

Branding in the Ready-To-Eat Food Industry

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper examines how brand image shape the consumer's purchase attitude and intention by integrating the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) with ready-to-eat (RTE) brand image. As RTE food industry continues to expand, understanding the psychological importance behind branding effects and its relation to consumer's purchase attitude and intention becomes crucial since it could lead to the right direction of marketing and increase sales, market share in addition to loyalty in the competitive fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) segment. Branding extends beyond just names, as it carries with it the credibility, quality, philosophy and segments in which it falls into. Therefore, these credentials are reflected through brand image in unspoken words and how the brand carries itself throughout the years. This particular condition shapes consumers purchase attitudes towards the RTE brand and eventually leads to purchase intention. To explore these dynamics, this study adopts a conceptual research design grounded in a structured synthesis of peer-reviewed literature on brand image, TPB theory and RTE food industry. Through this theory-driven analytical approach, the paper develops a conceptual framework illustrating how brand image influences consumer's purchase attitudes, while taking into consideration subjective norms and perceived behavioural control and eventually leads to purchase intention. The findings highlight that brand image influence purchase attitudes through many dimensions, and brand image seems to be a reciprocal and importance substance in building and sustaining an RTE food product in the competitive and alluring fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector. Theoretically, this paper extends the TPB model into a new domain by explaining consumer's purchase attitude through the lens of brand image. Practically, it underscores the need for entrepreneurs and policymakers to prioritise brand image as a tool of standardization, credibility, quality, philosophy and segments that could lead to safe, hygienic products to consumers while creating consumers loyalty for the brand in the long run.

Keywords: brand image, Theory of Planned Behaviour, purchase attitude, purchase intention, subjective norms

INTRODUCTION

The ready-to-eat food industry, a critical component of the fast-moving consumer goods sector valued for providing convenient, time-saving solutions amid urbanisation, rising disposable incomes, and busy lifestyles, has experienced substantial growth (Al-Farsi & Al-Mutlaq, 2025; Ramanathan et al., 2022). For instance, global RTE meals revenue reached USD 98.12 billion in 2019, with projections to USD 122.95 billion by 2024, driven by faster-paced lives, dual-income households, and demand for ethnic cuisines (Ramanathan et al., 2022). This expansion is largely attributable to the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) segment, where products are characterised by rapid sales cycles and relatively low prices, making them a significant part of household expenditure in many regions, such as one-fifth in Malaysia (Ahmat et al., 2024). This rapid expansion underscores a fundamental shift in consumer behaviour, moving away from traditional home-prepared meals towards more convenient alternatives that align with modern societal demands (Al-Farsi & Al-Mutlaq, 2025). Within this dynamic sector, branding plays a pivotal role in consumer perception and purchasing decisions, often outweighing product innovation alone (Rai et al., 2023). A strong brand is a crucial asset, fostering trustworthiness, providing a significant return on investment for suppliers, and enabling premium pricing while maintaining competitive superiority (Yoshioka-Kobayashi et al., 2020).

Branding is the strategic process of creating a unique identity and image for a product or company in consumers' minds, thereby differentiating it from competitors and fostering loyalty (Halim et al., 2024). This involves crafting a cohesive brand image through components such as logos, brand messaging, and core values, all of which are instrumental in shaping consumer psychology and influencing decision-making (Jahan et al., 2024). Given the convenience-driven nature of the ready-to-eat market, effective branding strategies must also address evolving consumer demands for factors such as perceived health benefits, transparent nutritional information, and innovative, sustainable packaging (Al-Farsi & Al-Mutlaq, 2025; Baskaran et al., 2017). Research on the branding of ready-to-eat food products found that brand influences consumers' decision-making processes, underscoring its multifaceted impact beyond mere product recognition (Jahan et al., 2024). It is a multifaceted process that goes beyond just a logo or slogan and encompasses the deliberate identification, creation, and management of a brand's assets and actions, each contributing to how the brand is perceived by stakeholders (Almutairi, 2025). This paper aims to explore the pivotal role of branding within the ready-to-eat food industry, examining its impact on consumer attitudes, purchase intention, and market dynamics.

To better understand the intricacies of branding in the ready-to-eat food industry, it is essential to delve into specific strategies and their impact on consumer behaviour, particularly on purchase attitude, intention and brand's roles (Baskaran et al., 2017). To do so, the present study proposes a novel application of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to examine how brand image influence consumer attitudes and, ultimately, purchasing decisions for RTE food products (Iradawaty & Mochklas, 2025). Moreover, establishing a favourable brand image is critical for distinguishing products in a crowded marketplace, influencing consumer perceptions, and cultivating long-term loyalty (Putri et al., 2021). This is particularly pertinent in the ready-to-eat sector, where convenience and health consciousness often present conflicting consumer motivations (Baskaran et al., 2017). Therefore, examining branding in the ready-to-eat food industry through the lens of the TPB can elucidate the cognitive processes underpinning consumer choices, as this theoretical model is widely recognised for its ability to explain behavioural patterns across various consumption contexts (Ismail et al., 2024).

In relation to the TPB, this framework posits that an individual's behavioural intention is influenced by their attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ahmat et al., 2024). This model, extensively used in food-related research, suggests that these components collectively explain a significant portion of the variance in an individual's intention and subsequent behaviour (Al-Kwifi et al., 2019; Panjaitan & Cahya, 2025; Užar & Filipović, 2023). A review of current ready-to-eat food industry research reveals a gap in the comprehensive application of the TPB to specifically investigate the role of brand image in shaping consumer attitudes and purchase intentions for these convenient food options (Rabbanee et al., 2020; Sutia & Fahlevi, 2024). This study, therefore, aims to bridge this research gap by examining brand image, consumer attitude and behaviour in the ready-to-eat food sector, utilising an extended TPB framework (Chilón-Troncos et al., 2024; Wibowo et al., 2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of ready-to-eat (RTE) Food Industry

The ready-to-eat food market is experiencing rapid expansion, driven by evolving consumer lifestyles that prioritise convenience and time efficiency (Ahmat et al., 2024). This growth is further fuelled by increasing urbanisation, smaller household sizes, and a rising demand for diverse culinary experiences, all of which contribute to a dynamic market where differentiation through effective branding is paramount. This sector includes a wide array of products, from pre-packaged meals and snacks to minimally processed fresh foods, all designed for immediate consumption with little to no preparation (Chen et al., 2024). The market's increasing complexity requires brands not only to offer convenience but also to effectively communicate other attributes, such as nutritional value, ingredient sourcing, and sustainability, to meet the diverse and evolving preferences of modern consumers (García-Salirrosas et al., 2024). For instance, consumers' growing awareness of health and well-being has led to a greater willingness to choose and consume healthy foods, influenced by factors like brand perception, brand messaging and brand images (Chilón-Troncos et al., 2024).

This shift underscores the critical role of branding in conveying these attributes effectively to consumers, thereby influencing purchasing decisions and fostering brand loyalty (Chilón-Troncos et al., 2024). This indicates that branding in the ready-to-eat food industry must strategically communicate not only convenience but also the intangible benefits and values that resonate with health-conscious consumers (Li & Shan, 2025). Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of consumer motivations, perceptions, and purchase intentions in relation to branding within this sector requires a robust theoretical framework that accounts for the interplay of these diverse factors, such as the TPB (Hanafiah et al., 2023; Roy & Khatun, 2023).

Overview of The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

According to the TPB, which has been extensively used in many industries, understanding the psychological determinants of consumer behaviour, particularly purchase intentions, involves several factors (Panjaitan & Cahya, 2025). These factors encompass attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, which collectively predict an individual's intent to perform a given action (Onat & Güneren, 2024). This model posits that a positive attitude, influenced by an individual's evaluation of the behaviour, is a strong predictor of behavioural intention (Ahmat et al., 2024). As such, branding strategies that cultivate favourable perceptions of convenience, quality, and healthfulness can significantly enhance consumer attitudes towards ready-to-eat food products, thereby fostering stronger purchase intentions (Suvittawat & Suvittawat, 2024).

Furthermore, subjective norms, which reflect an individual's perception of social pressure to engage or not engage in a particular behaviour, are also crucial in shaping purchase intentions within the ready-to-eat food market (Ismail et al., 2024). For instance, if key social groups or influencers endorse certain ready-to-eat brands, consumers are more likely to develop positive attitudes and intentions towards those products (Panjaitan & Cahya, 2025). The importance of subjective norms is further underscored by studies demonstrating their significant role in influencing consumer behaviour, particularly regarding novel food innovations and the willingness to pay a premium for specific products (Ahmat et al., 2024; Gutierrez et al., 2023; Nakhonchaigul & Siriyota, 2024).

Similarly, perceived behavioural control could also be influenced by brands through clear messaging about product accessibility, affordability, and ease of use, all of which enhance a consumer's belief in their ability to acquire and consume the product (Zafar et al., 2021). Hence, while consumers consciously make decisions and possess agency, perceived behavioural control is intrinsically linked to attitudes and subjective norms, with the strength of these variables ultimately shaping the final purchasing decision (Ismail et al., 2024). The interplay between these factors underscores the complexity of consumer decision-making and highlights the strategic importance of integrated branding efforts in the ready-to-eat food sector. This implies that effective branding in this industry transcends mere aesthetic appeal and requires a strategic alignment of brand communication with consumers' perceptions of control over their dietary choices (Higuchi et al., 2022).

Understanding Brand Image in TPB

An important element within the TPB, attitudes towards ready-to-eat foods are shaped by a confluence of factors, including taste preferences, nutritional considerations, and the perceived value proposition offered by a brand (Mulyarahardja et al., 2023). Attitudes, therefore, serve as a pivotal mediator between external stimuli, such as branding elements, and an individual's purchase intentions (Hassan et al., 2025). This evaluative stance towards a behaviour, whether positive or negative, directly influences the likelihood that an individual will engage in that behaviour, such as consuming fast food (Sajjad et al., 2023). This is further supported by the notion that the more positive one's attitude is towards a particular behaviour, the greater their behavioural intention will be (Guo et al., 2023). Cultivating positive associations through effective branding and communication strategies can significantly enhance consumer attitudes towards ready-to-eat products (Ismail et al., 2024).

On the other hand, subjective norms within the brand's image in the ready-to-eat food industry could be influenced by collective perceptions of society regarding convenience and innovation (Ismail et al., 2024). These norms are shaped by the perceived social desirability of consuming such products, often influenced by

peer recommendations and prevailing societal trends (Guo et al., 2023). The collective nature of these influences underscores the need for brands to align their messaging with broader cultural values and social expectations to foster greater acceptance and adoption (Sajjad et al., 2023; Valizadeh & Karami, 2025). This includes understanding how the perceived expectations of significant others and the motivation to comply with those expectations shape an individual's purchasing decisions for ready-to-eat products (Panjaitan & Cahya, 2025). Furthermore, the influence of subjective norms on purchasing intentions is particularly salient in product categories where social validation or perceived social pressure is significant, including radical food innovations (Ismail et al., 2024; Pradana et al., 2024).

Perceived behavioural control could also be influenced by brand image through the formation of consumer beliefs regarding the accessibility, affordability, and ease of use of ready-to-eat food options (Nakhonchaigul & Siriyotha, 2024; Yang et al., 2024). This perception of control is critical as it directly impacts an individual's confidence in their ability to perform the behaviour (Agu et al., 2017; Ismail et al., 2024). In the context of ready-to-eat foods, perceived behavioural control is further enhanced by transparent brand communication about product availability, clear preparation instructions, and readily accessible nutritional information, which collectively empower consumers to make informed choices (Alfiani & Priantina, 2024). Thus, a brand's ability to simplify the decision-making process and reduce perceived barriers to consumption directly contributes to higher perceived behavioural control, thereby strengthening purchase intentions (Ahmat et al., 2024).

This comprehensive understanding of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control within the TPB framework allows for a nuanced exploration of how branding strategies can effectively target and influence consumer behaviour in the dynamic ready-to-eat food market (Nakhonchaigul & Siriyotha, 2024; Sutia & Fahlevi, 2024). Branding, therefore, exerts significant influence in the ready-to-eat food industry, with a strong brand image fostering consumer trust and loyalty through indicators such as product quality, visual appeal, and consistent brand communication (Iradawaty & Mochklas, 2025). Moreover, a well-defined brand image can significantly impact consumer attitudes by conveying hedonic and utilitarian dimensions, which are foundational for predicting human behaviour and influencing decision-making, particularly in low-involvement purchases like ready-to-eat foods (Ismail et al., 2024). This influence extends to shaping purchase intentions, as consumers often rely on brand reputation as a heuristic in their decision-making process, especially when faced with numerous similar product offerings (Ayuni, 2020). As a result, understanding consumer purchase behaviour through branding mechanisms is critical to developing effective marketing strategies for the ready-to-eat food sector.

Although the TPB within the ready-to-eat industry literature often emphasises factors like convenience, price, and packaging as primary drivers of consumer purchase intention (Baskaran et al., 2017; Rosli & Sahak, 2024), these factors are also often taken into consideration in building a brand that resonates with consumer needs and expectations (Ismail et al., 2024). Existing research often overlooks the nuanced interplay between brand image, consumer attitudes and intentions (Rustagi & Prakash, 2022; Valizadeh & Karami, 2025). Furthermore, while the emphasis on extrinsic attributes is important, it often overshadows the deeper psychological motivators influenced by intrinsic product characteristics and brand promises, which contribute to a more holistic understanding of purchase behaviour in this dynamic sector. This gap is particularly salient given the growing consumer focus on health and wellness, which demands a more comprehensive understanding of how brand messaging on nutritional value and health benefits influences purchasing attitudes and intentions (Baskaran et al., 2017; EROL, 2023). In this context, a strong brand image is critical in shaping consumer attitudes and satisfaction, ultimately driving purchase intention, especially for healthy food options (García-Salirrosas et al., 2024).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a conceptual research design, relying on theoretical reasoning and structured literature synthesis rather than empirical data collection. Conceptual research is recognised as an appropriate and methodologically robust approach for developing theoretical models and advancing understanding in underexplored domains (Jaakkola, 2020; MacInnis, 2011). Given that the paper's objective is to explore how branding influences purchase intention in the ready-to-eat food industry, this approach facilitates the integration of diverse theoretical perspectives to construct a comprehensive conceptual framework (Baskaran

et al., 2017). This methodology allows for a thorough examination of existing theories, specifically the TPB, to identify key variables and propose relationships that explain branding's influence on consumer purchase intentions in the ready-to-eat food sector (Alfiani & Priantina, 2024; Baskaran et al., 2017). This approach is considered suitable for generating conceptual advancement. To construct the conceptual framework, a comprehensive review of peer-reviewed literature was conducted, focusing on studies that explored branding, consumer behaviour, and purchase intentions within the ready-to-eat food industry (Baskaran et al., 2017). This systematic review synthesised insights from prominent databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, using keywords such as "ready-to-eat food," "branding," "purchase intention," "consumer behaviour," "brand image," and "brand equity" to ensure comprehensive coverage.

Using a deductive reasoning process, the TPB was adapted to the context of the ready-to-eat food industry. The analysis synthesised prior findings and theoretical insights to construct logical linkages between branding elements (e.g., brand image) and the core constructs of the TPB (attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control) to explain purchase intention in this specific market (Chianardi & Permatasari, 2020; Halim et al., 2024). This non-empirical, theory-driven method enables a structured exploration of the psychological mechanisms guiding consumer decision-making within the ready-to-eat food sector, particularly how branding impacts attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Baskaran et al., 2017) while providing a foundation for future empirical validation through quantitative or qualitative research (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The conceptual synthesis undertaken in this study yields several key findings. Firstly, it highlights the paramount importance of branding in shaping consumer purchase intentions in the ready-to-eat food sector, particularly through the TPB lens (Macheke et al., 2023). Specifically, brand-related elements such as brand image directly influence consumers' attitudes towards ready-to-eat products, their subjective norms regarding consumption, and their perceived behavioural control over purchasing decisions (Alfiani & Priantina, 2024). This integrated perspective underscores that effective branding strategies can significantly enhance consumers' positive evaluations of RTE foods, reinforce social desirability, and bolster their confidence in acquiring and consuming these products (Ismail et al., 2024).

Secondly, the analysis reveals that brand image serves as a crucial mechanism for communicating intrinsic and extrinsic product attributes, thereby profoundly impacting consumer perceptions and intentions. For instance, a brand's commitment to sustainability or ethical sourcing can significantly sway purchase decisions, aligning with the growing consumer interest in environmental and social concerns (Santos et al., 2024). This aligns with broader trends indicating that consumers are increasingly considering ethical and environmental factors in their purchasing behaviours, with brand image serving as a pivotal tool for communicating these values and influencing purchase intention (Santos et al., 2024).

Thirdly, the study emphasises that a strong brand image, often conveyed through elements like logos and packaging, plays a significant role in fostering consumer trust and mitigating perceived risks associated with ready-to-eat food products, thereby enhancing purchase intentions (Iradawaty & Mochklas, 2025). Furthermore, this comprehensive framework suggests that brand image, cultivated through consistent brand messaging and positive consumer experiences, influences purchase attitudes and intentions and ultimately fostering consumer loyalty (Liu & Wang, 2023; Xie et al., 2021). Additionally, the analysis indicates that a strong brand image contributes significantly to perceived value, which, in turn, influences brand trust and ultimately purchase intention (Ling et al., 2023). It is particularly evident in informal microenterprises, where straightforward visual cues, such as logos, are more effective at attracting consumer attention and influencing purchase intentions than complex symbolic branding (Iradawaty & Mochklas, 2025).

This literature shows that even basic branding elements can significantly impact purchasing behaviour, especially for vendors seeking to build a sustainable brand without incurring extensive promotional costs (Iradawaty & Mochklas, 2025). This finding underscores the broad applicability of branding principles across diverse market structures, from established corporations to nascent informal vendors, and highlights the need for tailored branding strategies to leverage specific market contexts effectively (Iradawaty & Mochklas, 2025).

The intricate interplay between brand image and consumer attitudes is further underscored by findings showing that brand image significantly influences consumer attitudes, and ultimately purchase intention (Ling et al., 2023). This complex relationship highlights how carefully constructed branding not only captures initial consumer interest but also cultivates a deeper sense of reliability and worth, which are essential for driving actual purchasing decisions (Iradawaty & Mochklas, 2025; Ling et al., 2023).

For instance, packaging, often considered a foundational branding element, plays a strategic role in marketing by providing brand identification, visual distinction, and essential product information, thereby directly influencing consumers' assessments and purchase intentions (Chianardi & Permatasari, 2020). This multifaceted interaction suggests that effective branding encompasses not only aesthetic appeal but also the strategic communication of value and reliability, crucial for converting initial interest into consistent purchasing behaviour (Iradawaty & Mochklas, 2025). Moreover, brand image is intrinsically linked to consumer perceptions and beliefs, often evoked by distinct slogans or other brand cues, which are vital for establishing strong brand associations and fostering consumer loyalty (Fauziah et al., 2025).

Proposed Conceptual Framework

Building on these conceptual findings, a theoretical model was developed to visually map the relationships proposed in this study. The model integrates TPB with brand image proposed to influence purchase attitude. The formation of consumer attitudes through brand image is being proposed and examined within the context of the ready-to-eat food industry. These attitudes eventually lead to behaviour, while subjective norms and perceived behavioural control moderate the relationship between attitudes and purchase intention.

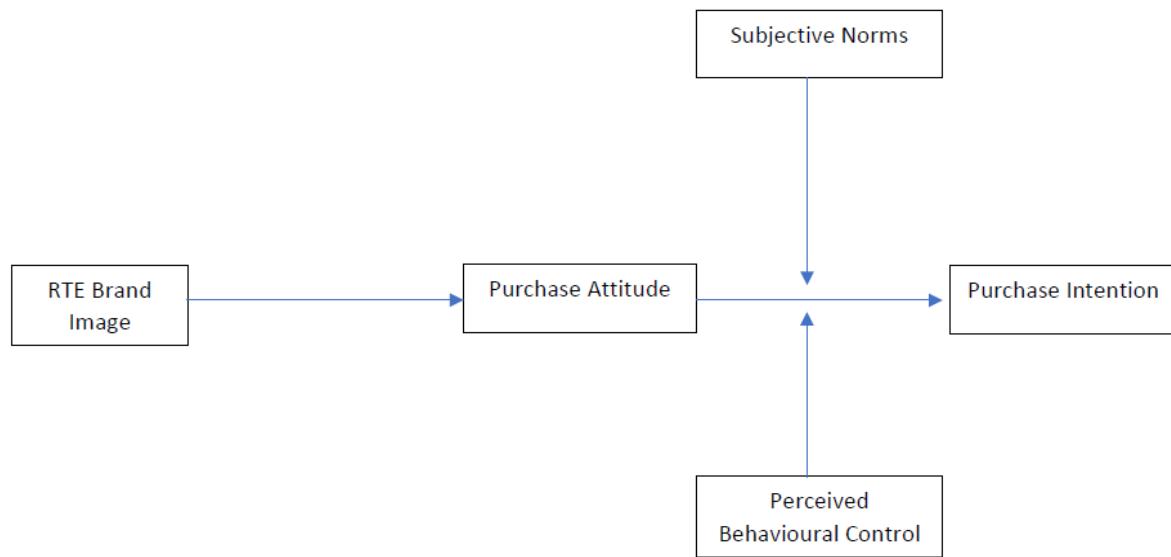


Figure 1: Propose Conceptual Framework for Branding influences towards attitudes within the RTE Food Industry by expanding Theory of Planned Behaviour.

This conceptual study highlights the critical role of branding in shaping consumer purchasing decisions in the ready-to-eat food sector, revealing that factors such as brand credibility and a strong brand image are fundamental drivers of consumer attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. This comprehensive understanding of branding's multifaceted influence underscores its pivotal role in establishing market differentiation, fostering consumer loyalty, and ultimately driving commercial success in this dynamic industry. Consequently, producers and marketers of ready-to-eat food products can leverage these insights to develop effective programs to attract customers and ensure the long-term viability of their offerings (Zhou & Nisa, 2023).

Future research could further explore the longitudinal impact of specific branding strategies on consumer behaviour within nascent markets, particularly in rapidly evolving ready-to-eat food segments. Such

investigations would provide valuable insights into how brand equity evolves and influences consumer choices over time, thereby informing more adaptive and responsive marketing approaches for sustained competitive advantage. Additionally, investigating the cross-cultural transferability of successful branding models could reveal nuances in consumer response to branding elements across diverse demographic and socioeconomic contexts. Furthermore, examining how technological advancements in food processing and preservation affect consumer perceptions of brand trustworthiness and product innovation would be beneficial (Rai et al., 2023). Finally, exploring the psychological underpinnings of consumer decision-making, particularly the role of emotional connections and cognitive biases within brand image of ready-to-eat food brands, could offer deeper insights into consumer behaviour (Ho & Hau, 2014).

Theoretical Contributions

The application of TPB has been instrumental in dissecting the complex behavioural determinants influencing consumer purchase intentions for ready-to-eat food products, thereby extending its proven utility from general food studies to this specialised sector (Kusuma, 2023). This advancement is significant, as it not only validates the framework's applicability in a new domain but also highlights the importance of incorporating additional factors, such as brand image, to enhance predictive power for purchasing behaviour in the ready-to-eat market (Liu & Wang, 2023). Moreover, integrating brand-specific variables into the TPB model allows for a more nuanced understanding of how branding strategies, particularly those emphasising sustainability and ethical production, directly influence consumer attitudes and perceived behavioural control, thereby impacting purchasing decisions (Santos et al., 2024). Brand image, recognised as an essential component of marketing, plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer preferences and purchase intentions, especially within the fast-selling ready-to-eat food sector, where understanding consumer perceptions of packaging attributes such as colour, design, and nutritional information is crucial for enhancing product experience (Baskaran et al., 2017).

This perspective also highlights how branding elements, beyond mere aesthetics, communicate vital information that builds trust and guides consumers through complex purchasing decisions (Sandu et al., 2022). The extended framework, which proposes brand image as an additional variable, offers a robust model for analysing TPB collectively influence consumer attitudes and intentions towards ready-to-eat products, thereby enabling marketers to develop more targeted and effective branding strategies (Panjaitan & Cahya, 2025; Prakash et al., 2023). This comprehensive approach also enables a deeper understanding of how brand loyalty, shaped by this factor, influences repeat purchases in the ready-to-eat market, despite arguments suggesting its absence in food contexts (Baskaran et al., 2017).

Practical Contributions

The TPB provides a robust framework for ready-to-eat food marketers to craft strategies that resonate with consumer psychology, focusing on enhancing perceived quality and building trust through transparent branding. Specifically, understanding how consumer attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control interact with brand attributes enables the development of targeted campaigns that can effectively influence purchase intentions (Ahmat et al., 2024; Panjaitan & Cahya, 2025). This framework helps identify key leverage points for communication and product development, ensuring that branding efforts align with consumer values and expectations. By applying the TPB, businesses can better anticipate consumer responses to various branding initiatives, thereby optimising resource allocation and enhancing the effectiveness of their marketing efforts (Nakhonchaigul & Siriyota, 2024). For instance, by emphasising the health benefits or convenience aspects that align with prevailing subjective norms, marketers can significantly enhance the brand image of their ready-to-eat products. Furthermore, by leveraging insights from perceived behavioural control, marketers can develop accessible distribution channels and user-friendly packaging that reduce perceived purchase barriers, thereby boosting consumer confidence and fostering repeat business (Baskaran et al., 2017). This strategic integration of branding within the TPB framework thus offers actionable insights for businesses to cultivate stronger brand loyalty and secure a competitive edge in the rapidly expanding ready-to-eat food market (Bilbíie et al., 2021; Hanafiah et al., 2023; Nakpathom et al., 2024; Užar & Filipović, 2023). Moreover, understanding consumer perceptions of ease or difficulty in engaging with a particular behaviour, alongside social influences, can help tailor promotional activities to specific demographics, further driving brand engagement and market penetration (Ahmat et al., 2024). The strategic use of logos and labelling, for example,

has been shown to increase market visibility and consumer trust, thereby boosting purchase intentions, even for micro-enterprises (Iradawaty & Mochklas, 2025; Užar & Filipović, 2023).

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY & RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper is conceptual in nature; thus, it requires empirical testing to validate the conceptual framework. Furthermore, the reliance on existing theoretical models such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour, while providing a strong foundation, may not fully capture the dynamic and impulsive nature of ready-to-eat food purchasing decisions without the inclusion of additional situational or emotional variables (Dzulkipli et al., 2023; Wibowo et al., 2024). These dynamic nature of the RTE industry should be empirically investigated to validate the conceptual framework. Furthermore, the generalizability of the findings may be constrained if the conceptual framework is validated within a specific cultural or geographical context without considering cross-cultural variations in consumer behaviour (Ismail et al., 2024). Future research should therefore incorporate quantitative methods to empirically assess the relationships proposed in this framework across diverse consumer segments and geographical regions. The empirical investigation should go through quantitative methodologies, such as structural equation modelling, to statistically validate the proposed relationships between branding variables and consumer purchase intentions within the ready-to-eat sector (Cuong, 2024; Valizadeh & Karami, 2025). Additionally, the cross-sectional design often employed in such studies limits the ability to establish causality or observe changes in consumer behaviour over time, suggesting that longitudinal research could provide deeper insights into behavioural patterns (Ismail et al., 2024). Future studies should also address the distinction between purchase intention and actual purchasing behaviour, as relying solely on self-reported intentions may not accurately reflect real-world consumption choices (Užar & Filipović, 2023). Longitudinal research methods can be used to explore relationships throughout time, while future work may employ a mixed-methods approach to capture the full complexity of consumer decision-making processes (Zhou & Nisa, 2023). In addition future research should make sure brand image of products related to RTE is examined across diverse cultural and geographical contexts to determine the extent to which the effectiveness of branding strategies is universally applicable or context specific (Sutia & Fahlevi, 2024).

CONCLUSIONS

Brand image holds a substantial importance in shaping consumer's purchase attitudes, functioning as a key psychological determinant within the TPB framework. This conceptual paper emphasizes that brand image, through its multidimensional components influences consumer's purchase attitude and actually leads to purchase intention. Brand image dimensions of credibility allows consumers to feel confident in their purchase, similar to assurance of quality and non-defects products reflected to brand image. Hygiene and safety assurance from a certain brand are also reflected through brand image, and these decisions to purchase RTE food products that falls within FMCG market segment could be made easier or through simpler filtering process by considering brand image as one of the deliberations. The social responsibility of the enterprises and their commitment towards sustainability or ethical sourcing can significantly influence purchase attitudes and intentions as consumers are more leaning towards environmental and social concerns (Santos et al., 2024), thus this is reflected in the brand image of the enterprises that practice these approaches. In addition to that, consistent brand messaging and positive consumer experiences builds a positive brand image that could lead to positive purchase attitudes and intentions and eventually fostering consumer loyalty (Liu & Wang, 2023; Xie et al., 2021). Additionally, the analysis indicates that a strong brand image contributes significantly to perceived value, which, in turn, influences brand trust and ultimately purchase intention (Ling et al., 2023). Positive brand image therefore, encourages consumer's purchase attitude, although the consistency of a brand to remain positive in the minds of consumers takes a lot of work through marketing, brand messaging and communications that actually reach the consumers within their daily life's. By placing brand image as one of the most important variables that influences consumer's purchase attitudes, this paper underscores the critical role of brand image in shaping consumer's attitudes and intention in the RTE food industry. Enterprises could build brand image that is feasible, with credibility, quality, safe and hygienic for the consumers and policymakers could assist in building brand image for the enterprises comprising of safety assurance, hygienic practices, quality control which eventually leads to product that is reliable and suitable for the consumers, and consumers reciprocate these values received through loyalty towards the brands. Future empirical research should test the proposed relationships within this conceptual framework to deepen understanding of brand

image on consumer's purchase attitude and intention. This understanding could benefit the aforementioned stakeholders involved while theoretically shades light towards the nuance understanding of brand image in the RTE food industry through the lens of TPB.

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