Understanding sample product quality, purchase decision, and brand awareness of Nescafe

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the impact of sample product quality and brand awareness on consumer purchasing decisions for Nescafe coffee products in Denpasar, Indonesia, during the COVID-19 pandemic and under the Indonesian government's Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB). These restrictions limited traditional marketing channels, including direct consumer interactions that were essential to Nescafe's sampling strategy, which historically relied on face-to-face engagement to boost brand recognition and trust. The research focused on how sample quality and brand awareness influenced consumer decisions and examined whether brand awareness mediated the relationship between sample product quality and purchase intent. Using path analysis on data collected from 100 purposively sampled respondents, the study found that higher sample product quality directly improved both brand awareness and purchasing decisions. Additionally, brand awareness significantly enhanced the likelihood of a purchase and served as a mediating factor, strengthening the effect of sample product quality on purchase decisions. These findings underscored the value of high-quality sampling in building brand familiarity and consumer trust, especially when traditional marketing channels were constrained. The study suggested that brands could maintain consumer engagement and drive purchasing behavior by investing in quality-controlled sampling programs and developing robust brand awareness strategies, offering practical implications for marketing in challenging environments.

Keywords: Sample product quality, brand awareness, purchasing decisions, COVID-19 pandemic, path analysis

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on business operations worldwide, including in Indonesia (Sudjatmoko et al., 2023). With many businesses facing severe revenue declines, some companies have had to reduce staff or close entirely. To mitigate the spread of the virus, the Indonesian government implemented Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) through Government Regulation No. 21 of 2020, limiting public gatherings and activities in public spaces (Widyastuti, 2020). While crucial for public health, these restrictions posed substantial challenges for businesses reliant on direct consumer interaction, particularly those that use personal selling as a core marketing strategy.

Personal selling—direct engagement between sales personnel and consumers—serves as a powerful approach to building relationships and influencing purchasing decisions (Mangus, 2024; Prayogi et al., 2020). By allowing marketers to interact face-to-face with potential buyers, personal selling helps foster brand familiarity and trust (Aliyyah et al., 2024; Valentina et al., 2023). However, the limitations imposed by PSBB disrupted in-person marketing efforts, which was particularly challenging for Iris Worldwide in Denpasar, an agency

responsible for promoting Nescafe coffee products. Iris Worldwide's marketing strategy heavily relies on in-person sampling events to create engagement opportunities, offering samples of Nescafe products to potential consumers. This direct sampling approach allowed consumers to experience product quality firsthand, enhancing brand familiarity and trust in Nescafe's products (Dachlani & Soebiantoro, 2023; Wibowo et al., 2023). Therefore, the restrictions on public gatherings directly affected Iris Worldwide's ability to maintain these essential touchpoints with consumers.

Sample products are especially important in competitive markets such as instant coffee, where they serve as a means for consumers to assess product quality directly (Jacobi et al., 2024; Salsabillah et al., 2024; Urwin et al., 2019). Providing consumers with samples allows them to evaluate attributes like flavor, convenience, and consistency, which are essential factors influencing brand perception and purchasing decisions (Swastha & Irawan, 2013). Nescafe, targeting young consumers who favor convenient and diverse flavor options, can benefit from a sampling strategy that emphasizes quality (Dachlani & Soebiantoro, 2023). In addition to quality, brand awareness—the degree to which consumers can recognize and recall a brand—plays a critical role in influencing purchase behavior. Familiar brands generally inspire more confidence among consumers, with brand awareness contributing to a sense of trust and reliability that often guides purchasing choices (Widjaja & Pranatasari, 2018). For Nescafe, an effective sampling strategy not only highlights product quality but also reinforces brand awareness, making consumers more likely to choose Nescafe over competing coffee brands.

In this context, this study examines the effects of Nescafe's sample product quality on both brand awareness and purchasing decisions among consumers in Denpasar. It explores how product quality influences brand awareness and purchasing choices, as well as whether brand awareness acts as a mediating factor in these relationships. Through this analysis, the study aims to provide insights that may inform marketing strategies in challenging environments like the pandemic, where traditional marketing channels are restricted. This research contributes to understanding how product quality and brand perception shape consumer behavior, offering actionable implications for brands to remain competitive in times of crisis.

LITERATURE REVIEWS
Promotional Mix
The promotional mix is a combination of marketing strategies, including advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, and public relations, that companies use to reach their target market and achieve marketing goals (Tjiptono, 2002). Personal selling is especially significant in relationship-driven marketing, allowing direct communication with potential consumers. For brands like Nescafe, personal selling through sample distribution can build brand familiarity and influence purchasing behavior by letting consumers experience the product firsthand. This strategy is particularly effective in consumer markets where direct engagement strengthens trust and brand loyalty.

Sample Products
Sample products provide consumers with an opportunity to experience a brand's quality without an initial purchase commitment. Product sampling helps build brand loyalty, as it allows consumers to evaluate the product's attributes before making a buying decision (Swastha & Irawan, 2013). This approach is effective in competitive markets like instant coffee, where taste, convenience, and perceived quality are central to consumer preferences. Sampling enables brands like Nescafe to showcase their product's quality to potential customers, making it a crucial marketing tactic in expanding market reach and fostering positive brand associations.

Consumer Behavior
Consumer behavior refers to the processes through which individuals or groups select, purchase, use, or dispose of products to fulfill their needs and preferences (Solomon, 2006). This field of study is crucial in helping companies design targeted marketing strategies. Factors such as perceived quality, brand associations, and personal preferences heavily influence consumer decisions. For Nescafe, understanding consumer behavior is fundamental to crafting sampling campaigns that resonate with consumer preferences, as well as anticipating how consumers might respond to brand experiences and promotional tactics.

Purchase Decision
The purchase decision-making process is a complex evaluation in which consumers weigh alternatives, often influenced by factors such as product quality, price, and brand reliability (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000). The process involves stages like need recognition, information search, and post-purchase evaluation. For Nescafe, sample distribution offers an immediate experience of product quality, which can lead to a positive purchase decision. Sampling provides a foundation for consumers to decide based on their direct experience, especially in highly competitive markets where consumers seek confidence in the brand they choose.

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is the ability of consumers to recognize or recall a brand, which often influences purchasing decisions (Aaker, 1997). It is a key factor in consumer choice, especially in crowded markets where consumers prefer familiar brands they trust. High brand awareness often results from consistent and impactful marketing efforts, such as product sampling, which allows consumers to experience the product and form a personal connection with the brand. For Nescafe, building strong brand awareness through sampling can strengthen consumer trust and improve brand recall, ultimately supporting purchasing decisions.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges to business operations and marketing strategies globally. Restrictions such as Indonesia's Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) disrupted in-person marketing activities, limiting opportunities for direct consumer engagement (Widyastuti, 2020). For brands reliant on experiential marketing, such as Nescafe, these restrictions presented a challenge in maintaining brand presence and consumer engagement. The pandemic has led businesses to adapt by shifting to digital or alternative promotional methods to compensate for the loss of in-person interactions. This context makes it critical for brands to find innovative ways to connect with consumers while maintaining health and safety compliance.

METHODS

Research Site

This study was conducted at the Iris Worldwide agency in Denpasar, Indonesia, focusing specifically on their promotional activities for Nescafe. The choice of research site is rooted in the challenges faced by the agency due to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which have limited their usual in-person events and sample distribution. The study aims to understand how product quality and brand awareness influence purchasing decisions for Nescafe's coffee products, particularly in the context of these pandemic-induced limitations on traditional marketing channels.

Population and Sample

The population of this study includes all consumers in Denpasar, estimated at 947,100 individuals. A purposive sampling method was used, selecting respondents who meet specific criteria relevant to the study's objectives. Criteria for inclusion were consumers aged 18 or older with at least a high school education, residing in Denpasar, having prior awareness of Nescafe coffee products, and having previously made a purchase decision influenced by Nescafe's sample distribution events. This purposive approach ensures that participants are knowledgeable and capable of providing insights into their purchasing behavior and brand perception. Using Slovin's formula with a margin of error set at 10%, the final sample size was determined to be 100 respondents, which provides a manageable dataset for analysis while ensuring representative results.

Data Type and Sources

The study relies on quantitative data, primarily gathered through a structured questionnaire scored on a Likert scale. The questionnaire quantifies responses related to sample product quality, brand awareness, and purchasing decisions. The data collection includes both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through surveys distributed to consumers meeting the inclusion criteria, while secondary data were collected from books, journals, and reports relevant to the research topic, such as industry reports on brand awareness and consumer behavior in the coffee market.

Data Collection Technique

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to respondents at locations associated with Iris Worldwide's Nescafe sampling activities. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions on a Likert scale, designed to capture respondents' perceptions of sample product quality, brand awareness, and purchasing decisions. The Likert scale provides a standardized method to measure responses, facilitating reliable analysis of the relationships between variables.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis employed path analysis to examine the relationships between sample product quality, brand awareness, and purchasing decisions. Path analysis was chosen for its capacity to reveal direct and indirect effects between variables, allowing for a comprehensive examination of brand awareness as a mediating factor between product quality and purchasing decisions. This approach provides insight into the strength and significance of each variable's impact, offering a nuanced understanding of how these factors contribute to consumer decision-making.

Path analysis is a statistical technique used to examine the relationships between multiple variables,

particularly in understanding mediation effects. This method is valuable for analyzing how independent variables influence dependent variables directly and indirectly through mediating factors. In this study, path analysis is applied to assess how Nescafe's sample product quality impacts brand awareness and purchasing decisions, with brand awareness potentially mediating the relationship. Path analysis allows for a nuanced understanding of these interactions, helping to identify significant drivers of consumer decision-making in relation to product quality and brand perception.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results
Respondent Characteristic

The demographic profile of the 100 respondents reveals key insights into the consumer base for Nescafe in Denpasar. The majority of respondents (74%) are male, indicating a higher engagement with Nescafe products among male consumers. Additionally, the age distribution shows that 42% of respondents fall within the 28-37 age range, with a significant portion holding undergraduate degrees (47%) and working in the private sector (34%). These findings suggest that the primary consumers influenced by Nescafe's promotional activities are young adults with stable incomes and educational backgrounds, which could impact their purchasing decisions and brand preferences. The following data on respondent identity based on gender, age, last education, and occupation are presented in the table below.

TABLE 1. Characteristics of Respondents

No.	Characteristics	Classification	Number of Respondent (Person)	Percentage of respondent (%)
1	Gender	Female	26	26.0
		Male	74	74.0
	Total		100	100,00
2	Age	18-27 Year	11	11.0
		28-37 Year	42	42.0
		38-47 Year	29	29.0
		48-57 Year	13	13.0
		> 57 Year	5	5.0
	Total		100	100,00
3	Latest Education	High school	10	10.0
		Diploma	16	16.0
		S1	47	47.0
		S2	15	15.0
		S3	12	12.0
	Total		100	100,00
4	Based on Employment	Scholar	12	12.0
		Government employee	23	23.0
		Private employee	34	34.0
		Enterpreneur	26	26.0
		Other	5	5.0
	Total		100	100,00

Source: Primary data processed, 2021

The table shows that the majority of respondents who have a purchase decision at Iris Worldwide Denpasar are male respondents. This indicates that the majority of male respondents are more interested in buying Nescafe coffee products due to an event held by the Iris agency (Nescafe) in Denpasar compared to women. The data shows that the majority of respondents are consumers who have graduated from undergraduate education with an age range of 28 to 37 years and work as private employees respondents belonging to this group tend to have a fixed income every month so that they are able to purchase Nescafe coffee products due to events that occur. implemented by the Iris agency (Nescafe) in Denpasar.

Outer Model Testing
Validity Test

Each item in the questionnaire underwent a validity test to determine if it reliably measured the intended variable. A correlation coefficient of above 0.30 for all items confirmed their validity at a 5% significance level. The table

2 summarizes these findings, indicating that statements related to sample product quality, brand awareness, and purchasing decisions are valid indicators within the research instrument. The results of the recapitulation of the validity test in this study are presented below.

TABLE 2. Validity Test Results

No.	Variable	Items Statement	Correlation Total Items	Sig. (2-tailed)	Information
1	Sample product quality (X)	X_1	0,866	0,000	Valid
		X_2	0,844	0,000	Valid
		X_3	0,854	0,000	Valid
2	Brand awareness (M)	M_1	0,827	0,000	Valid
		M_2	0,764	0,000	Valid
		M_3	0,790	0,000	Valid
3	Purchase decision (Y)	Y_1	0,824	0,000	Valid
		Y_2	0,748	0,000	Valid
		Y_3	0,800	0,000	Valid
		Y_4	0,733	0,000	Valid
		Y_5	0,615	0,000	Valid

Source: Primary data processed, 2021

The results of the validity test show that all variables, namely brand awareness, sample product quality, and purchasing decisions have a coefficient value with a total score of all statement items greater than 0.30. This shows that the statement items in the research instrument are valid.

Reliability Test

To assess the internal consistency of the variables, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated, yielding values above 0.60 for all variables, which indicates reliable measurement. The sample product quality variable achieved a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.810, while brand awareness and purchasing decisions scored 0.702 and 0.798, respectively, suggesting high reliability in capturing respondent perceptions on these topics. The recapitulation of the research instrument reliability test results can be seen in the Table below.

TABLE 3. Summary of Reliability Test Results

No.	Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Information
1	Sample product quality (X)	0,810	Reliable
2	Brand awareness (M)	0,702	Reliable
3	Purchase decision (Y)	0,798	Reliable

The reliability test results show that the three research instruments namely purchasing decisions, sample product quality and brand awareness have Cronbach's Alpha coefficients greater than 0.60. This shows that all instruments are reliable so that they can be used to conduct research.

Path Analysis Results

The results of the path analysis illustrate both the direct and indirect effects between the study's variables. Path analysis was used to examine the relationships between sample product quality, brand awareness, and purchasing decisions, with a focus on brand awareness as a mediating factor.

- Effect of Sample Product Quality on Brand Awareness: The analysis indicates that sample product quality has a significant positive effect on brand awareness ($\beta = 0.866$, $p < 0.05$). This finding implies that higher-quality Nescafe sample products contribute positively to consumers' ability to recall and recognize the brand, aligning with previous research that emphasizes the role of product experience in brand perception.
- Effect of Sample Product Quality on Purchasing Decisions: Sample product quality was also found to have a significant direct impact on purchasing decisions ($\beta = 0.854$, $p < 0.05$). This result suggests that when consumers perceive the sample product to be of high quality, they are more likely to make a purchasing decision in favor of Nescafe. This aligns with previous studies highlighting the importance of perceived quality in influencing consumer choice.
- Effect of Brand Awareness on Purchasing Decisions: The analysis also showed that brand awareness positively influences purchasing decisions ($\beta = 0.790$, $p < 0.05$). This finding reinforces the idea that consumers are more inclined to purchase brands they recognize and trust, suggesting that brand awareness contributes to increased purchasing intentions by enhancing familiarity and perceived

reliability.

- Mediating Role of Brand Awareness: The path analysis results demonstrate that brand awareness significantly mediates the relationship between sample product quality and purchasing decisions. This indirect effect (sample product quality → brand awareness → purchasing decision) suggests that brand awareness strengthens the influence of product quality on purchasing decisions, highlighting the importance of both product experience and brand familiarity in driving consumer choices.

Discussion

This study highlights the significant role of sample product quality and brand awareness in influencing purchasing decisions for Nescafe in Denpasar. The findings align with previous research that emphasizes the impact of product quality and brand familiarity on consumer choice, particularly within competitive product markets like instant coffee. Each of the study's key relationships is discussed in detail below, along with implications for marketing strategies and brand management.

Effect of Sample Product Quality on Brand Awareness

The results demonstrate a strong positive effect of sample product quality on brand awareness, supporting Swastha & Irawan (2013) assertion that product sampling allows consumers to experience and evaluate a brand firsthand. When consumers perceive high quality in the product samples they try, they are more likely to recognize and recall the brand favorably. This suggests that product sampling when executed with attention to quality, serves as an effective tool for establishing brand awareness. For Nescafe, which targets young consumers, the quality of samples distributed at events plays a pivotal role in solidifying the brand's image in consumers' minds, potentially giving Nescafe a competitive edge in an increasingly crowded coffee market.

This study supports the results of research which states that the perception of product quality has a significant positive effect on brand awareness (Fenetta, 2019; Saputra, 2022). This means that the better the perception of product quality, it can increase brand awareness of the product so that consumers can easily make purchasing decisions. Sienatra & Pranedya (2020) in their research stated that brand awareness is a variable that is able to mediate the influence on purchasing decisions.

Effect of Sample Product Quality on Purchasing Decisions

The study further reveals that sample product quality has a direct and positive impact on consumers' purchasing decisions. This finding supports the idea that perceived product quality is a fundamental driver of consumer choice (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000). When consumers experience a high-quality sample, they are more inclined to purchase because they trust the product to meet their expectations. For Nescafe, this highlights the importance of maintaining high standards in their sampling products, as quality assurance during sampling directly contributes to purchase conversions. Investing in quality control for samples can thus reinforce consumer trust and lead to higher purchase rates, particularly when consumers value quality in a product category as personal as coffee.

This study supports several previous research results and is consistent with the results of research which states that product quality has a positive and significant effect on the consumer purchasing decision process (Anggraini et al., 2023). This means that the better the quality of the product, the higher the purchase decision will be. Similar studies also found that product quality had a positive effect on purchasing decisions (Ekawati & Aryadirda, 2018; Handayani & Sutawijaya, 2024; Sihombing et al., 2023; Silka Halyana, 2024; Sutrisno et al., 2020).

Effect of Brand Awareness on Purchasing Decisions

The study's findings also confirm that brand awareness significantly influences purchasing decisions. This result is consistent with Aaker (1997) concept of brand awareness, where familiarity and recognition contribute to consumer confidence and preference. Consumers tend to favor brands they recognize and trust, especially in familiar product categories. For Nescafe, this implies that sustained efforts to enhance brand visibility and recall could significantly impact purchasing behavior. Building brand awareness through consistent messaging, memorable packaging, and strategic positioning will likely strengthen consumer loyalty and preference, making Nescafe the brand of choice in competitive retail settings.

This study supports several previous research results and is consistent with research results that state that brand awareness is very influential on purchasing decisions because brand awareness is the level of sensitivity to recognize or remember a brand so that consumers will tend to buy brands that are already known (Endyana & Ardani, 2019). It feels safe with something that is already known. The role of brand awareness can be understood by examining how brand awareness creates value. The higher level of awareness about the brand means that the product is in the minds of consumers before other brands. Brand awareness has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention, with higher awareness of the brand, the consumer's intention to buy the product will increase (Eliasari & Sukaatmadja, 2017). Similar studies obtained the results that brand awareness is positive and partially

Mediating Role of Brand Awareness

Based on the results of the Sobel test, it was found that there was a positive influence between the sample product quality variables on purchasing decisions through the brand awareness variable. This shows that the higher the quality of sample products obtained by consumers, the higher their purchase intentions, with brand awareness as a mediator can encourage consumers to further strengthen their purchasing decisions. The results of this study are supported by previous research conducted by Saputra (2022) which states that brand awareness fully mediates the effect of product quality perceptions on purchasing decisions. With this brand awareness, consumers can create their perceptions of product quality, so that consumers can easily make purchasing decisions. Anggraini et al. (2023) in their research also stated that product quality has a positive and significant effect on the consumer purchasing decision process. This means that the better the quality of the product, the higher the purchase decision will be. Brand awareness is very influential on purchasing decisions because brand awareness is the level of sensitivity to recognize or remember a brand so consumers will tend to buy brands that are already known because they feel safe with something that is already known (Endyana & Ardani, 2019). The role of brand awareness can be understood by examining how brand awareness creates value. The higher level of awareness about the brand, it means that the product is in the minds of consumers before other brands. Brand awareness has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention, with higher awareness of the brand, the consumer's intention to buy the product will increase (Eliasari & Sukaatmadja, 2017).

Practical Implications

For Nescafe and similar brands, these findings underscore the importance of high-quality sampling programs combined with brand awareness initiatives. Given the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited traditional sampling events, Nescafe may benefit from exploring digital engagement and at-home sampling options to maintain brand visibility and engagement. Additionally, reinforcing brand recognition through consistent digital advertising, attractive packaging, and targeted promotions can further leverage brand awareness as a mediating factor, making it easier for consumers to connect positive product experiences with the brand.

Furthermore, focusing on younger, urban consumers who are particularly responsive to sample quality could maximize the impact of these strategies. By investing in quality control and consistent branding across physical and digital channels, Nescafe can build a loyal consumer base that associates the brand with reliability and high quality, thereby increasing both initial purchases and repeat buys in the long term.

This study contributes to the understanding of how sample product quality and brand awareness drive purchasing decisions, particularly in the context of a global crisis that limits direct consumer engagement. For brands like Nescafe, emphasizing both quality in sampling and strategies to enhance brand recall are essential for maintaining consumer trust and driving purchase intentions. These insights can inform strategic adjustments in Nescafe's marketing efforts, helping the brand remain competitive despite shifting consumer expectations and promotional constraints.

CONCLUSION
Conclusion

The study concludes that the quality of the sample product has a positive and significant impact on brand awareness. Specifically, as the quality of the Nescafe sample product provided by Iris Worldwide Denpasar improves, there is a corresponding increase in brand awareness of Nescafe instant coffee products. Additionally, the quality of the sample product significantly influences purchasing decisions, showing that high-quality samples positively affect consumers' decisions to purchase Nescafe products.

Furthermore, brand awareness plays a crucial role in purchasing decisions. The study indicates that as brand awareness of Nescafe products grows in the minds of consumers, the likelihood of making a purchase also increases. Brand awareness also serves as an effective mediator between sample product quality and purchasing decisions. This means that high-quality samples not only enhance brand awareness but also reinforce consumers' purchasing decisions, with brand awareness acting as a strengthening mediator.

To provide a more comprehensive understanding, the study could benefit from an expanded scope. This study was limited to consumers in Denpasar, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research might explore other geographic areas or demographic groups to provide a broader perspective on brand awareness and purchasing behaviors. Additionally, incorporating qualitative insights on consumer motivations could offer a deeper understanding of Nescafe's brand positioning and consumer preferences.

These findings underscore the effectiveness of sample distribution as a tool for enhancing both brand awareness and purchase intention. The strong influence of sample product quality on both brand awareness and purchasing decisions suggests that companies like Nescafe could benefit from maintaining a high standard for product samples. Additionally, the mediation effect of brand awareness indicates that Nescafe's sampling

campaigns could be more impactful if coupled with strategies to reinforce brand recognition, such as consistent branding across digital and physical platforms. By doing so, Nescafe can potentially increase consumer trust and drive higher purchase conversion rates, even in a competitive market.

Recommendations

To improve Nescafe's brand presence and consumer appeal, several actionable recommendations are suggested. First, enhancing product packaging could make Nescafe instant coffee products more visually appealing. Since not all respondents found the current model and design attractive, Nescafe could consider packaging styles that stand out. Suggestions include adopting minimalist or eco-friendly designs, utilizing vibrant colors, and incorporating unique design elements that resonate with the brand's identity. These changes can help Nescafe capture consumer attention and distinguish itself from competitors.

Second, increasing brand distinctiveness could elevate Nescafe's brand recognition. The study found that some respondents had difficulty distinguishing Nescafe from other instant coffee brands. To address this, Nescafe could introduce targeted digital campaigns that emphasize unique product attributes, engage in local event sponsorships to build community connections, or partner with influencers to expand brand visibility. These efforts can help build a stronger brand identity and ensure Nescafe stands out in a competitive market.

Finally, incentivizing purchasing decisions could encourage more immediate consumer action, especially among respondents in Denpasar. Nescafe could introduce promotions such as "buy one, get one free" or seasonal discounts to appeal to value-conscious consumers. Additionally, implementing a customer loyalty program that rewards frequent buyers could further strengthen consumer retention and encourage repeat purchases.

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