

Consumer Perceptions of Dynamic Pricing in the Electronics Industry: A Case in Makassar City

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Abstract

Dynamic pricing has proliferated across global electronics retail, yet consumer responses to this practice remain critically underexplored in emerging economies. This qualitative study examines consumer perceptions of dynamic pricing in Makassar City's electronics retail sector, conducted through 27 in-depth interviews and 7 focus group discussions involving 76 participants, and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Five interconnected themes emerged: (1) fragmented awareness—consumers recognize price fluctuations but misattribute them to external economic forces rather than deliberate retailer strategies; (2) conditional fairness—cost-justified variations are acceptable, whereas opaque algorithmic personalization triggers strong unfairness judgments; (3) emotional ambivalence oscillating between excitement at price decreases and betrayal at unexpected increases; (4) strategic decision paralysis manifesting as purchase postponement and compulsive price monitoring; and (5) systematic trust erosion transforming loyal customers into price-sensitive switchers and generating retaliatory negative word-of-mouth. The study introduces the "ignorance dividend"—temporary retailer advantages derived from consumer unawareness that carry substantial latent backlash risks as digital literacy spreads—and documents a dynamic pricing paradox wherein algorithmic optimization paradoxically contracts rather than expands demand. A digital literacy divide further creates de facto price discrimination, favoring sophisticated consumers while leaving vulnerable populations subject to unrecognized exploitation. Theoretically, this research challenges the universality of Western fairness models, demonstrating that fairness perceptions are fundamentally context-dependent and culturally contingent. Practically, the findings call for transparency-enhancing pricing strategies and regulatory frameworks that address information asymmetries in digitally-mediated commerce, affirming that sustainable competitive advantage derives from trust-based relationships rather than short-term algorithmic exploitation.

Keywords: Dynamic Pricing, Consumer Perception, Electronics Industry, Purchasing Behavior, Emerging Markets

1. Introduction

The contemporary electronics industry operates within an increasingly volatile landscape characterized by rapid technological advancement, fluctuating exchange rates, and shortened product life cycles. Dynamic pricing has emerged as a pervasive strategic response, enabling retailers to adjust prices in real-time based on demand patterns, competitive pressures, and inventory dynamics (Kopalle et al., 2023). While extensively studied in hospitality and airlines, its application in consumer electronics—particularly in emerging markets—remains critically underexplored.

Indonesia, as Southeast Asia's largest economy with a digital consumer market projected to reach \$300 billion by 2025, presents a compelling investigative context (UNCTAD, 2020). Makassar City, as Eastern Indonesia's major commercial hub, exemplifies the collision



between traditional consumer expectations and algorithmically-driven pricing strategies across both online and brick-and-mortar electronics retail. Theoretical frameworks suggest that fairness perceptions are shaped by reference price mechanisms and equity theory, wherein consumers evaluate transactions by comparing their input-output ratios against reference parties (Xia & Monroe, 2010; Priester et al., 2020). Dynamic pricing fundamentally challenges these frameworks by introducing price variability across occasions, channels, and individual profiles. Negative fairness perceptions reliably emerge when fluctuations appear arbitrary or when pricing logic lacks transparency (Alderighi et al., 2022; Malc et al., 2016).

In emerging markets where relational fairness norms and negotiation traditions prevail, algorithmically opaque pricing may generate consumer responses diverging substantially from Western patterns. Intriguingly, YouGov's (2024) cross-national survey found Indonesian consumers exhibited the highest dynamic pricing acceptance among 17 markets—69% considering it fair, contrasting sharply with Western majority opposition—an anomaly demanding context-specific theoretical explanation.

Consumer electronics intensify these dynamics through rapid technological obsolescence, creating significant temporal value variation (Chenavaz & De Giovanni, 2025). The digitalization of retail through platforms such as Tokopedia, Shopee, and Lazada simultaneously enhances price transparency while enabling granular personalization—paradoxically giving consumers more comparison information while exposing them to more complex discriminatory pricing (Ashiq & Hussain, 2024). When perceived as exploitative, such practices risk eroding the brand trust, particularly critical in developing markets where institutional consumer protection remains nascent (Haws & Bearden, 2006; Wattoo et al., 2025).

Critical gaps persist in the literature. Existing research predominantly focuses on developed Western markets, neglecting cultural variations in commercial equity norms and information asymmetry tolerance (Cohen et al., 2025). Emotional and behavioral consequences beyond immediate purchase intentions—particularly long-term loyalty and word-of-mouth—remain underexplored. Demographic moderators of pricing perceptions, including age, income, and digital literacy, are insufficiently theorized despite evidence of distinct generational adaptation strategies.

This study addresses these gaps by qualitatively exploring consumer perceptions of dynamic pricing in Makassar's electronics retail sector across five dimensions: (1) awareness of price fluctuation mechanisms; (2) perceived fairness relative to traditional pricing norms; (3) emotional responses to variable pricing; (4) impacts on purchase decision-making; and (5) consumer adaptation strategies. By examining these dimensions across diverse demographic segments, the study illuminates how cultural context, institutional environment, and digital literacy mediate fairness perceptions and behavioral responses—contributing to a more globally representative understanding of dynamic pricing while challenging the Western-centric assumptions that have long dominated pricing research.

2. Literature Review

Dynamic pricing is theoretically grounded in microeconomic price discrimination principles, where firms capture consumer surplus by segmenting markets based on willingness

to pay. Classical models assume rational consumers with complete information—an assumption increasingly untenable in digital marketplaces. Systematic reviews confirm exponential growth in dynamic pricing research, particularly around AI integration, clustering around financial modeling, market dynamics, commodity markets, and behavioral decision-making (Chenavaz & Dimitrov, 2025). Yet theoretical fragmentation persists: Kopalle et al. (2023) note that its fundamental definition remains contested, ranging from temporal price variation to algorithmic personalization—a conceptual ambiguity with significant implications for how dynamic pricing affects consumer psychology (Cohen et al., 2025).

Fairness perceptions represent the most extensively studied dimension of dynamic pricing, predominantly explained through equity theory and dual entitlement principles, whereby consumers evaluate prices against reference points to assess whether fluctuations reflect legitimate cost changes or exploitative extraction (Alderighi et al., 2022). Negative fairness judgments reliably emerge when price changes appear arbitrary, unjustified, or discriminatory (Priester et al., 2020). Critically, fairness is neither universal nor determined solely by price magnitude—contextual framing, temporal factors, and individual differences substantially moderate responses (Alderighi et al., 2022). A particularly paradoxical pattern emerges in algorithmic pricing: some studies find that algorithmic attribution attenuates perceived unfairness through diffused moral responsibility, while others document amplified outrage at perceived data manipulation (Taylor, 2025; Wang et al., 2025). This inconsistency confirms that fairness perceptions are fundamentally shaped by attribution processes, transparency signals, and cultural schemas—not merely objective price differentials.

Trust is a multidimensional construct encompassing competence beliefs and benevolence perceptions; opaque or discriminatory pricing threatens both dimensions by signaling either incompetence or exploitative intent (Senali et al., 2024; Qian, 2025). Cross-market evidence reveals that trust formation differs substantially by context: Austrian consumers exhibit experience-mediated trust development, while Moldovan consumers display more uniform trust-loyalty relationships regardless of prior online experience (Quintus et al., 2024)—challenging the universality of Western behavioral models. Perceived price fairness mediates the relationship between pricing practices and trust, with discrimination triggering psychological contract violation, consumer cynicism, and ultimately reduced purchase intention, brand switching, and retaliatory negative word-of-mouth (Sahabuddin et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025).

AI-driven pricing has transformed dynamic pricing from temporal adjustment to granular individual personalization based on browsing history, purchase patterns, and behavioral signals—with discrimination rates exceeding 50% in certain markets (Wu et al., 2022). Consumer responses are complex: while economic theory predicts rational evaluation of personalized prices, behavioral evidence shows that awareness of algorithmic discrimination triggers betrayal, anger, and retaliatory intent even among beneficiaries (Wu et al., 2022). Attribution dimensions matter critically—algorithmic versus human agency, perceived data exploitation, and transparency all moderate reactions (Zhang & Cheng, 2024; Lu et al., 2025). A key paradox emerges: consumers continue purchasing from platforms known to employ discrimination, suggesting that lock-in effects and lack of alternatives override fairness concerns in actual behavior—even when violations are consciously recognized.

Dynamic pricing research remains overwhelmingly concentrated in developed Western markets, undermining theoretical generalizability. Emerging markets present distinct moderating conditions: lower digital literacy, different fairness norms, weaker consumer protection institutions, and greater price sensitivity (Quintus et al., 2024). Cross-national data reveal striking variation: Indonesian consumers exhibit among the highest acceptance globally—69% considering dynamic pricing fair compared to majority opposition in most Western markets (YouGov, 2024). This anomaly may reflect cultural price negotiation norms, lower algorithm awareness, or different reference price formation. Studies on AI-driven pricing in Southeast Asian tourism suggest fairness perceptions exert weaker effects on satisfaction than anticipated, with consumers prioritizing affordability over process fairness when algorithmic mechanisms remain poorly understood (Nguyen, 2025)—collectively indicating that dynamic pricing effects are fundamentally contingent on market development, regulation, and cultural context.

Critical gaps constrain both theory and practice. First, sectoral imbalance persists, with consumer electronics—characterized by high purchase involvement and rapid obsolescence—understudied despite its distinct characteristics. Second, methodological overreliance on quantitative experiments sacrifices the ecological validity needed to understand how consumers experience, interpret, and adapt to dynamic pricing in naturalistic settings. Third, temporal dynamics are insufficiently addressed, with most studies capturing immediate reactions rather than longitudinal trust erosion. Fourth, consumer heterogeneity—including digital literacy, demographics, and experience—remains underexplored, particularly critical in rapidly digitalizing emerging markets. Fifth, strategic consumer adaptation (price monitoring, strategic timing, privacy tools) remains nascent as a research domain. Addressing these gaps demands methodological pluralism, explicit contextual sensitivity, and integrative frameworks encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of consumer response to algorithmically-mediated pricing.

3. Methods

This study employs a qualitative interpretive phenomenological design grounded in constructivist epistemology, recognizing that consumer perceptions of fairness and trust are socially constructed rather than objective realities—particularly relevant in emerging market contexts where Western pricing fairness models may inadequately capture local meaning-making processes (Lim, 2025; Chand, 2025).

Data were collected through two complementary methods: in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). IDIs excel at generating personal narratives and nuanced individual perceptions, while FGDs reveal collective attitudes and social construction of fairness judgments through group dynamics (Hagaman et al., 2025; Chand, 2025). Together, they enable methodological triangulation to enhance credibility and illuminate contextual variability (Geampana & Perrotta, 2025).

Participants were selected through purposive maximum variation sampling across four dimensions: age (18–30, 31–45, 46–60, 60+), income level (low, middle, high), digital literacy (low, moderate, high), and purchase frequency (occasional, regular, frequent). Phase one consisted of 24–30 semi-structured IDIs (lasting 45–75 minutes each), covering five domains:

price fluctuation awareness, fairness evaluations, emotional responses, decision-making adaptations, and retailer trust. Phase two comprised 6–8 FGDs (6–8 participants each), using vignette-based scenarios—such as discovering price increases or observing cross-channel price differences—to ground discussions in concrete experiential contexts (Chand, 2025). Sample sizes align with empirical guidelines for achieving meaning saturation in thematic analysis (Wutich et al., 2024).

Data analysis follows Braun and Clarke's six-phase reflexive thematic analysis: familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and analytical writing—treating researcher subjectivity as an analytical resource through systematic reflexivity and analytic memo-keeping (Kharbat & Ngah, 2025; Naeem et al., 2023). Trustworthiness follows Lincoln and Guba's criteria: credibility via member checking and investigator triangulation; dependability through transparent audit trails; confirmability through reflexive positionality; and transferability through thick description. All procedures received institutional ethics approval, with informed consent, pseudonymization, and voluntary participation strictly observed.

Table 1. Summary method research

Component	Description
Research Design	Qualitative, interpretive phenomenology; constructivist epistemology
Data Collection	In-depth interviews (IDIs) + focus group discussions (FGDs)
Sample Size	24–30 IDIs; 6–8 FGDs (6–8 participants each)
Sampling Strategy	Purposive maximum variation: age, income, digital literacy, purchase experience
Setting	Makassar City, South Sulawesi, Indonesia
Data Analysis	Reflexive thematic analysis — Braun & Clarke's six-phase framework
Quality Criteria	Credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability (Lincoln & Guba)

4. Results and Discussion

Reflexive thematic analysis of 27 in-depth interviews and 7 focus group discussions (76 participants total) yielded five overarching themes. The sample achieved strong demographic heterogeneity: age cohorts (18–30: 26%; 31–45: 30%; 46–60: 22%; 60+: 22%), income levels (low: 33%; middle: 37%; high: 30%), digital literacy (low: 30%; moderate: 37%; high: 33%), and purchase frequency (occasional: 26%; regular: 41%; frequent: 33%). Data saturation was reached after the 23rd interview and the 6th focus group. The analytical process generated 387 initial codes, refined into 24 sub-themes, and synthesized into five major themes.

Theme 1: Fragmented Awareness and Attribution Confusion

While nearly all participants (23/27 interviews; 6/7 focus groups) acknowledged encountering price fluctuations, their explanatory frameworks were largely inaccurate. Most attributed variations to macroeconomic forces—particularly currency volatility and supply chain costs—rather than deliberate retailer strategy. Andi (male, 34, middle income, moderate digital literacy) noted: "Prices for laptops change because of the dollar rate and shipping from China—it's the economy, not the store." Digital literacy emerged as a critical moderator: highly literate consumers recognized algorithmic pricing mechanisms, though understanding remained incomplete, while low-literacy consumers rejected the concept entirely when presented with it. This literacy divide has direct consequences for fairness evaluations, as

consumers without conceptual frameworks for dynamic pricing cannot meaningfully assess its legitimacy or develop effective counter-strategies.

Theme 2: Conditional Fairness—Context-Dependent Legitimacy Evaluations

Fairness perceptions were fundamentally conditional rather than absolute, contingent on perceived justification and transparency. Cost-justified variations—attributed to currency shifts, supply disruptions, or product lifecycle—were deemed acceptable, while opaque algorithmic personalization triggered strong unfairness judgments even for modest price differences. Budi (male, 52, low income) articulated this boundary: "If an old phone gets cheaper when a new model launches, that's fair. But if my friend pays a different price for the same phone on the same day, that's cheating." Notably, Indonesian cultural norms around negotiation shaped evaluations in domain-specific ways: participants accepted differential pricing in traditional markets but applied stricter equality expectations in modern retail, where visible fixed-price tags signal uniform pricing. Siti (female, 41, middle income) explained: "In traditional markets, different customers pay different prices—that's normal. But in modern stores, if they secretly charge some people more, that breaks trust."

Theme 3: Emotional Ambivalence—From Excitement to Exploitation

Dynamic pricing generated pronounced emotional ambivalence, with affective responses varying sharply by price direction and perceived intent. Price decreases—especially flash sales and notifications—produced excitement and a sense of "winning." Rina (female, 25, high income) described: "When something I've been watching drops in price, I feel like I've won—like the system is working for me." Conversely, unexpected price increases triggered frustration, anger, and perceived betrayal; 11 interview participants and 4 focus groups spontaneously used terms connoting deception or manipulation when describing such experiences. A significant source of anxiety was timing uncertainty—stress around when to purchase and fear of post-purchase regret. These findings indicate that dynamic pricing imposes psychological costs on consumers that extend well beyond financial impact.

Theme 4: Strategic Decision Paralysis and Behavioral Adaptation

Price variability fundamentally disrupted purchase decision-making, inducing both paralysis and adaptive behavior. A dominant pattern was deliberate purchase postponement, even for urgently needed products. Hasan (male, 36, low income) recounted: "I needed a phone for work but kept waiting for a price drop. I checked every day for three weeks—and two days after I finally bought it, the price actually fell." This monitoring cycle represents a form of decision paralysis where perpetual timing uncertainty prevents commitment. Simultaneously, frequent purchasers developed sophisticated adaptive strategies—systematic price tracking via screenshots, dedicated applications, and social media communities sharing price intelligence. This behavioral evolution suggests that sustained exposure to dynamic pricing cultivates increasingly adversarial consumer orientations, with potential demand-contracting consequences for retailers.

Theme 5: Erosion of Trust and Contingent Loyalty

Perceived pricing unfairness systematically eroded both affective trust (beliefs about retailer benevolence) and calculative trust (confidence in receiving fair value). Critically, trust erosion generalized beyond pricing to encompass broader suspicions about product authenticity and service integrity. Dewi (female, 45, middle income) explained: "After I found out they were changing prices constantly, I started wondering what else they weren't telling me—are the products genuine? Are warranties real? Once trust is lost in one area, it spreads to everything." Behavioral consequences were substantial: 19/27 interview participants reported reducing purchases from retailers perceived to employ unfair pricing; 22/27 reported actively warning family and friends. Importantly, loyalty proved brand-specific: product brand loyalty (Samsung, Apple) remained relatively stable, while retail platform loyalty (Tokopedia, Shopee) was highly contingent on pricing fairness—suggesting dynamic pricing primarily damages retailer rather than manufacturer brands.

Collectively, these five themes reveal dynamic pricing as a phenomenon generating awareness gaps, conditional fairness evaluations, emotional ambivalence, strategic behavioral adaptation, and systemic trust erosion—outcomes with significant implications for both consumer welfare and retailer strategy in emerging market contexts.

Table 3. Overview of Major Themes and Sub-themes

Theme	Sub-themes	Core Description
1. Fragmented Awareness	Superficial recognition; misattribution; digital literacy divide	Price fluctuations are recognized but attributed to external economic forces, not retailer strategy
2. Conditional Fairness	Cost-justified acceptance; rejection of personalization; cultural norms	Fairness contingent on perceived justification and transparency, not price magnitude
3. Emotional Ambivalence	Positive affect (decreases); betrayal (increases); timing anxiety	Mixed emotions ranging from excitement to perceived exploitation
4. Strategic Decision Paralysis	Purchase postponement; price monitoring; platform switching	Price variability induces hesitation and sophisticated adaptive counter-strategies
5. Trust Erosion	Benevolence deterioration; contingent loyalty; negative WOM	Unfair pricing erodes trust broadly, converting loyal customers into price-sensitive switchers

4.1. Discussion

The finding that consumers attribute price fluctuations to macroeconomic forces rather than retailer strategy fundamentally challenges the cognitive sophistication assumed by equity theory and dual entitlement frameworks (Xia et al., 2004; Bolton et al., 2003). This misattribution creates an "ignorance dividend"—undetected algorithmic discrimination benefiting retailers in the short term—yet carries substantial latent risk: as digital literacy spreads through social networks, sudden consumer awareness of systematic price manipulation may trigger disproportionate backlash (Zhang et al., 2022). The digital literacy divide further reveals that dynamic pricing may inadvertently constitute de facto discrimination based on literacy rather than willingness to pay, raising ethical concerns beyond those addressed in existing literature (Priester et al., 2020).

The conditional fairness evaluations observed challenge the universality of Western fairness models. Participants' invocation of traditional market negotiation norms as evaluative reference points complicates standard reference price theory, suggesting fairness reflects cultural expectations about commercial relationships rather than price magnitude alone (Scherhauer et al., 2024). This finding partially explains Indonesian consumers' anomalously high dynamic pricing acceptance (YouGov, 2024)—not as endorsement of algorithmic

personalization, but as attribution to familiar market forces. Critically, cultural tolerance for price variability does not extend to perceived deception: the ethical threshold hinges on transparency and consumer agency, requiring culturally-attuned implementation strategies (Nguyen et al., 2025).

The emotional ambivalence and decision paralysis documented reveal a fundamental paradox: algorithmic optimization designed to maximize efficiency may undermine its own objectives by imposing psychological costs—timing anxiety, compulsive monitoring, post-purchase regret—that outweigh economic benefits (Kahneman, 2011; Malc et al., 2016). The emergence of adversarial consumer counter-strategies resembles game-theoretic escalation cycles fundamentally incompatible with relationship marketing paradigms central to emerging market commerce (Li et al., 2021; Wattoo et al., 2025). Critically, evidence suggests that dynamic pricing may contract overall demand rather than merely shift it temporally, as friction costs exceed consumer reservation values for marginal purchases.

Trust erosion extended beyond pricing dissatisfaction to encompass suspicion regarding product authenticity, warranty validity, and general business integrity—confirming that trust operates as a gestalt rather than domain-specific perception (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Xu & Liu, 2023). The distinction between stable product brand loyalty and contingent retail platform loyalty reveals that in digitally-mediated electronics markets, dynamic pricing serves as a critical platform differentiator—but in low-switching-cost environments, pricing unfairness rapidly converts loyal customers into active detractors whose retaliatory word-of-mouth may inflict reputational damage exceeding any short-term revenue gains (Victor et al., 2024).

Three boundary conditions merit emphasis. First, the ignorance dividend is temporary and ethically problematic, dissipating as digital literacy advances. Second, Indonesia's high acceptance of price variability reflects specific cultural schemas distinguishing transparent market-driven variation from opaque exploitation—not blanket algorithmic endorsement. Third, trust erosion and adversarial dynamics suggest dynamic pricing may be fundamentally incompatible with relationship marketing strategies, forcing a strategic choice between transactional optimization and relational investment.

Future research should examine the temporal dynamics of pricing literacy development and comparative cross-market investigations across varying cultural and institutional contexts. For policymakers, these findings underscore the urgency of regulatory frameworks mandating algorithmic transparency, establishing fairness guardrails, and creating consumer education initiatives that address information asymmetries (Cohen et al., 2025). Ultimately, sustainable competitive advantage in emerging markets derives from trust-based relationships grounded in transparency and fairness—not short-term algorithmic rent extraction from consumer unawareness.

Table 5. Synthesis of Theoretical Contributions and Practical Implications

Finding	Theoretical Contribution	Managerial Implication
Attribution Confusion	Reveals "ignorance dividend"; challenges fairness theory assumptions	Proactive transparency before digital literacy spreads
Conditional Fairness	Demonstrates cultural contingency of fairness thresholds	Frame pricing using culturally familiar negotiation norms
Emotional Ambivalence	Documents psychological costs beyond financial considerations	Balance optimization against consumer well-being

Decision Paralysis	Reveals the demand-contracting paradox of algorithmic pricing	Implement price stability zones; recognize monitoring as a warning signal
Trust Erosion	Differentiates retail vs. product brand loyalty; shows trust spillover	Monitor negative WOM as an early indicator of relational deterioration

5. Conclusion

This study reveals that dynamic pricing in Makassar's electronics retail sector generates awareness gaps, conditional fairness evaluations, emotional ambivalence, decision paralysis, and systematic trust erosion—collectively challenging the viability of Western-derived algorithmic pricing models in emerging market contexts. The apparent high acceptance of dynamic pricing among Indonesian consumers masks critical underlying tensions: consumers tolerate transparent, cost-justified price variations while rejecting opaque algorithmic personalization as exploitative—a distinction rooted in cultural negotiation norms privileging visible fairness over invisible optimization. The digital literacy divide further exposes an ethical problem wherein sophisticated consumers develop counter-strategies while vulnerable populations remain subject to undetected price discrimination, constituting inadvertent but consequential market stratification.

Theoretically, this research demonstrates that fairness perceptions are context-dependent, culturally contingent, and attribution-sensitive rather than universal responses to objective price differentials—necessitating culturally-grounded frameworks over one-size-fits-all models. The "ignorance dividend" concept captures retailers' temporary advantage from consumer unawareness, while the dynamic pricing paradox reveals how algorithmic optimization may contract rather than expand demand through decision paralysis and trust erosion.

Practically, retailers must shift from purely algorithmic optimization toward transparency-enhancing, relationship-preserving implementations that recognize pricing as embedded within broader trust ecosystems. Price stability zones, justification frameworks, and fairness communication are essential investments—not optional enhancements—particularly given that negative word-of-mouth in tight social networks can inflict reputational damage far exceeding short-term revenue gains. For policymakers, findings underscore the urgent need for regulatory frameworks mandating algorithmic transparency, establishing fairness guardrails, and investing in digital literacy programs.

This study is limited by its geographic specificity to Makassar and its cross-sectional qualitative design, which precludes causal inference or generalization across Indonesia's diverse markets. Future research should employ longitudinal and mixed-methods designs across varied cultural and institutional contexts. Ultimately, sustainable competitive advantage derives not from exploiting information asymmetries but from trust-based relationships grounded in transparency, fairness, and genuine commitment to consumer welfare.

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