



The ultimate power of perceived quality

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Abstract:

"The ultimate power of perceived quality" refers to the significant importance of the quality of a product or service in the minds of consumers. This concept reflects how customers perceive the quality and added value they receive from the products or services they purchase. Perceived product quality greatly influences purchase decisions and brand loyalty. When consumers consider a product to be of high quality, they are typically willing to pay higher prices for that quality. Perceived quality can impact brand reputation and increase chances of success in the market. Simply put, perceived quality is what makes a brand stand out, attract and impress audiences, and build strong customer relationships. Introduction

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted several democratic countries to impose the most severe restrictions on personal liberty since World War II. Certain countries have implemented lockdowns, others have imposed restrictions on commercial and service operations, while others have introduced confinement measures that limit the mobility of individuals (Pantano et al., 2020). Prior to the implementation of distancing measures, global urban consumers were generally inclined to allocate funds towards vacations, dining out, art and cultural events, personal style, health and wellness, nightlife and entertainment, and sports. The spread of COVID-19 and the subsequent implementation of distancing measures have significantly impacted the daily lives of both consumers and businesses. Travel restrictions have resulted in a surge in emergency purchasing, posing unparalleled challenges for store management. Severe confinement has altered customer purchasing patterns (Pantano et al., 2020).

The retail sector in Malaysia saw its slowest growth in 33 years, and consumers are expected to reduce their expenditure. A decline of 30.9 percent was seen in retail sales during the second quarter of 2020 in comparison to the same period of the previous year (Kamel, 2020). Healthcare supplies and pantry inventory incur the highest costs for Malaysians. Considering the increasing unemployment rate and the expiration of the credit embargo, it is expected that prudent spending will persist (ICDM PULSE, 2020).

Malaysia's population in the fourth quarter of 2020 is 32.7 million, beyond the 32.5 million recorded in 2019. This is a 0.4% annual growth rate, like other developing Asian countries (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020a). The annual population growth rate declined from 3.1 million in 2019 to 3.0 million in 2020 due to a reduction in the number of non-citizens. The global transmission of the COVID-19 epidemic led to the implementation of the Movement Control Order (MCO), which effectively shut down borders and repatriated citizens. The population of Malaysians increased by 1.1% from 29.4 million in 2019 to 29.7 million in 2020 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020b). According to Santandertrade (2020), the median age in Malaysia is 29. The population includes 27.4% individuals aged 14 or under, 16.74% aged 15-24, 40.97% aged 25-54, 8.46% aged 55-64, and 6.35 percent aged 65 or over. Approximately 20% of Malaysia's population falls between the 20-29 age bracket (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020c). The Generation Z category (1995–2010) encompasses this age cohort.

Generation Z derives satisfaction from their ability to express their true self in many ways. Its authenticity fosters freedom of expression and comprehension of others (McKinsley&Company, 2020). Generation Y and Generation Z are the largest generational cohorts in Malaysia, accounting for 27% and 26%

respectively, exceeding the Silent Generation (4%), Baby Boomers (6%), and Generation X (21%). Malay constitutes the majority of Generation Z, with Chinese and Indian following closely after. The gender distribution of Generation Z is 52% male and 49% female (Tjiptono et al., 2020). The prevalence of a four-person home is attributed to a decreasing birth rate (Hirschmann, 2019). Generation Z in Malaysia has the smallest number of siblings ever recorded and resides in urban areas, accounting for 78%. According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2020) the literacy rate for both men and women in Malaysia's Generation Z is 96.9%. Malaysian Generation Z has access to a wide range of information digitally. They actively pursue novel objects, concepts, and experiences with more frequency. Notwithstanding their affinity for technology, Generation Z harbours scepticism about online information. Educational attainment has made this generation less susceptible to hoaxes and incorrect information (Tjiptono et al., 2020). These young Malaysians play an important influencer role in many household purchase contexts. Malaysian youth are family-oriented and tend to choose staying at home, even if they are popular in the digital realm but lack physical mobility. Undoubtedly, their parents highly appreciate and rely on their viewpoints, leading to a significant degree of confidence in their buying choices (Tjiptono et al., 2020).

Malaysia's purchasing power and GDP per capita of US\$11,415 in 2019 make it one of the highest in Asia among upper-middle-income countries (The World Bank, 2020). In 2019, the monthly discretionary income of Malaysian Generation Z increased by 23% to sum of US\$327 million (Tjiptono et al., 2020). Advertisers in the fashion, culinary, electronics, educational, and telecommunications sectors are drawn to this. Malaysia's biggest age group, Generation Z, comprises 29% of the population and has a monthly disposable income of US\$327

million. During the post-pandemic period, retailers must closely monitor Generation Z to comprehend how this new environment impacts and will impact all their interactions with consumers. Their parents have confidence in and value their opinions, so they make cautious purchases.

1.1 Problem

Malaysia's retail industry had its lowest growth rate in 33 years, and the outlook is bleak as the loan ban concludes this month and consumers exercise more financial restraint. Retail revenues in the second quarter of 2020 decreased by 30.9 percent compared to the previous year. This quarter marked the poorest performance of the nation's retail industry (Kamel, 2020).

Retail Group Malaysia (RGM) described the retail market as a "bloodbath" prior to the implementation of the movement control order (MCO) in mid-March to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The second-quarter growth of -30.9 percent year on year was lower than the initial projection of -28.8 percent (Malaysia Retailers Association, 2020). During the second quarter of 2020, the nationwide lockout negatively impacts retail efficiency in all subsectors, except for groceries and hypermarket. Notwithstanding its continuous operation throughout the lockout, the supermarket and hypermarket subsector saw a decline of 9.9%. The combined sales of department stores and supermarkets have decreased by 34.6 percent, while department store firms have declined by 62.3 percent, making it the subsector with the worst performance in Q2 2020. Due to the prohibition on company openings during the first lockdown and the subsequent restriction on customers trying on clothes and shoes after the lockdown was lifted, the fashion industry and fashion accessories sector saw a decline of 44.2 percent. Retailers in the toy, optical, photographic equipment, children's items, and second-hand goods sectors had

a 40.9 percent decline in sales, while pharmacy and personal care retailers witnessed a 26.2 percent decrease (Kamel, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic altered human behaviour and placed significant pressure on both individuals and society (Bavel et al., 2020; Goswami & Chouhan, 2021). Pandemics give rise to a financial crisis that significantly impacts consumer behaviour, namely in terms of family-level consumption and expenditure. The long-term ramifications of COVID-19 remain undetermined, but its immediate effect on the retail industry is substantial. Retailers in the food, goods, and social security sectors are showing growing interest in catering to consumers' needs at home, including matters such as inventory management, supply chain execution, and distribution. Businesses in non-essential sectors such as jewellery, apparel, and footwear are seeing a decline in revenue and need improved methods to attract customers. In order to thrive in this market, retailers must anticipate and predict customer behaviour both before and after the outbreak, as well as their present needs. Therefore, marketers must comprehend the impact of market importance on customer purchasing behaviours.

1.2 Objectives

- RO1. To analyse what is the effect of perceived quality on Malaysian Generation Z purchase intention.
- RO2. To examine how value consciousness impacts on Malaysian Generation Z purchase intention.
- RO3. To identify the value of environmental concern on Malaysian Generation Z purchase intention.
- RO4. To evaluate how subjective norms effect on Malaysian Generation Z purchase intention.
- RO5. To determine what is the effect of perceived behavioural control on Malaysian Generation Z purchase intention.
- RO6. To examine how price consciousness moderates the relationship between perceived quality, value

consciousness, environmental concern, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control on Malaysian Generation Z purchase intention.

RO7. To examine how attitude mediates the relationship between perceived quality, value consciousness, environmental concern, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control on Malaysian Generation Z purchase intention.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Purchase Intention

Purchase intent refers to an individual's inclination to acquire a product (Norfarah et al., 2018). Numerous empirical studies have employed Ajzen (1991) Theory of Planned Action (TPB) to analyse the factors influencing purchasing intention of private label company products (Boon and Fern, 2020; C. Hsu et al., 2017; Jain, 2020; Kumar et al., 2021; Norfarah et al., 2018; Shen and Chen, 2020; Zaremohzzabieh et al., 2020; Zhang, 2019). The TPB model posits that intention is influenced by attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control. Nevertheless, Blackwell et al. (2001) defined purpose as an individual's subjective assessment of their hypothetical actions (Norfarah et al., 2018). Purchasing intention has been widely employed by researchers to predict future purchases of goods or services (Cham et al., 2018; Ibrahim & Mohammad Yatim, 2020; Jaidev & Dhanya, 2018; Norfarah et al., 2018; Tran & Le, 2020; Walia et al., 2020; Widyanto & Rachmad Saleh, 2018). Strength of purchasing intention positively correlates with the probability of a transaction becoming a reality. Yet, Zeithaml's (1988) study revealed that purchase intentions are affected by external variables like the price, quality, and value of the goods (Lins Ferreira et al., 2017a; Norfarah et al., 2018). Moreover, extensive studies have confirmed that environmental concern plays a significant role in influencing consumer purchasing

choices (Asif et al., 2018; He et al., 2018; Prakash & Pathak, 2017; Rausch & Kopplin, 2021a; Shen & Chen, 2020; Sutikno et al., 2020; Varshneya et al., 2017; Zaremohzzabieh et al., 2020). Hence, purchase intention is influenced by perceptual factors including attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, product price, quality, value, and environmental concern.

2.2 Perceived Quality

Perceived quality has been the subject of comprehensive research for many years, and the prevailing consensus among scholars is that perceived quality strongly and significantly influences consumer purchasing intention. To understand its importance, we must first grasp the definition of perceived quality and why it is such a crucial determinant of customer purchasing intentions, particularly in the retail industry.

Quality is a fundamental element in both managerial practices and scholarly research. Certain scholars differentiate between objective and subjective quality in marketing literature. However, Zeithaml (1988) states that “perceived quality refers to the consumer's judgement on a product's overall performance or superiority more than the actual quality of the product itself, and objective quality does not exist since all quality is perceived by someone” (Lins Ferreira et al., 2017a; Norfarah et al., 2018). After evaluating the product's content using informational messages, consumers construct a set of beliefs about the product. The elucidating signals include both external and internal characteristics of the product (Cham et al., 2018; Zeithaml, 1988). Extrinsic qualities refer to the credibility, brand name, and price of a company, while intrinsic qualities include the physical features of the product, including functioning, specs, design, size, shape, materials used, and perceived durability (Cham et al., 2018). Research conducted in the clothing, dairy, Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG), and pharmaceutical

sectors has provided significant evidence of a strong correlation between consumers' perceived quality and their intention to make a purchase (Cham et al., 2018; Ibrahim and Mohammad Yatim, 2020; Norfarah et al., 2018; Tran and Le, 2020; Walia et al., 2020). Research conducted by Cham et al. (2018) revealed that the closing interest of Malaysia's Generation Y is influenced by the quality of clothing. Similarly, Walia et al. (2020) found that the perceived quality of green products in the FMCG industry in Dehradun, India significantly affects customers' purchasing intention. Therefore, the prior research helps us to acknowledge and agree that the perceived level of quality has a positive impact on the intention to make a purchase. We suggest the following hypothesis based on this concept:

H1: Generation Z' perceived quality is positively related to their purchase intention.

2.3 Value Consciousness

Another factor that is strongly correlated with customer purchasing intentions is value consciousness, also known as perceived value. Value consciousness, as defined by Zeithaml (1988) pertains to the preferences and satisfaction with products or services among consumers. Furthermore, a value-conscious customer is an individual who prioritises the inherent qualities of a product in relation to the cost they incur for it (Norfarah et al., 2018; Zeithaml, 1988). Their prevailing conviction remains that they would get a satisfactory agreement. Consequently, consumers that prioritise value seek not just inexpensive items, but also things that provide similar quality in relation to the price they spend to achieve a satisfactory deal. Considering the current economic recession, customers that prioritise value are constantly seeking for advantageous offers. Consequently, instead of the exclusive consideration of price or cost, some

consumers choose to assess products based on their worth to receive the most favourable deal (Norfarah et al., 2018).

In marketing literature, perceived value is often defined as the psychological evaluations and emotions of customers about the perceived advantages of purchasing a product or service (Hanaysha, 2018). Furthermore, Chi et al. (2011) stated that the perception of value is the paramount factor in the consumer decision-making process, and that consumers are more likely to purchase a product if they perceive it to have significant value. Generally, an enhancement in the overall perception of quality is associated with a rise in the perceived value (Ibrahim & Mohammad Yatim, 2020). As a result, the following hypothesis is proposed in this study:

H2: Generation Z' value consciousness is positively related to their purchase intention.

2.4 Environmental Concern

The growing environmental concern serves as a key driving force that demonstrates ecologically friendly behaviour. The concept of environmental concern refers to individuals' comprehension of environmental matters, endorsement of efforts to tackle such challenges, and inclination to actively participate in their resolution (Prakash & Pathak, 2017). Karl et al. (1996) assert that the issue of environmentalism has gained significant importance due to environmental degradation attributable to materials, industrial activities, and natural calamities (Nor et al., 2017). Conecomm (2013) reported that the majority of US consumers take environmental concerns into account while making purchases (Kumar et al., 2021). Leading retailers are now diversifying their range of products and using many sustainability strategies to influence consumer purchasing decisions for environmentally friendly apparel. Environmental concerns are increasingly evident in their influence on consumer purchasing intentions, particularly in relation to the acquisition

of ecologically friendly products. Research by Zaremohzzabieh et al. (2020) suggests that consumers who prioritise environmental concerns are more likely to participate in eco-sustainable behaviour. Based on prior studies, these assertions suggest that certain consumers are inclined to voice their environmental concerns and utilise environmentally friendly products (Nor et al., 2017). Environmental concern has been identified as a significant determinant in consumer purchasing decisions in many studies (Asif et al., 2018; He et al., 2018; Prakash & Pathak, 2017; Rausch & Kopplin, 2021a; Shen & Chen, 2020; Sutikno et al., 2020; Varshneya et al., 2017; Zaremohzzabieh et al., 2020). Consequently, the present study formulated the following hypothesis to examine the dynamic trend seen among Generation Z customers in Malaysia and the impact of environmental concern on the retail sector in the country.

H3: Generation Z' environmental concern is positively related to their purchase intention.

2.5 Subjective norm

Subjective norm is defined as an individual's perception of how the significant individuals in their life would judge whether they should or should not engage in a certain action (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975; Bhutto, 2020). Within the TPB, subjective norm is a direct factor that influences the choice to engage in a certain activity. Subjective norms include both social and personal standards that influence an individual's perception of their ability to participate in a certain action (Conner & Armitage, 1998; Zhang, 2019). The subjective norm refers to an individual's sense of the social expectation from their peers to participate in a certain activity (Paul et al., 2016; Zhu, 2018). It refers to an individual's motivation to fulfil personal expectations

from others that have personal significance to them, such as peers and superiors (Boon & Fern, 2020; Taylor & Todd, 1995). Should a customer see a thing as satisfactory, their propensity to acquire it is heightened. Family and close friends experience additional normative pressure, and physical looks are seen as desirable and respectable traits closely linked to individual friendship preferences (Boon & Fern, 2020). Thus, it was often noted that social pressures significantly influenced an individual's purchasing decisions (Valaei & Nikhashemi, 2017). Thus, a variety of cultural ideas influence customer purchasing intentions in distinct ways. In their study, Wong and Ahuvia (1998) identified a correlation between status-seeking consumption in Western societies and the belief that individuals possess inherent differences, whereas consumption in Eastern cultures is motivated by the inherent interconnectedness of human beings (Boon & Fern, 2020). Veblen (1899) defined status-seeking or ostentatious expenditure as the strategic display of affluence and the attainment of social standing (Zhang, 2019). As a result, based on the literature, we concluded that subjective norms have a significant influence on consumers' decisions to buy (or decline) specific products and services, and have a more extensive influence on purchase intention (Ahmed et al., 2020; Asif et al., 2018; Bhutto, 2020; Chetioui et al., 2019; C. L. Hsu et al., 2017; A. Kumar et al., 2021; Patel et al., 2020; Rausch & Kopplin, 2021b; Shen & Chen, 2020; Singh & Verma, 2017; Zaremohzzabieh et al., 2020; Zhang, 2019). As a result, the following hypothesis is proposed in this study:

H4: Generation Z' subjective norms are positively related to their purchase intention.

2.6 Perceived Behavioural Control

Perceived behavioural control refers to individual perceptions of the ease or difficulty of engaging in an activity (Ajzen, 1991; Boon & Fern, 2020; Jain, 2020a; Zhang et al., 2020).

TPB conduct posits that the perceived level of control over a certain activity has distinct influences on the behavioural objectives and conduct of people. The perceived behavioural control of individuals is determined by the benefits they get, which may either facilitate or impede the achievement of the desired activity (Madden et al., 1992; Zhang et al., 2020). Moreover, it is straightforward to elucidate how different perspectives might modify intents and actions due to their direct impact (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Prior research has extensively examined the influence of perceived behavioural control in the retail sector, particularly in the context of purchasing organic food (Ahmed et al., 2020; Asif et al., 2018; Dangi et al., 2020; A. Kumar et al., 2021), green products (Choi & Johnson, 2019; Sutikno et al., 2020; Zaremohzzabieh et al., 2020), luxury goods (Jain 2020a; Zhang et al., 2020), and natural skin care products (Boon & Fern, 2020; C. L. Hsu et al., 2017). Empirical evidence has shown that perceived behavioural control significantly influences purchase intention in a favourable manner. Indeed, it can be inferred that these perspectives possess the capacity to greatly modify the attitudes and abilities of certain consumers. However, some studies indicate that the perception of behavioural control might adversely affect the desire to make a purchase. As a result, the following hypothesis was developed:

H5: Generation Z' perceived behavioural is positively related to their purchase intention.

2.7 Price Consciousness

Several studies have used the concept of price consciousness in connection with a range of neurological conditions associated with price exposure. Price awareness refers to the degree to which a consumer's primary preference is to buy goods at the lowest possible prices (Ibrahim & Mohammad Yatim, 2020; S. Kumar & Chandra, 2020; Lichtenstein et al., 1993; Norfarah et

al., 2018). Price-conscious consumers are also price-oriented. Competitively priced goods are selected while making a purchasing decision, and this is established by comparing products within the same category based on their pricing. Due to different perceived risks, some consumers base their level of price consciousness on product categories, while others are price alert irrespective of the product category (Norfarah et al., 2018; Sinha & Batra, 1999).

Price perceptions might vary among different clients. Lichtenstein et al., (1993) propose that price-conscious customers see high-priced products in a negative light (Ibrahim and Mohammad Yatim, 2020; Kumar and Chandra, 2020). It exerts both advantageous and detrimental effects on consumer behaviour. Consumers with high price consciousness prioritise low-cost products more than those with low price consciousness (Kumar & Chandra, 2020; Thanasuta, 2015). Furthermore, while seeking products with the lowest price, cost-conscious consumers prioritise commodity consistency less. Consequently, clients that prioritise cost are ready to switch to a different brand or experiment with a new brand if the previously selected brand offers the most competitive price, particularly in times of recession (Norfarah et al., 2018).

Due to different perceived risks, some consumers allocate their level of price consciousness based on product categories, whereas others are price aware irrespective of the product category (Sinha and Batra, 1999). This research, supported by Jin and Sternquist (2003), defines price consciousness as the purchasing behaviour shown by consumers during an economic recession (Ibrahim & Mohammad Yatim, 2020). This is due to the event of an unfavourable economic condition, the per capita income would decrease, compelling consumers to alter their purchasing habits, intensifying their price sensitivity. As a result, the following hypotheses have been identified:

H6a: Generation Z' price consciousness moderates between perceived quality and their purchase intention.

H6b: Generation Z' price consciousness moderates between value consciousness and their purchase intention.

H6c: Generation Z' price consciousness moderates between environmental concern and their purchase intention.

H6d: Generation Z' price consciousness moderates between subjective norms and their purchase intention.

H6e: Generation Z' price consciousness moderates between perceived behavioural control and their purchase intention.

2.8 Attitude

Attitude refers to an individual's favourable or unfavourable attitude towards carrying out a certain activity (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975; Jain, 2021). An attitude in TPB activity refers to a predisposition to respond positively or negatively to a certain activity (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Norfarah et al., 2018). Attitude, as proposed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1975), has an impact on both purpose and behaviour (Jaidev & Dhanya, 2018). Similarly, Ajzen and Fishbein (1977) noted that an attitude towards a given activity is formed by the expectations linked to that behaviour and the desired outcome (Norfarah et al., 2018). An individual is more likely to participate in a given action if they have a positive attitude towards that behaviour, as stated by Ajzen (1991) (Pop et al., 2020). Attitude remains the most influential factor in determining purchasing intention, and previous research has extensively explored the relationship between attitude and purchase intention as a mediator (Cheah et al., 2020; Chin et al., 2020; Jaidev and Dhanya, 2018; Jain, 2020b; Kumar and Chandra, 2020; Lins Ferreira et al., 2017; Norfarah et al., 2018; Patel et al., 2020). As a result, the following hypotheses are proposed in this study:

H7a: Generation Z' attitude mediates between perceived quality and their purchase intention.

H7b: Generation Z' attitude mediates between value consciousness and their purchase intention.

H7c: Generation Z' attitude mediates between environmental concern and their purchase intention.

H7d: Generation Z' attitude mediates moderates between subjective norms and their purchase intention.

H7e: Generation Z' attitude mediates moderates between perceived behavioural control and their purchase intention.

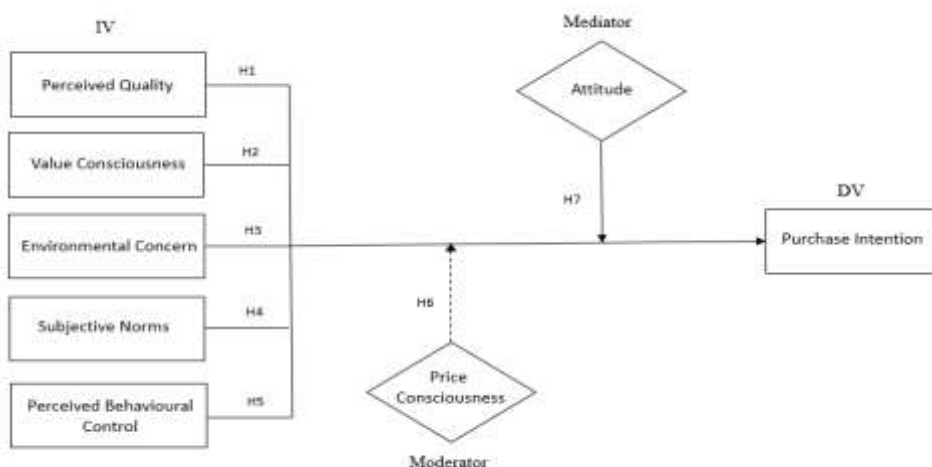


Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework

3. Method

3.1 Sample Selection

The research population pertains to Generation Z in Malaysia. Individuals belonging to the Generation Z cohort were born between 1995 and 2010 (Mohr & Mohr, 2017). According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020c) Generation Y and Generation Z exceed the Silent Generation (4 percent), Baby Boomers (6 percent), and Generation X (21 percent) to become the largest generational groupings in Malaysia, with percentages

of 27 percent and 26 percent respectively. Among Southeast Asian countries, Malaysia ranks first in the Global Web Index 2020 Q2 study, with an average daily internet use duration of 9 hours and 17 minutes. This research confirms that Generation Z allocates a greater amount of time to their mobile devices and engages in more purchases compared to other age cohorts (Kemp, 2021). Tjiptono et al. (2020) predict that the projected monthly discretionary income of Malaysian Generation Z would reach US\$327 million, indicating a 23 percent growth compared to 2018. Moreover, Malaysia's social media penetration rate in 2021 is 86 percent, with Singapore following closely at 84.4 percent (Statista, 2021).

In many research studies, the sample size is used as a representative of a certain demographic group that has been chosen for the study to circumvent the challenging endeavour of contacting every individual (Fisher, 2010). The sample for this research consisted of replies from 384 distinct individuals. The study used Krejcie & Morgan's (1970) method to determine the optimal sample size for the research.

4. Analysis and results

4.1 Validation of the measurement model

To evaluate the measurement model, the data was subjected to confirmatory factor analysis using maximum likelihood estimation. Each of the model fit indices were within an acceptable range. The SRMR model has a numerical value of 0.042 and an NFI of 0.858, shown in Table 1. Hence, the model is very suitable and well aligned for integration into the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) software to enable further study.

Initial Measurement Model

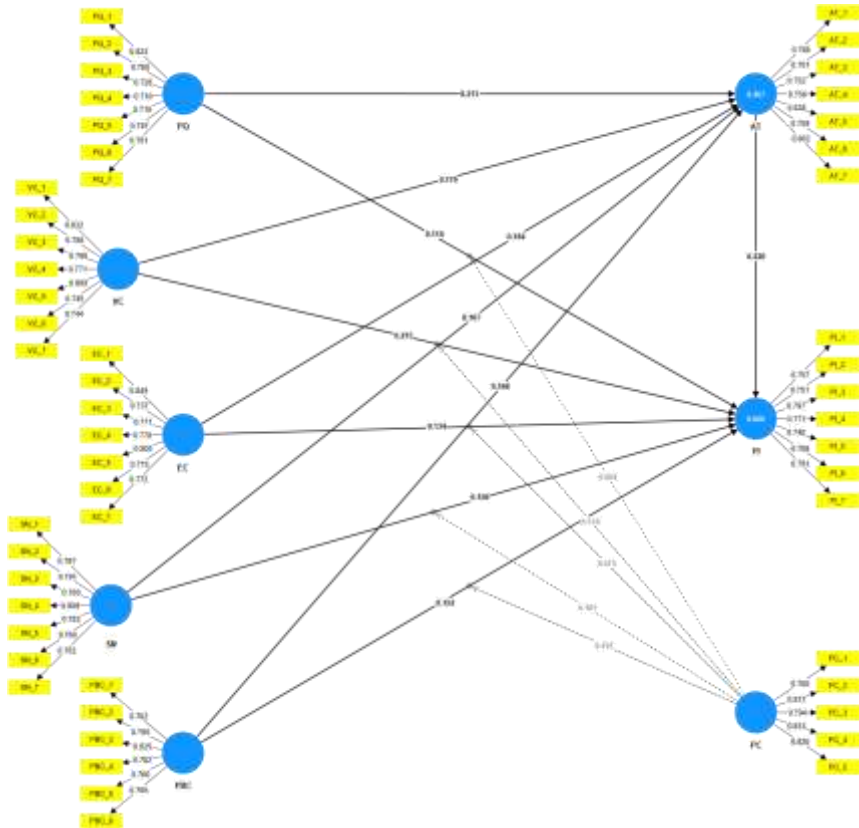


Figure 2. Summary of Initial Measurement Model

Table 1. Results of the confirmatory factor analysis of the conceptual model

Constructs	Item	Factor Loading	Composite Reliability	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha (>0.7)
Perceived Quality (PQ)	PQ_1	0.823	0.882	0.577	0.877
	PQ_2	0.780			
	PQ_3	0.728			
	PQ_4	0.710			
	PQ_5	0.710			
	PQ_6	0.797			
	PQ_7	0.761			
Value Consciousness (VC)	VC_1	0.832	0.895	0.613	0.894
	VC_2	0.786			
	VC_3	0.788			
	VC_4	0.771			
	VC_5	0.809			
	VC_6	0.745			
	VC_7	0.744			
Environmental Concern (EC)	EC_1	0.845	0.898	0.613	0.895
	EC_2	0.737			
	EC_3	0.771			
	EC_4	0.778			
	EC_5	0.800			
	EC_6	0.775			
	EC_7	0.772			
Subjective Norms (SN)	SN_1	0.787	0.894	0.607	0.892
	SN_2	0.791			
	SN_3	0.760			
	SN_4	0.808			
	SN_5	0.783			
	SN_6	0.760			
	SN_7	0.762			
Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC)	PBC_1	0.762	0.875	0.611	0.873
	PBC_2	0.795			
	PBC_3	0.825			
	PBC_4	0.782			

	PBC_5	0.760			
	PBC_6	0.765			
Price Consciousness (PC)	PC_1	0.780	0.865	0.649	0.865
	PC_2	0.811			
	PC_3	0.794			
	PC_4	0.813			
	PC_5	0.830			
Attitude (AT)	AT_1	0.788	0.896	0.613	0.894
	AT_2	0.781			
	AT_3	0.752			
	AT_4	0.756			
	AT_5	0.838			
	AT_6	0.759			
	AT_7	0.802			
Purchase Intention (PI)	PI_1	0.757	0.888	0.596	0.887
	PI_2	0.751			
	PI_3	0.797			
	PI_4	0.771			
	PI_5	0.748			
	PI_6	0.788			
	PI_7	0.791			
SRMR = 0.042 Acceptable Fit, NFI = 0.858 Acceptable Fit					

The Cronbach's alphas of all the measures in Table 1 provided values above 0.80, indicating satisfactory internal consistency (Hair et al., 2021). Composite reliability was used to assess the reliability of the measurement scales. Each of the constructions has a composite reliability over 0.700. Thus, the overall level of dependability of all the metrics was considered acceptable. To assess the convergent validity of the model, we investigated the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value for each construct. As indicated in Table 1, the AVE of each construct above 0.500, indicating that the measurement model had strong convergent validity (Hair et al., 2021). The discriminant validity of the measures was evaluated by

comparing the square root of the AVE of each construct with the correlation of that construct with the other constructs in the model. As shown in Table 2, the square root of the AVE of each construct was larger than its correlation with other constructs, thus confirming the discriminant validity of the model.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity

	AT	EC	PBC	PC	PI	PQ	SN	VC
AT	0.783							
EC	0.472	0.783						
PBC	0.459	0.317	0.782					
PC	0.397	0.304	0.307	0.806				
PI	0.612	0.496	0.487	0.424	0.772			
PQ	0.489	0.387	0.354	0.347	0.470	0.760		
SN	0.49	0.352	0.377	0.337	0.535	0.307	0.779	
VC	0.522	0.428	0.425	0.353	0.554	0.446	0.454	0.783

The criterion for discriminant validity, as defined by Fornell & Larcker (1981), is that the AVE of a construct should be greater than the square of its strongest connection with any other construct. This criterion was one of the applied criteria. This approach assumes that a construct shows more variation when associated with its relevant indicators than with any other constructed variable. The structures were analysed to see whether they had statistically significant differences from one other. As seen in Table 2, there exists a strong correlation among every concept and its own measures compared to any of the other concepts. When the results are consolidated, they provide enough confidence that the reflective measurement model precisely aligns with the measured data. The evaluative results indicate that the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all constructs varied between 1.442 and 1.913. Although these results surpassed the minimal requirement of 0.20, they still fell below the maximum criterion of 0.50. Notably, none of the

predictor variables in the research exhibit multicollinearity, indicating the absence of collinearity concerns.

Table 3. Variance Initial Factor (VIF)

Independent Variables	VIF
AT	1.913
EC	1.442
PBC	1.434
PQ	1.502
SN	1.505
VC	1.691

Upon the completion of the inspection of the external model, the internal model may be evaluated. A summary of the assessment of the inner model and the testing of hypotheses for direct effects is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of Inner Model Evaluation (Direct Effect)

Total Effects					
	Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
EC -> PI	0.200	0.201	0.039	5.082	0.000
PBC -> PI	0.186	0.185	0.041	4.485	0.000
PQ -> PI	0.159	0.160	0.041	3.844	0.000
SN -> PI	0.255	0.256	0.041	6.208	0.000
VC -> PI	0.202	0.204	0.046	4.403	0.000

Excluding a moderating and mediating variable from a Partial Least Squares (PLS) model might result in a reduction in the magnitude of a positive direct impact when other moderating and mediating variables are included. Visual representations of the moderated impact of price consciousness between perceived quality, value consciousness, environmental concern, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control on purchase intention are shown in Table 6 and the mediating impact of attitude between perceived quality, value consciousness, environmental concern, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control on purchase intention are shown in Table 7.

Table 5. Explanatory Power

Predictor(s)	Outcome	R ²	f ²	Q ²
EC			0.061	
PBC			0.053	
PQ	PI	0.514	0.038	0.496
SN			0.098	
VC			0.053	

The coefficient of determination (R²) is a statistical measure that quantifies the amount of variability accounted for by the model for each endogenous component. This metric serves as an indicator of the model's capacity to elucidate and predict data inside the sample, commonly referred to as the in-sample predictive power. The coefficient of determination, denoted as R Square (R²), is a statistical measure with a numerical value between 0 and 1. A larger R² value indicates a stronger ability to explain the variation in the data. In 1988, Cohen proposed the following categorisations for assessing the R Square (R²) values of endogenous latent variables: 0.26 (significant), 0.13 (moderate), and 0.02 (insignificant). The scientific research done by Hair et al. (2021) in the field of marketing categorises R Square (R²) values of 0.75, 0.50, or 0.25 for endogenous latent variables as significant, moderate, or weak, respectively. The findings presented in Table 4 indicates that the R Square (R²) values for all the endogenous constructs exceed 0.514, suggesting a considerable degree of explanatory power for the model (Hair et al., 2021).

By excluding a particular exogenous construct from the model, the study measured the change in R Square (R²) to enhance the precision of evaluating the influence of individual exogenous factors. This statistic is often known as the impact size, denoted by the sign f square (f²). Effect size is a quantitative assessment of the extent to which each independent variable affects the dependent variable. Using Partial Least

Squares (PLS) path modelling, the exclusion of an independent variable from the model significantly impacts the variability of the dependent variable. Cohen (1988) classifies the magnitude of the influence of the predictor variable at the structural level as follows: a coefficient of determination f^2 of 0.35 is regarded as significant, 0.15 is seen as moderate, and 0.02 is regarded as insignificant. In the model, the f^2 quantifies the extent to which an external latent variable affects the R Square (R^2) value of an endogenous latent variable. The effect size is a statistical measure that describes the extent or strength of the connection between latent variables, expressed in a straightforward and explicit way. According to the data in Table 5, the effect size, as evaluated by f^2 , varied from 0.038 for the correlation between PQ and PI to 0.098 for the correlation between SN and PI. The endogenous construct exhibited Q square (Q^2) values above 0, therefore confirming the presence of predictive importance.

Table 6. Summary of Inner Model Evaluation (Moderation Effect)

Moderated Effects	Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
PC x EC -> PI	0.076	0.074	0.034	2.216	0.027
PC x SN -> PI	0.102	0.100	0.032	3.153	0.002
PC x PQ -> PI	0.055	0.055	0.035	1.582	0.114
PC x VC -> PI	0.115	0.114	0.040	2.852	0.004
PC x PBC -> PI	0.168	0.167	0.035	4.747	0.000

The data shown in Table 6 incorporating the moderator's price consciousness into the model reduces the statistical significance of the relationship between perceived quality and purchase intention. These results indicate that the influence of price consciousness on the relationship between perceived quality and purchase intention is not significant, as shown by the moderation effect ($\beta = 0.055$, $t = 1.582$, $p < 0.114$). Yet, when

taking into account the moderator's price consciousness, the other four independent variables (value consciousness, environmental concern, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control) have a significant and favourable impact, as seen in Table 6. Secondly, the research findings suggest that the relationship between value consciousness and purchase intention is moderated by price consciousness ($\beta = 0.115$, $t = 2.852$, $p < 0.004$). In the research, a significant moderating influence of price consciousness was found on the association between value consciousness and purchase intention. Thirdly, the results of the research suggest that the influence of environmental concern on the desire to make a purchase is influenced to some extent ($\beta = 0.076$, $t = 2.216$, $p < 0.027$). The findings indicate that the influence of price consciousness moderates the relationship between environmental concern and purchasing intention. Fourthly, analysis of the moderating effect indicates that the relationship between subjective norms and purchase intention is influenced by price consciousness ($\beta = 0.102$, $t = 3.153$, $p < 0.002$). Lastly, the study's findings indicate that the impact of perceived behavioural control on purchase intention is influenced by a moderating factor ($\beta = 0.168$, $t = 4.747$, $p < 0.000$). Consequently, the observation suggests that the consciousness of prices has a moderating influence on the relationship between perceived behavioural control and purchase intention.

Table 7. Summary of Inner Model Evaluation (Mediating Effect)

Mediating Effects	Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
EC -> AT -> PI	0.043	0.043	0.016	2.693	0.007
PBC -> AT -> PI	0.039	0.039	0.014	2.761	0.006
PQ -> AT -> PI	0.050	0.050	0.015	3.230	0.001
SN -> AT -> PI	0.050	0.051	0.017	3.040	0.002
VC -> AT -> PI	0.042	0.042	0.015	2.723	0.006

The bootstrapping method was used to assess the mediation hypothesis (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Hayes (2009) reported that the 5000 resamples used in this investigation generated 95% confidence intervals (percentiles) for the mediator. In accordance with the research framework, the study initially assessed the correlation between purchase intention and the independent variables (perceived quality, value consciousness, environmental concern, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control) to confirm the currently established relationship. Subsequently, the study investigated the mediating effect between these constructs. Firstly, the direct impact should be substantial under the condition that the mediator is excluded from the model (Hair et al., 2021). While not mandatory, this parameter greatly facilitates the comprehension and interpretation of the mediator analysis (Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010). The connection, or direct impact, of the independent variables on the dependent variable is shown in Table 4. The results indicate a statistically significant positive correlation between purchase intention and the independent variables (perceived quality, value consciousness, environmental concern, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control).

Including the mediator variable in the PLS path model would result in a significant reduction in the magnitude of the positive direct impact. When VAF exceeds 80%, it is reasonable to assume complete mediation (Hair et al., 2021). The mediated processes of perceived quality, value consciousness, environmental concern, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control on purchase intention are shown in Table 7. The statistics shown in Table 7 clearly indicate a significant

degree of endorsement for environmental concern. A statistically significant direct impact of 0.200 is observed, as illustrated in Table 2. Nevertheless, the inclusion of the mediator in the model results in a reduction in the significance of environmental concern on purchase intention to 0.043, as seen in Table 7. A significant indirect impact of environmental concern on purchase intention (0.043; $t=2.693$; $p < 0.007$) suggests that attitude plays a mediating role in the connection between environmental concern and purchasing intention.

Table 4 demonstrates that perceived behavioural control has a strong and statistically significant influence on purchase intention, with a coefficient of 0.186. By including attitude as a mediator in the model, the influence of perceived behavioural control on purchase intention decreases to 0.039, as seen in Table 7. The research revealed that environmental concern had an indirect impact on purchasing intention (0.039; $t=2.761$; $p < 0.006$). These findings indicate that attitude acts as a mediator in the connection between perceived behavioural control and the desire to make a purchase.

Table 4 demonstrates that the impact of perceived quality on purchase intention is both positive and strong, with a coefficient of 0.159. By including attitude as a mediator in the model, the impact of perceived quality on purchase intention is reduced to 0.050, as seen in Table 7. Research findings indicated that perceived quality indirectly influenced purchase intention (0.050; $t=3.230$; $p < 0.001$). The observation implies that attitude serves as a mediator in the correlation between perceived quality and the desire to make a purchase.

The statistics shown in Table 4 clearly demonstrate a significant level of support for subjective norms. A statistically significant direct impact of 0.255 is seen, as illustrated in Table 4. Thus, the inclusion of the mediator in the model decreases the importance of subjective norms on purchase intention to 0.050, as seen in Table 7. The statistical analysis reveals that the relationship between subjective norms and purchase intention is mediated by attitude, as shown by the indirect impact of subjective norms on purchase intention (0.050; $t=3.040$; $p < 0.002$).

Lastly, our analysis reveals that value consciousness has a strong and statistically significant influence on purchase intention, as shown by a coefficient of 0.202 in Table 4. By include attitude as a mediator in the model, the influence of value consciousness on purchase intention decreases to 0.042, as illustrated in Table 7. Indirect impact of value consciousness on purchase intention was shown to be significant (0.042; $t=2.723$; $p < 0.006$). These findings indicate that attitude acts as a mediator in the connection between value consciousness and the desire to make a purchase.

Hypothesis testing

The proposed hypothesised relationships (Figure 1) were tested using structural equation modelling with PLS-SEM. PLS-SEM is a causal modelling approach intended to maximise the explained variance of the dependent latent constructs. This path modelling proves to be a “silver bullet” in estimating theoretical models and empirical data situations (Hair et al., 2021). In our conceptual model, all the model fit indices were within the acceptable range. The structural model has a statistically

significant value (SRMR = 0.042, NFI = 0.858). Thus, we conclude that the proposed model fits the data well.

The results of the hypothesis test are illustrated in Table 4. H1 states that Generation Z' perceived quality is positively related to their purchase intention; thus, H1 is supported ($\beta = 0.159$, $t = 3.844$, $p < 0.000$). In this regard, the results of the current study indicate that the perceived quality significantly influences on Malaysian Generation Z' purchase intention. The statement suggests that the purchasing intention of Malaysian Generation Z consumers is impacted by their perception of the quality of a product or service.

H2 states that Generation Z' value consciousness is positively related to their purchase intention; thus, H2 is supported ($\beta = 0.202$, $t = 4.403$, $p < 0.000$). The findings of this study demonstrate a significant relationship between the level of value consciousness and the tendency of Malaysian Generation Z to intend to make purchases. The observation suggests that a considerable amount of importance is placed on value consciousness by members of Generation Z in Malaysia when they are considering their purchasing intentions.

H3 states that Generation Z' environmental concern is positively related to their purchase intention; thus, H3 is supported ($\beta = 0.200$, $t = 5.082$, $p < 0.000$). The results suggest that the intention to purchase among Malaysian Generation Z customers is greatly influenced by their environmental concern. There are several research that provide evidence supporting this hypothesis. The environmental concern arises as a key driver that demonstrates environmentally friendly behaviour.

H4 states that Generation Z' subjective norms are positively related to their purchase intention; thus, H4 is supported ($\beta = 0.255$, $t = 6.208$, $p < 0.000$). The study revealed a significant relationship between the subjective norms and purchase intention of the Malaysian Generation Z.

H5 states that Generation Z' perceived behavioural is positively related to their purchase intention; thus, H5 is supported ($\beta = 0.186$, $t = 4.485$, $p < 0.000$). The findings of this study demonstrate a significant relationship between the level of perceived behavioural control and the tendency of Malaysian Generation Z to intend to make purchases.

The analysis also reveals that the corresponding indirect (moderating) effect is partially significant. Price consciousness identification thus moderates the relationship between perceived quality, value consciousness, environmental concern, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control and Malaysian Generation Z purchase intention, in support of H6. The results indicate that price consciousness does not have a moderating influence on the relationship between perceived quality and purchase intention, as shown by the moderation effect ($\beta = 0.055$, $t = 1.582$, $p < 0.114$). Secondly, the study findings suggest that the relationship between value consciousness and purchase intention is moderated by price consciousness, as demonstrated by the analysis of the moderating effect ($\beta = 0.115$, $t = 2.852$, $p < 0.004$). The study found a significant moderating influence of price consciousness on the relationship between value consciousness and purchasing intention. Thirdly, the results of the study suggest that the impact of environmental concern on purchase intention is moderated ($\beta = 0.076$, $t = 2.216$, $p < 0.027$).

This suggests that price consciousness plays a moderating role in the association between environmental concern and purchase intention. Price consciousness appears to have a moderating effect on the relationship between environmental concern and purchase intention. Furthermore, the study findings suggest that the relationship between subjective norms and purchase intention is moderated by price consciousness, as evidenced by the moderation effect analysis ($\beta = 0.102$, $t = 3.153$, $p < 0.002$). Last but not least, the outcome of the study suggests that the impact of perceived behavioural control on purchase intention is moderated ($\beta = 0.168$, $t = 4.747$, $p < 0.000$). This implies that price consciousness plays a moderating role in the association between perceived behavioural control and purchase intention.

The analysis also reveals that the corresponding indirect (mediating) effect is significant. Attitude identification thus mediates the relationship between perceived quality, value consciousness, environmental concern, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control and Malaysian Generation Z purchase intention, in support of H7. The findings suggest that attitude plays a mediating role in the connection between perceived quality and purchase intention, as evidenced by the mediation effect ($\beta = 0.050$, $t = 3.230$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, the study's results indicate that the relationship between value consciousness and purchase intention is influenced by attitude, as evidenced by the analysis of the mediating effect ($\beta = 0.042$, $t = 2.723$, $p < 0.006$). The study discovered a notable positive mediating impact of attitude on the correlation between value consciousness and purchasing intention. Furthermore, the study's findings indicate that the influence of environmental concern on

purchase intention is moderated by attitude ($\beta = 0.043$, $t = 2.693$, $p < 0.007$). This implies that attitude acts as a mediator in the relationship between environmental concern and purchase intention. Moreover, the study results indicate that the relationship between subjective norms and purchase intention is influenced by attitude, as demonstrated by the examination of mediating effects ($\beta = 0.050$, $t = 3.040$, $p < 0.002$). Finally, the study's results indicate that the influence of perceived behavioural control on purchase intention is moderated by attitude ($\beta = 0.039$, $t = 2.761$, $p < 0.006$). This suggests that attitude acts as a mediator in the relationship between perceived behavioural control and purchase intention.

5. Conclusions and implications

5.1 Theoretical implications

This research makes a theoretical contribution by enumerating the key factors that impact the purchasing intention of Generation Z in Malaysia. The objective of this research is to construct a comprehensive conceptual framework to comprehend the elements that impact the purchasing intention of Generation Z in Malaysia. This study particularly examines price consciousness as a moderating factor, which will aid researchers in their research. It is expected that the results of the investigation will have a substantial influence.

Researchers conducted a comprehensive literature review on the retail industry both before and after COVID-19, with a special emphasis on generation theory, particularly Generation Z, and the determinants of purchase intention. Furthermore, the study has formulated a theoretical model and corresponding assumptions. A significant number of relevant research studies

have focused their emphasis on ordinary consumers. This research will thoroughly examine this attribute of Generation Z. This will deepen the comprehension of generation theory and consumer behaviour of Generation Z with regards to their plans to make future purchases. The data reveals a strong positive correlation between the purchase intention of Malaysian Generation Z and several factors, such as perceived quality, value consciousness, environmental concern, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, price consciousness (acting as a moderator), and attitude (acting as a mediator). This addition could be beneficial for scholars aiming to improve their understanding of the complex and ever-changing domain and its influence on the purchasing habits of Generation Z.

These findings enhance our comprehension of the influence of numerous variables on the purchasing intentions of Generation Z in Malaysia. This study fills a gap in the existing research by specifically examining customers' purchasing intentions and the influence of several variables. Enhanced comprehension of customer purchasing intentions might help researchers in finding crucial elements that can augment the existing knowledge base.

5.2 Managerial Implications

This study offers a framework for marketers to comprehend the aspects that impact Generation Z's purchasing intention, with price consciousness acting as a moderating variable. The study introduces a set of parameters that can be employed to assess the attributes of variables, including perceived quality, value consciousness, environmental concern, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, price consciousness, and attitude.

These parameters can help marketers develop more efficient marketing strategies. The study also lays much emphasis on the elements that are considered valuable by customers from Generation Z. By examining the preferences of Generation Z consumers, marketers can improve the effectiveness of their marketing efforts in relation to perceived quality, value consciousness, environmental concern, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Moreover, this study has a great importance for marketers that are working in the Malaysian market. The study's findings indicate that implementing diverse marketing methods can boost the purchasing intention of the Malaysian Generation Z generation.

5.3 Limitations and directions for future research

Although this study makes significant theoretical and practical contributions to the field, it has certain limitations that could be addressed in future studies.

The research findings reported here support the theoretical framework that explains how many factors influence the purchasing intentions of Malaysian Generation Z. Nevertheless, while examining the data, it is crucial to recognise specific methodological limitations. Demographic analysis illustrates that most of the participants are from two specific states in Malaysia Perlis and Kelantan. Secondly, the researchers employed convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, to get the necessary data for this analysis. The convenience sampling methodology has limitations in its capacity to extrapolate findings from a constrained sample to the total population. Furthermore, the survey was carried out on a voluntary basis, potentially leading to a non-response bias

among the participants. This suggests that there may have been a non-response bias, as the characteristics and actions of persons who chose not to engage in the survey may have differed from those who chose to participate. The study employed the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975) in current research in aim to explain the purchase intention behaviour. Future investigations have the potential to expand the existing model by including more variables or to assess the current model in a different study context. Conclusively, considering the study's restricted focus on Generation Z customers in Malaysia, it is plausible that the findings may lack relevance for customers in other countries. Notwithstanding these constraints, it was concluded that the data collection approach was adequate as it accurately represents the participants' responses.

A theoretical framework is proposed in this research to help marketing professionals comprehend the factors that impact the purchasing intention of Malaysian Generation Z. From both a theoretical and practical perspective, this is of great importance. The results of this review provide significant insights for professionals in the field of marketing.

The objective of this research was to investigate the relationship between subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, price consciousness, attitude, perceived quality, value consciousness, environmental concern, and purchase intention among Malaysian Generation Z. It is conceivable that there are additional variables that may impact the purchasing intention of Generation Z in Malaysia. Although the suggested model provides a significant explanation for the observed variations in purchase intention, it is possible that there are more variables

that have not been included in the present investigation. Hence, it is recommended that future studies assess the possible existence of unexplained factors in the present research. Further investigation is needed to formulate further enquiries and assess their efficacy by using diverse research methodologies used in this work. Researchers may need to enhance the existing model by integrating additional variables to adequately assess the influence of various factors on the purchasing intentions of Generation Z in Malaysia.

The present study used quantitative research methodology, which included the distribution of survey questionnaires. This methodology has limited its efficacy in evaluating client sentiments and inclinations towards completing a transaction. One limitation of quantitative research is its restricted ability to provide a comprehensive exploration of consumer behaviour or the fundamental factors that influence such behaviour. An inherent restriction is one of the limits of quantitative research. Future iterations of this study may use qualitative research approaches, such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, to improve the understanding of consumers' perspectives. Employing qualitative research as a kind of investigation, which entails conducting in-depth interviews, might provide more understanding of many underlying factors.

A model has been developed in the present research to analyse the determinants influencing the purchasing intention of Generation Z in Malaysia. This model may be further examined, expanded, or modified by including more demographic data, such as those pertaining to different countries. Subsequent investigations may be advantageous by exploring new

populations or transitioning towards cross-cultural research. To explore novel research opportunities, one might conduct a cross-cultural study. The results of the research provide multinational companies with valuable understanding that a marketing strategy that is successful in one country may not provide the same level of success in another country, especially when there are cultural differences between the two. Furthermore, this result might motivate foreign organisations to create distinctive marketing strategies that give priority to the local culture, local needs, and predominant features of the sociocultural environment in that region. Moreover, it would be beneficial to expand the study to include differences in marketing behaviour linked to age among consumers.

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