-third of all internet users in the country and emphasizing the strategic relevance of these platforms for brand engagement (DataReportal, 2024). University students, as digital natives, constitute a significant segment of this online population, characterized by high daily engagement with social media for both social and commercial purposes. Studies show that Nigerian undergraduates frequently use platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok not only to interact but also to seek product information and evaluate purchases (Olaposi et al., 2023). Within academic literature, social media engagement is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing behavioral, cognitive, and emotional components that collectively shape how consumers interact with brand content and form purchase intentions (Shareef et al., 2023).

Despite the critical role of social media engagement in Nigeria's digital ecosystem, the extent to which different engagement dimensions translate into actual purchase intention, particularly among university students, remains under-researched. Many current studies in Nigeria examine general usage patterns or marketing exposure without fully disentangling the effects of behavioral engagement and content interaction on CPI. Furthermore, while e-commerce platforms such as Jumia have implemented social media strategies to boost consumer interaction, empirical evidence regarding the differential impact of interaction frequency, time spent, and engagement with brand-related content on students' purchase intentions remains scarce.

Nigeria's digital economy continues to expand, with social media contributing to growth in digital advertising, employment, and entrepreneurship. However, persistent challenges, such as infrastructure gaps, high data costs, and trust issues stemming from online fraud, may limit the effectiveness of engagement strategies in translating online interactions into tangible purchase intentions (DataReportal, 2024). This study seeks to address these gaps by investigating how distinct dimensions of social media engagement influence CPI among university students in Nigeria, using Jumia Nigeria as a contextual case. Specifically, the research explores how interaction frequency, time spent on platforms, and participation in brand-related content influence students' purchase intentions. The findings are intended to provide actionable insights for marketers and policymakers aiming to optimize social media marketing strategies in emerging markets. Based on the research objective, three hypotheses were formulated as follows.

H01: The frequency of interaction with social media content does not significantly influence the likelihood of purchase among students in the Federal University of Education, Zaria.

H02: The amount of time spent on social media platforms per day does not significantly contribute to the likelihood of purchasing among students in the Federal University of Education, Zaria

H03: Brand-related content interaction does not significantly contribute to purchase among students in the Federal University of Education, Zaria.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept of Consumer Purchase Intention

Consumer purchase intention refers to an individual's stated willingness or likelihood to purchase a product or service in the future, typically as a response to marketing stimuli. In the social media context, this construct reflects how consumer interaction with brand-related content, such as ads, influencer posts, and promotional videos, influences decision-making and readiness to purchase (Hussain, Ting, & Mazhar, 2022; Tiwari et al., 2025). It is widely regarded

as a critical predictor of actual buying behavior, since it denotes the consumer's psychological readiness to act on marketing communications (Tiwari et al., 2025; Hu & Zhu, 2022).

Marketing research consistently positions purchase intention as a central outcome variable, enabling firms to evaluate the effectiveness of promotional strategies on consumer choices (Hu & Zhu, 2022; Tiwari et al., 2025). By measuring purchase intention, marketers and researchers can gain insights into how exposure to advertisements, user-generated content, brand engagement, and social media interactions translates into anticipated buying behavior (Hussain et al., 2022). Accordingly, assessing consumers' purchase intention provides empirical evidence of marketing effectiveness and supports forecasts of future sales outcomes (Hu & Zhu, 2022; Tiwari et al., 2025).

2.2 Concept of Social Media Engagement

Social media engagement is defined as the degree of active participation, interaction, and involvement users exhibit with brand content or communities on social media platforms. This construct encompasses a variety of behaviors, including liking, commenting, sharing, clicking, and viewing posts, that reflect users' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment in their social media experiences (de Vries et al., 2023; Pérez-Vega, Waite, & O'Gorman, 2023). Engagement is widely recognized as multidimensional, integrating behavioral actions, psychological involvement, and emotional responses that together signal the depth and quality of consumer-brand interactions in digital environments (de Vries et al., 2023; Algharabat et al., 2022). This multidimensionality distinguishes simple content exposure from deeper engagement that may foster stronger brand relationships and shape consumer decision-making.

In marketing research, social media engagement is a key metric for assessing how effectively brands connect with audiences, as higher engagement typically reflects greater consumer interest, stronger emotional ties, and more meaningful interactions with brand content (Algharabat et al., 2022; Pérez-Vega et al., 2023). Engagement behaviors can range from passive consumption (e.g., views) to active contributions (e.g., comments and user-generated posts) and co-creation of brand narratives (de Vries et al., 2023). These behaviors not only capture users' attention but also signal their propensity to respond to and advocate for brands, thus amplifying reach and influencing broader consumer perceptions through social signaling and peer influence.

2.3 Dimensions of Social Media Engagement

Social media engagement is broadly conceptualized as the range of active and passive behaviors users display when interacting with digital platforms and branded content (Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Lim et al., 2022). This multidimensional construct is operationalized with metrics such as interaction frequency, time spent on platforms, and the volume of brand-related actions (Wirtz et al., 2019; Dabbous & Barakat, 2023). These measures are central to understanding the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies and their influence on consumer behavior, including purchase intention.

i. Frequency of Interaction with Social Media Content

Frequency of interaction captures how often users engage with brand-related posts, including likes, comments, shares, and reactions within a given timeframe (Lim et al., 2022). This metric serves as a direct indicator of ongoing consumer interest and engagement, with frequent interactions linked to higher brand visibility and stronger brand-consumer relationships (Dabbous & Barakat, 2023). Studies demonstrate that analyzing interaction frequency helps reveal patterns that can predict purchase intentions and advocacy behaviors (Lim et al., 2022; Dabbous & Barakat, 2023).

ii. Time Spent on Social Media Platforms Per Day

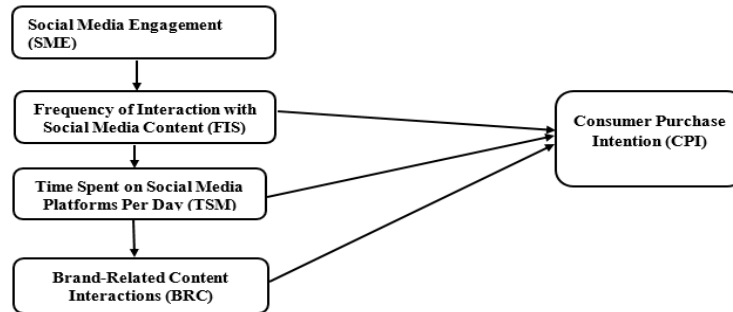
Time spent on social media refers to the total minutes or hours users actively engage with platforms each day, thereby increasing their exposure to brand messages and peer content (Islam et al., 2022). Extended usage may enhance brand awareness and facilitate message retention, but excessive time can also create information fatigue, potentially reducing promotional effectiveness (Islam et al., 2022; Wirtz et al., 2019). By evaluating these patterns, marketers can better understand the relationship between exposure, engagement, and consumer purchase intention.

iii. Brand-Related Content Interactions

Brand-related content interactions measure users' actions in response to branded material, such as ad clicks, video views, and participation in branded polls or contests (Dabbous & Barakat, 2023). The frequency and

diversity of these interactions reflect the depth of consumer engagement and often correspond with increased brand attachment and higher purchase intention (Pansari & Kumar, 2017).

Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework



Source: Author compilation 2026

The conceptual framework for this study illustrates the relationship between social media engagement and consumer purchase intention among university students. Social media engagement, the independent variable, is measured through three proxies: frequency of interaction, time spent on social media per day, and number of brand-related content interactions. These dimensions represent different ways students engage with brands online. The dependent variable, consumer purchase intention, reflects the students' likelihood to purchase products after engaging with brand content on social media. This framework is guided by established behavioral theories, which suggest that increased engagement with marketing content can shape attitudes and, ultimately, influence purchase decisions. By analyzing these relationships, the framework provides a structured approach to understanding how specific aspects of social media use impact consumer behavior in the academic context.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model, a widely acknowledged theoretical framework in environmental and consumer psychology. The S–O–R paradigm posits that external stimuli influence behavior by activating internal processes, cognitive, affective, and physiological, which subsequently shape observable responses. The model emphasizes that human behavior is mediated by internal psychological states rather than occurring as a direct, reflexive reaction to external cues (Jiang & Kim, 2020; Lee, 2020).

In recent consumer behavior research, the S–O–R framework provides robust theoretical justification for analyzing how exposure to online marketing communications and social media content leads to measurable outcomes, such as purchase intention (Sun et al., 2023; Islam & Rahman, 2017). This model elucidates how environmental cues embedded in digital content can elicit diverse consumer responses through internal cognitive and affective mechanisms (Jiang & Kim, 2020; Sun et al., 2023).

Within the S–O–R model, the “organism” component represents the internal psychological and emotional processes that mediate the relationship between external stimuli and behavioral outcomes. Contemporary literature describes this component as including cognitive evaluations, such as assessments of credibility, value, and relevance, and affective states, including trust, enjoyment, and excitement (Rather, 2021; Sun et al., 2023). For Nigerian university students, social media engagement behaviors, such as liking, sharing, commenting, or interacting with influencer promotions, serve as stimuli that generate varied cognitive and affective responses, explaining why similar content may yield different purchase intentions among individuals.

The “response” in the S–O–R model refers to overt behavioral outcomes that result from these internal psychological processes. In this study, responses are operationalized as students' purchase intentions and ongoing engagement with brands online. When Nigerian university students experience positive cognitive and affective reactions to social media content, they are more likely to express purchase intention, share brand messages with peers, or deepen their engagement with the brand (Rather, 2021; Sun et al., 2023). Thus, the S–O–R model underpins this research by

explaining how social media engagement influences consumer purchase intentions, emphasizing the intermediary psychological processes that connect online brand stimuli with behavioral outcomes.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a quantitative research approach, employing both descriptive and survey designs to systematically examine the influence of social media engagement on consumer purchase intention among university students at the Federal University of Education, Zaria. The population consists of all undergraduate students in the department of Business Education. This is because the department's student distribution by age and gender reflects approximately 70% of the school and also reflects active social media users. Also, it will be time and resource constraints to access the entire department in school. This prompts the limitation of the population sample selected because they are digitally literate, active social media users, and a relevant demographic for analyzing consumer behavior in an academic context. A margin of error of 5% with an estimated population size of 400 students. The sample size was determined using the formula suggested by Yamane (1967). A stratified random sampling approach was employed to ensure sectoral representation. The sampling frame was constructed from students of Business Education. The data were collected using Primary data, which was obtained through structured questionnaire distributed randomly among 200 students. The assumption is that the sample is representative of the population.

Sample Size Formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

- n = sample size
- N = population size
- e = level of significance (sampling error), set at 5% (0.05)
- 1 = constant

Substitution:

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{400}{1 + 400 \times 0.0025} \\ n &= \frac{400}{1 + 1} \\ n &= \frac{400}{2} \\ n &= 200 \end{aligned}$$

Final Answer: The required sample size is 200 respondents.

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to assess social media engagement behaviors, including frequency of interaction, time spent per day, and engagement with brand-related content, as well as students' self-reported purchase intentions. The questionnaire was adapted from established survey design principles in Likert (1932) and consists of closed-ended items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). This scale was selected due to its ease of analysis, ability to provide respondents with a balanced range of response options, and its widespread use in measuring attitudes and opinions effectively. The questionnaire is organized into sections covering demographic characteristics, social media engagement indicators, and consumer purchase intention. It was administered physically to enhance accessibility and maximize the response rate. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their rights, voluntary participation was ensured through informed consent, and all responses were treated with confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Data Analysis and Presentation

The analysis was performed on survey responses collected from 200 Social Media users in Business Education Department. This descriptive analysis was undertaken using Statistical Software for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 while the validity, reliability and hypothesized relationship was carried out using structural equation modelling especially Smart-PLS version 4.

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics of Social Media Engagement on ConsumerPurchase Intention using the specifics:

Descriptive Statistics		Frequency of Interaction	Time Spent on social media	Brand-Related Content Interactions	Likelihood of Purchase
N	Valid	200	200	200	200
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		17.16	17.08	17.73	17.99
Median		17.00	18.00	18.00	18.00
Mode		17	18	18	20
Std. Deviation		1.878	2.282	1.898	2.047
Skewness		-0.607	-0.969	-1.158	-0.324
Std. Error of Skewness		0.177	0.177	0.177	0.177
Kurtosis		0.234	0.066	1.163	-1.489
Std. Error of Kurtosis		0.352	0.352	0.352	0.352
Minimum		12	12	12	14
Maximum		20	20	20	20

Source: Researcher's Review 2025

Table 4.1 Present the descriptive statistics for the key variables' frequency of interaction, time spent on social media, brand-related content interactions, and likelihood of purchase offer a clear picture of social media usage and purchasing tendencies among the 200 business education student respondents, with no missing data. All variables show high average scores, with means ranging from 17.08 to 17.99, and relatively low standard deviations, indicating consistent responses across the sample. Each variable also exhibits negative skewness, suggesting that most students reported above-average engagement and purchase intentions. Specifically, frequency of interaction had a mean of 17.16 and slight negative skew (-0.607), indicating frequent engagement. Time spent on social media averaged 17.08 with a moderate negative skew (-0.969), showing that many students spend considerable time online. Brand-related content interactions had a higher mean of 17.73 and a pronounced negative skew (-1.158), suggesting strong engagement with branded material. Likelihood of purchase had the highest mean (17.99) and a slight negative skew (-0.324), indicating that most students were inclined to purchase after engaging with social media content. The consistent high scores and negatively skewed distributions suggest that social media plays a significant role in shaping the behaviors and purchase intentions of university students in this study.

Table 4.2: Hypothesised Relationship

Hypothesis	Relationship	Beta	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-statistics	P-value	R-squared	Effect Size (f ²)	Decision
H01	FIS → CPI	0.031	0.043	0.72	0.471	0.056	0.001	Fail to Reject
H02	TSM → CPI	0.542	0.04	13.704	0	0.294	0.27	Rejected
H03	BRC → CPI	0.141	0.047	3.036	.002	0.2	0.027	Rejected

Source: Smart-PLS output (2025).

The structural equation modeling (SEM) results provide insights into the relationships between various dimensions of social media engagement (frequency of interaction, time spent on social media, and brand-related content engagement) and consumer purchase intention (CPI). These results are based on beta values, t-statistics, p-values, R-squared (R^2),

effect sizes (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2), which are used to assess the strength and significance of the relationships.

- i. Frequency of Interaction (FIS) → Consumer Purchase Intention (CPI):
The relationship between FIS and CPI shows a very weak positive effect with a beta value of 0.031. The t-statistic of 0.720 and p-value of 0.471 indicate that the relationship is not statistically significant. The R^2 value of 0.056 suggests that only 5.6% of the variance in CPI is explained by FIS, indicating its minimal impact. The effect size (f^2) of 0.001 further reinforces that the effect is negligible. Based on these findings, the hypothesis (H01) is not rejected, meaning frequency of interaction with social media content does not significantly influence purchase intention.
- ii. Time Spent on social media (TSM) → Consumer Purchase Intention (CPI):
The relationship between time spent on social media and CPI shows a strong positive impact with a beta value of 0.542, a t-statistic of 13.704, and a p-value of 0.000, which indicates high statistical significance. The R^2 value of 0.294 suggests that time spent on social media explains 29.4% of the variance in purchase intention, indicating a strong explanatory power. The effect size (f^2) of 0.270 indicates a large effect, confirming that time spent on social media is a significant predictor of consumer purchase intention. Therefore, H02 is rejected, meaning that time spent on social media significantly influences purchase intention.
- iii. Brand-Related Content (BRC) → Consumer Purchase Intention (CPI):
The relationship between engagement with brand-related content and CPI shows a moderate positive effect, with a beta value of 0.141, a t-statistic of 3.036, and a p-value of 0.002, indicating statistical significance. The R^2 value of 0.200 shows that 20% of the variance in purchase intention is explained by brand-related content engagement, indicating a moderate level of explanatory power. The effect size (f^2) of 0.027 indicates a small effect, suggesting that while the relationship is significant, it is weaker than the time spent on social media. As a result, H03 is rejected, showing that engagement with brand-related content does influence purchase intention, although to a lesser extent than time spent on social media. The Q^2 value of 0.273 is above the recommended threshold of 0, indicating that the model has acceptable predictive relevance. This confirms that the combination of the engagement metrics (FIS, TSM, and BRC) provides meaningful explanatory power in predicting consumer purchase intention among university students

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study align with the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework, which posits that external stimuli influence consumer behavior through internal psychological processes (Jiang & Kim, 2020; Sun et al., 2023). In this context, social media engagement activities act as external stimuli, while cognitive and emotional responses serve as the mediating internal mechanisms shaping behavioral outcomes.

The results reveal that the frequency of interaction with social media content did not significantly affect purchase intention among university students. This outcome is consistent with the S–O–R perspective, which emphasizes that mere exposure is not sufficient to trigger substantive behavioral change; instead, the depth of internal cognitive and affective processing determines the likelihood of observable action (Islam et al., 2022). Prior research corroborates that recurrent exposure without meaningful engagement often fails to translate into consumer action or purchase decisions (Dabbous & Barakat, 2023; Islam et al., 2022).

Conversely, the study found that time spent on social media exerted the strongest positive effect on purchase intention. This supports the organism component of the S–O–R model, highlighting that internal cognitive and affective responses mediate the impact of external stimuli on behavior (Jiang & Kim, 2020). Students who spend more time on social media platforms are more likely to engage deeply with content, which fosters stronger emotional bonds and trust in brands. This finding is in line with evidence that prolonged exposure to online content enhances trust and brand equity, thereby increasing purchase intentions (Rather, 2021).

Furthermore, engagement with brand-related content, such as advertisements, surveys, and sponsored posts, also demonstrated a positive effect on purchase intention, although smaller than the effect of time spent online. This observation is consistent with research indicating that active engagement with branded content elicits cognitive and affective responses, strengthening brand attachment and influencing purchase decisions (Rather, 2021; Islam et al., 2022). The relatively smaller effect size suggests that while engagement is important, the total time spent on social media has a more pronounced influence on purchase intentions among university students.

These findings underscore the importance for marketers to design strategies that promote extended and meaningful engagement rather than simply increasing the frequency of shallow interactions. Content that encourages prolonged exposure, such as interactive features, immersive storytelling, and participatory activities, can stimulate deeper internal processing and emotional investment. Additionally, utilizing interactive formats like contests, polls, and influencer collaborations can intensify users' engagement with brand content, thereby enhancing trust and emotional connection and ultimately increasing purchase intention among highly active social media users.

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study demonstrates that social media use has a significant impact on consumer purchase intention among university students, although the effects vary depending on the type of engagement. While time spent on social media and interaction with brand-related content had the most pronounced positive effects, with time spent emerging as the strongest factor, the frequency of interaction showed no significant influence on purchase behavior. The findings emphasize the importance of sustained exposure and meaningful engagement in shaping consumer decisions. The results suggest that strategies focused on fostering deeper interactions and prolonged engagement with social media content are more likely to successfully influence purchase intentions.

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

- i. Since consistent exposure greatly boosts purchase intention, marketers provide interesting and interactive material to get students to spend more time on social media.
- ii. Marketers place a high priority on producing engaging brand-related content for students, such as advertisements, surveys, and interactive postings, as meaningful engagement with branded materials greatly increases purchase intention.

5.1 Study Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the influence of social media engagement on consumer purchase intention among university students, several limitations must be acknowledged.

- i. The study relies on a cross-sectional design, which captures data at a single point in time. This limits the ability to establish causal relationships between social media engagement and purchase intention. Longitudinal studies would be beneficial in exploring how social media engagement influences purchase intention over time.
- ii. The study sample was restricted to undergraduate students at the Federal University of Education, Zaria. While this demographic is important, the findings may not be generalizable to other university students or to different populations, such as older adults or individuals outside of Nigeria. Future research could expand the sample to include a more diverse group of participants to improve the generalizability of the findings.
- iii. The study examines only three dimensions of social media engagement: frequency of interaction, time spent on social media, and engagement with brand-related content. While these dimensions are relevant, other factors such as the type of content, platform used, or peer influence could also play a role in shaping purchase intention. Future research could include additional variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence consumer behavior on social media.

5.2 Suggestions for further studies

Future research could explore several areas to deepen the understanding of how social media engagement influences consumer purchase intention:

- i. Longitudinal studies: Investigating the long-term effects of social media engagement on purchase intention would help assess whether the observed effects persist over time.
- ii. Diverse demographics: Expanding the sample to include various age groups, professionals, and socio-economic backgrounds would improve the generalizability of the findings.
- iii. Additional engagement dimensions: Exploring factors like emotional engagement, trust in influencers, and content types (e.g., visual vs. textual) could provide a fuller understanding of the drivers behind purchase intention.

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