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SWITCHING THE SMARTPHONE WAY: INVESTIGATING INFLUENTIAL FACTORS IN CONSUMER REPURCHASE INTENTION

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ABSTRACT

With the explosive increase in smartphone adoption over the past few years and the constant evolution of mobile technologies, there is a need to gain further insight into the determinants of buyers' repurchase intention. Despite the exponential growth of the smartphone market, scant research has delved into exploring the affecting factors behind consumer decisions regarding brands, especially within the Malaysian scenario. Informed by the Affection-Behaviour-Cognition (ABC) model, the present research investigates the impact of brand image, brand communication, and Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) on consumers' attitudes and their resultant effect on repurchasing smartphones. Notably, the ABC model offers a conceptual framework explicating the intertwined nature of sentiments, behaviours, and cognitions in shaping customers' decisions. Accordingly, an online questionnaire with 294 participants served as a data collection point for the current study. It was subsequently analysed, utilising sophisticated Smart Partial Least Squares (SmartPLS) software version 4.0. Our analyses indicate that brand image, brand communication, and e-WOM play positive roles in influencing consumers' attitudes. Meanwhile, it is also notable that attitude itself plays a vital role in enhancing consumers' repurchase intention with direct effects. Extending beyond mere statistical data, this work underscores the significance and pivotal nature of consumer attitude as a mediator between brand-facilitating factors and purchase intention-behaviour. For practitioners, these results deliver key insights that can be harnessed for bolstering branding efficacy and boosting customer loyalty amid stiff competition in the cut-throat landscape of the smartphone industry.

Introduction

Purchase intention has a significant impact on business decision-making in the field of consumer behaviour. One key factor influencing consumers' real purchasing decisions is their intention to buy (Zhe *et al.*, 2026). Correspondingly, consumer purchase intention has been observed to be significantly influenced by Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMAs). Recently, Samsung has had the highest retail volume market share of 39%, followed by Huawei, iPhone, Hisense, and ZTE with 14%, 12%, 8%, and 6%, respectively (Diniso, 2025). Concurrently, smartphones are becoming popular globally and mobile phone

users have grown rapidly worldwide. In 2022, statistics revealed smartphone usage at an astonishing 5.31 billion people, rising to 5.44 billion in early 2023, or 68% of the world's total population (Simon Kemp, 2022, 2028). Similarly, Malaysia also demonstrates a surge in phone users, with estimates of more than 88.79% phone penetration in the country in recent years and expected to reach 89.48% by 2025 (Amanda Sidhart, 2021).

Nonetheless, alongside this technology boom, Malaysia's economy struggles. Most Malaysian citizens faced a high cost of living since 2022, resulting in shifts in their decisions on where they spend their money (Digital News Asia, 2022). Consequently, this shift created research gaps in many areas. This ranges from investigating factors affecting smartphone brand-switching behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sari, 2022) to dynamic analysis of smartphone purchase behaviours among Generation Y individuals in a university setting (Osman *et al.*, 2021). It also includes exploring determinants of brand loyalty among smartphone users belonging to Malaysia's Generation Y (Marmaya *et al.*, 2019).

Considering all the research gaps uncovered thus far, the current study was conducted to elaborate on the factors that may influence consumers' smartphone repurchase intention by applying the Affection-Behaviour-Cognition (ABC) framework. The ABC model was proposed under the umbrella of the theory of attitude, founded on the premise that human behaviour is steered through a combination of three interacting elements: Affect (emotional reaction), behaviour (actional desire or behavioural plan), and cognition (belief or thought) (Breckler, 1984). Since its inception, the ABC model has gained widespread acceptance in marketing-related studies to describe how emotions and cognitions form consumers' perceptions towards brands, gaining behavioural consequences such as purchase and repurchase intentions. Therefore, by applying the ABC framework, the current study aims to develop a systematic reasoning about how consumers' affective and cognitive responses to factors regarding brands influence repurchase behaviour in the Malaysian smartphone market.

Leveraging on the ABC framework, this study pays attention to three antecedents, namely brand image, brand communication, and Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM). Following this, brand image is the perception and associations consumers have of a brand, impacting how they evaluate, trust, and stay loyal to it (Keller, 1993). Moreover, strong and positive brand images build consumer confidence and more positive attitudes towards repurchases (Nguyen *et al.*, 2015). Brand communication, meanwhile, speaks to maintaining consistency and visibility in the messaging conveyed by the firm across channels, impacting consumers' reception and engagement with the brand (Porcu *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, effective brand communication nurtures stronger brand-consumer connections and positive brand attitudes. On the other hand, e-WOM or online opinion-sharing among consumers plays a significant role in developing buyer attitudes and purchase decisions (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). In essence, positive e-WOM builds brand credibility and encourages prospective buyers to buy again.

Prior literature addressed some related constructs. For example, Bupalan *et al.* (2019) discussed the impact of attitude, perceived behavioural control, and product involvement on repurchase intentions. In another study, Abdul Manan *et al.* (2022) examined dealer-buyer relationship quality, subjective norm, and the role of perceived value. However, few articles have investigated how these factor-related aspects interplay to influence repurchase intention within the smartphone market in Malaysia by employing the ABC framework as a theoretical basis.

Recent trends reflect shifting Malaysian consumers' repurchase intention for smartphones. In particular, a significant downturn was observed in the first half of 2022. The device shipment volume in Malaysia declined dramatically, including a sharp fall of approximately 28.8%, according to the reports by Digital News Asia (Digital News Asia, 2022), which attributed this decrease mainly to supply disruption concerning low-end 4G smartphones. Furthermore, economic conditions, such as increasing cost-of-living, are also fueling Malaysia's gradual reduction of smartphone purchases. Concurrently, consumers have shifted spending priorities down-market, favouring other expenses such as travelling and fashion over buying mobile gadgets. As Malaysia continues to implement de-escalation measures against the COVID-19 pandemic, its citizens are allocating increasing budgets to festivals such as Ramadan and Raya celebrations (Mohdiah *et al.*, 2023). This has resulted in decreased smartphone buying behaviour.

Applying the concepts drawn from the ABC model, this research hypothesises that brand image, brand communication, and e-WOM influence attitude (affective and cognitive components), which ultimately influences repurchase intention (behavioural component). Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Attitude has a positive effect on intention to repurchase.

H2: Brand communication has a positive effect on attitude.

H3: Brand image has a positive effect on attitude.

H4: e-WOM has a positive effect on attitude.

Materials and Methods

This study applied a non-probability convenience sampling method since no national sampling frame is available that includes the names of all smartphone users in Malaysia. Hence, it is not feasible to select a random sample from the overall population. In line with this, convenience sampling allows the gathering of data from easily available respondents with specific study criteria, thereby attaining easy access to individuals with experience in smartphone repurchasing behaviour.

Building on this, a cross-sectional online survey design was employed, as it enables the collection of data at a single point in time from numerous respondents in a cost-effective manner. It is particularly suitable for the current research, which aims to examine interrelationships among variables such as brand image, brand communication, e-WOM, attitude, and repurchase intention, without having to follow them over a long period of time. A web-based survey also facilitates more geographical reach, reduced expense, and timely data gathering from Malaysian smartphone users who are familiar with digital media.

In the interest of consistency, the sampling technique was entirely non-probabilistic in nature. The convenience sampling technique was employed as it enables the researcher to collect useful and relevant data from respondents who volunteer to answer, particularly when probability-based sampling with an entire population list is not attainable. Accordingly, there were three inclusion criteria for the respondent selection: (1) Malaysians who are current owners of a smartphone, (2) Malaysians who have had experience in repurchasing a smartphone, and (3) Malaysian adults aged 18 years and older.

Based on the G*Power software, the required minimum sample size was determined to be 103 respondents. Nevertheless, in order to reduce the possibility of problems such as non-responses, incomplete responses, or missing data, the target sample size was set at 350 respondents. Notably, this larger sample size

increases data reliability and guarantees that the final dataset remains adequate for statistical analysis even after removing unusable responses during screening.

Prior to conducting the actual data collection, a pretest was conducted to establish the readability, understandability, and content validity of the questionnaire items. Following this, two marketing lecturers were invited to examine the content relevance and wording accuracy of the items, and another three were employed for face validity. This ensures the questions were comprehensible and appropriate for the target respondents. Additionally, their feedback helped identify minor issues regarding wording, sequence, and item interpretation, which were revised accordingly before proceeding with the pilot test.

Subsequently, a pilot study of 30 respondents was conducted in Malaysia in early 2024 through an online survey platform. The respondents for the pilot study were recruited through convenience sampling based on the same main study inclusion criteria. In particular, the purpose of the pilot test was to examine the reliability and internal consistency of the measurement items while also ensuring that the instrument functioned as required. Moreover, revisions of a minor nature were made to improve question flow and readability, according to the pilot test results, ensuring that all the measurement items were easily comprehensible to the targeted respondents.

Concurrently, the measurement items used in the present study were adapted from existing and already validated scales in the literature.

- Brand image items were adopted from Keller (1993) and Nguyen *et al.* (2015).
- Brand communication items were adopted from Porcu *et al.* (2019).
- e-WOM items were adopted from Cheung and Thadani (2012).
- The attitude and repurchase intention items were modified from previous consumer behaviour studies such as Bupalan *et al.* (2019) and Abdul Manan *et al.* (2022).

All the items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "1 = Strongly disagree" to "5 = Strongly agree." The instrument's reliability and validity were also examined through a pilot test and further confirmed with Smart Partial Least Squares (SmartPLS) version 4.0, which examined the measurement and structural model relationships between constructs.

Analysis and Findings

The study data were collected using an online structured questionnaire distributed across multiple digital platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram. Accordingly, the survey link was distributed to potential respondents who met the inclusion criteria: Malaysian citizens, aged 18 and above, smartphone owners, and individuals who have repurchased smartphones in the past. In this way, there was extensive coverage of all 14 states of Malaysia, with respondents from various demographic and socio-economic backgrounds. Note that the response was anonymous and voluntary. Ultimately, a total of 350 responses were collected and 294 valid responses remained after screening for completeness and accuracy, forming the final data for analysis instead of the pilot data.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 was performed to report the demographic profiles of respondents. The sample was composed of 44.9% female and 55.1% male respondents. With regards to age, the majority (32%) were aged 23 to 27 years old and thus classified under Generation Z, 27.9% were aged 28 to 35 years,

19.4% were aged 18 to 22 years old, 16% were aged 33 to 37 years old, while 4.8% were aged 38 years and above. Furthermore, the majority of them held bachelor's degrees and reported no income since most are students. This profile aligns with the overall consumer segment that is actively engaged in smartphone purchases and repurchases in Malaysia. In addition, these findings affirm that the participants were tech-savvy and highly familiar with mobile devices, consistent with existing literature on smartphone users (Abu Daqar *et al.*, 2020).

Two statistical software packages were employed to analyse the data: SPSS version 26 to conduct descriptive statistics and SmartPLS version 4.0 to perform the measurement and structural model tests. Accordingly, normality of the data was assessed by WebPower, taking into account Mardia's multivariate skewness ($\beta = 12.515$, $p < 0.01$) and kurtosis ($\beta = 62.149$, $p < 0.01$). Since the data were moderately non-normal, the use of SmartPLS as a non-parametric analysis method was appropriate.

The study aimed for Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) scores below 3.3, such that multicollinearity among the constructs would be minimal. In essence, VIF scores below 3.3, as argued by Kock (2015), indicate that multicollinearity is not a significant problem and common method bias will not compromise results. In this study, all constructs had satisfactory VIF scores ranging from 1.590 to 3.077, which reaffirmed the fact that there was no multicollinearity problem. Following this, different Likert anchor scales were used for independent and dependent variables to reduce potential Common Method Variance (CMV). At the same time, independent variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, while the dependent variable (repurchase intention) was measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Consequently, the difference reduced response bias by altering response formats and enhancing scale sensitivity for behavioural intention, indicating that CMV is not a major issue in this study.

Table 1: Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value

Attitude	Brand Communication	Brand Image	Electronic Word-of-Mouth	Intention to Repurchase
2.798	2.504	2.409	3.595	3.218

Table 2 summarises the results of construct validity and reliability. The minimum acceptable Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is 0.50; an AVE of 0.50 or greater indicates that the construct explains 50% or more of the variance of the construct's constituent indicators. Thus, to identify the adequateness of convergent validity, the AVE value should be higher than 0.50, which explains at least 50% of the assigned indicators' variance. Conversely, any value less than the minimum 0.50 is considered inadequate, and therefore, no item is rejected for its value less than the minimum tolerable AVE value. The AVE value for all constructs is calculated and tabulated in Table 2 using the PLS algorithm in SmartPLS software version 3.0. All constructs recorded an AVE value of more than 0.5; the lowest AVE value recorded is brand communication (0.595). Accordingly, brand image (0.632), attitude (0.661), e-WOM (0.675), and intention to repurchase (0.738) obtained a higher AVE value, which explains more than 60% and 70% of the total variance. Concurrently, the result reveals that the measurement model demonstrated adequate convergent validity.

In PLS, both Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) have a desirable acceptable value of 0.70 to 0.90 to be considered

as satisfactory. In contrast, values greater than 0.90 are not desirable as they indicate redundancy and are very unlikely to constitute a valid construct validity assessment. This study, however, focuses on CR to measure the internal consistency, as it is considered more critical and consistent than Cronbach's Alpha. The result tabulated in Table 2 suggests that all indicators have a range of values of 0.713 to 0.877, implying that an adequate internal consistency was achieved.

Table 2: The result of construct validity and reliability

Construct	Item	Loading	CR	AVE
Attitude	ATT1	0.789	0.886	0.661
	ATT2	0.815		
	ATT3	0.831		
	ATT5	0.816		
Brand communication	BC1	0.779	0.880	0.595
	BC2	0.826		
	BC3	0.750		
	BC4	0.741		
	BC5	0.759		
Brand image	BI1	0.800	0.895	0.632
	BI2	0.868		
	BI3	0.811		
	BI4	0.713		
	BI5	0.773		
e-WOM	EWOM1	0.858	0.912	0.675
	EWOM2	0.853		
	EWOM3	0.835		
	EWOM4	0.813		
	EWOM5	0.743		
Intention to repurchase	ITR1	0.817	0.934	0.738
	ITR2	0.858		
	ITR3	0.877		
	ITR4	0.869		
	ITR5	0.874		

Note: AVE = average variance extracted, CR = composite reliability.

Measurement Model

To calculate the explained variance of an indicator, we must present the square of the indicator loading, which is the bivariate correlation between the indicator and the construct. As such, the reliability of the indicator indicates the commonality of the indicator. In particular, indicator loading greater than 0.708 is recommended, as it indicates that the construct explains more than 50% of the indicator's variance, providing acceptable indicator reliability (TomassMHultt, 2021). Furthermore, discriminant validity can be assessed using three

different criteria [e.g., cross loadings, Fornell-Larcker, and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio]. In this study, all constructs in the model are multi-item constructs and are regarded as reflective rather than formative. Specifically, the construct's validity and reliability are of utmost importance to the extent that the structural model can only be further analysed after the measurement model meets all required criteria. Essentially, a measurement model is considered reliable when the measure of what it intends is consistent, and the model is considered valid when the items are able to measure what they are intended to measure (TomassMHultt, 2021).

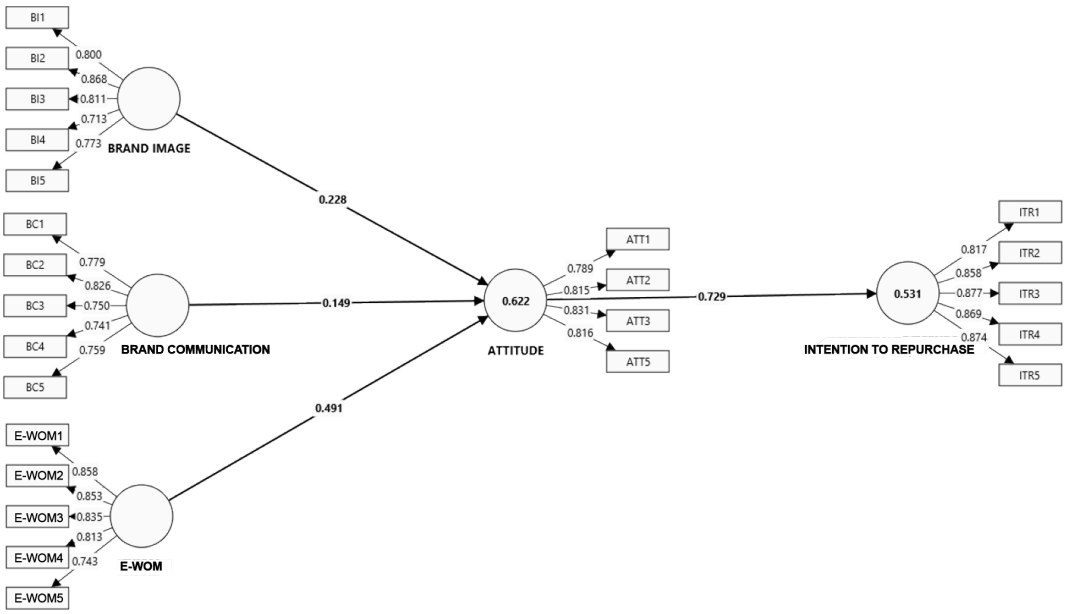

Figure 1: Measurement model

Table 3 presents the highest HTMT ratio of 0.868, which is well below the threshold cut-off ratio of 0.90. Following this, it can be concluded that none of the constructs violates the HTMT threshold of 0.90, with all HTMT values being less than 0.90. Thus, discriminant validity was achieved and established for this study. It can, therefore, be concluded that both reliability and validity requirements are met for this study. Next, the data can be further analysed for structural measurement.

Table 3: The result of discriminant validity using HTMT

Construct	Attitude	Brand Communication	Brand Image	e-WOM	Intention to Repurchase
Attitude					
Brand communication	0.770				
Brand image	0.758	0.782			
e-WOM	0.757	0.852	0.790		
Intention to repurchase	0.729	0.793	0.790	0.868	

Structural Model

A bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was conducted on the 294 valid responses. All four hypotheses were supported.

- H1: Attitude → Intention to repurchase (β = 0.729, t = 16.444, $p < 0.01$)
- H2: Brand communication → Attitude (β = 0.149, t = 2.183, $p < 0.05$)
- H3: Brand image → Attitude (β = 0.228, t = 3.753, $p < 0.01$)
- H4: e-WOM → Attitude (β = 0.491, t = 7.009, $p < 0.01$)

The R^2 for attitude was 0.622, indicating that brand communication, brand image, and e-WOM explained 62.2% of the variance in attitude. Meanwhile, the R^2 for intention to repurchase was 0.531, reflecting that 53.1% of its variance was accounted for by attitude. Overall, these results have strong and moderate predictive power, respectively (Cohen, 1988).

Table 4: Results of hypothesis testing

Hypotheses	Construct	Beta	SE	*t*-Value	*p*-Value	LL	UL	Decision
H1	ATT → ITR	0.728597	0.044308	16.44403	5.68E-14	0.639176	0.810997	Supported
H2	BC → ATT	0.149402	0.068446	2.18279	0.029098	0.006834	0.27913	Supported
H3	BI → ATT	0.227893	0.060719	3.753208	0.000177	0.109801	0.350212	Supported
H4	EWOM → ATT	0.490782	0.070024	7.008745	2.67E-12	0.361407	0.635141	Supported

Based on the findings presented, the path coefficients ranging from 0.149 to 0.729 resulted in varying results: ATT (0.729), BC (0.149), BI (0.228), and e-WOM (0.491). This confirms that all variables have a positive relationship. All relationships: H1 (16.444), H2 (2.183), H3 (3.753), H4 (7.009) are reported to yield t-values of ≥ 1.645. Correspondingly, all other relationships are significant at the 0.05 significance level. Specifically, the predictors of attitude (β = 0.729, t-value = 16.444, $p < 0.01$) are positively related to intention to repurchase, brand communication (β = 0.149, t-value = 2.183, $p < 0.01$), brand image (β = 0.228, t-value = 3.753, $p < 0.01$), e-WOM (β = 0.491, t-value = 7.009, $p < 0.01$) are positively related to attitude. Thus, H1, H2, H3, and H4 are supported. As there are many sets of rules for acceptable R^2, this study follows the rule of thumb set by Cohen (1988). Table 5 summarises the results of values on attitude (0.622) and intention to repurchase (0.531). From the result, attitude can be explained by the brand communication, brand image, and e-WOM of 62.2% (0.622), and the remaining 37.8% can be explained by other predictors that are out of this study model. Based on the rule of thumb by Cohen (1988), the attitude variable is considered a substantial predictive accuracy since the value exceeds 0.26 and thus, belongs in the strong category. On the other hand, intention to repurchase can be explained by attitude of 53.1% (0.531), and the remaining 46.9% can be explained by other independent variables outside of the study's model. Moreover, based on the rule of thumb by Cohen (1988), the usage behaviour variable is considered moderate for passing the value of 0.13 and thus, belongs to the medium category.

Table 5: Variance explained in the endogenous latent variables

Latent Variables	R-square (R_2)
Attitude	0.622
Intention to repurchase	0.531

Discussions

This study examined the influence of brand image, brand communication, and e-WOM on attitude, and, in turn, attitude on repurchase intention of smartphones among Malaysian consumers, with the ABC model as the theoretical foundation. Furthermore, the ABC model predicts that affective (emotional), cognitive (belief-based), and behavioural components collectively establish an individual's attitude and subsequent behaviour (Breckler, 1984). In addition, the findings confirm this theoretical model, demonstrating that affective and cognitive evaluations of brand-related factors significantly impact consumer attitudes. This consequently shapes repurchase behaviour. Notably, all four hypotheses (H1-H4) were supported, confirming interrelations in the conceptual model.

Specifically, e-WOM exerted the strongest impact on attitude (β = 0.491), highlighting the importance of peer recommendations and online reviews in shaping perceptions and emotional bonding with smartphone brands. This aligns with Cheung and Thadani (2012), who confirmed that online information sharing exerts a profound impact on consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions. Similarly, brand image positively influenced attitude (β = 0.228), in consonance with Keller (1993) and Nguyen *et al.* (2015), who emphasised that positive brand image reinforces trust and loyalty. Brand communication also significantly positively influenced attitude (β = 0.149), in consonance with Porcu *et al.* (2019), who confirmed that consistent and transparent communication creates brand credibility and consumer engagement.

Lastly, attitude significantly influenced repurchase intention (β = 0.729), corroborating existing studies (Bupalan *et al.*, 2019; Abdul Manan *et al.*, 2022) that favourable judgments by consumers have a direct influence on their intention to repurchase. Overall, this study extends the application of the ABC model by demonstrating empirically how affective and cognitive judgments formed through brand-related determinants translate to behavioural intentions in the smartphone context. Additionally, it contributes to the literature by confirming that attitude is a significant mediating variable linking brand perceptions and consumer behaviour in technology markets.

Conclusions

This study investigated the most influential factors affecting consumers' repurchase intention toward smartphones in Malaysia, using the ABC model as the theoretical framework. It revealed that brand image, brand communication, and e-WOM significantly affect consumer attitude and that attitude strongly predicts repurchase intention. Moreover, these results emphasise the mediating roles of psychological and perceptual processes in affecting repeat purchasing behaviour. Concurrently, the study adds to theory through the application of the ABC model of smartphone repurchase behaviour. It also demonstrates how effective and cognitive responses to brands build positive attitudes that shape intention to behave, adding to the body of knowledge in consumer psychology in digital product markets.

Furthermore, the findings have practical implications for smartphone marketers. Supporting brand communication efforts with consistent and engaging messages, establishing brand image on the basis of quality and credibility, and facilitating positive e-WOM through online communities can effectively develop positive attitudes and increase customer retention.

Despite the contributions, there are limitations to this research. That is the use of non-probability convenience sampling limits the generalisability of findings to the entire Malaysian population. In response, future research can employ probability sampling or longitudinal designs to examine the evolution of repurchase intentions over time. Following this, the inclusion of additional variables such as price sensitivity, perceived innovation, or product exclusivity can also provide a more complete understanding of repurchase behaviour. Consistent with this, the examination of demographic moderators (e.g., income, education, or age) can also provide additional insight into differences across consumer segments.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial, or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

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