

# Conceptual Development of Intention to Purchase Ready-to-Eat Food Mediated Consumers' Attitude

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## ABSTRACT

This study will investigate the determinants of purchase intention for ready-to-eat (RTE) food products, focusing on the direct and indirect influences of price, product quality, and convenience, with consumer attitude positioned as a mediating variable. Grounded in an integrated theoretical framework combining the Value-Attitude-Behavior hierarchy and the Theory of Planned Behavior, the research will employ a quantitative methodology to examine these complex relationships. Data will be collected through a digitally administered survey distributed to a purposive sample of RTE food consumers, ensuring participants possess relevant purchase experience. The study will utilize advanced statistical techniques, specifically structural equation modeling (SEM) via SmartPLS 4, to analyze the collected data. This approach will enable a simultaneous assessment of both the measurement model, for validity and reliability, and the structural model, for hypothesis testing. The anticipated findings will confirm that price, product quality, and convenience exert significant direct effects on purchase intention. More importantly, the results will establish that consumer attitude serves as a powerful psychological mediator, meaning the influence of these core attributes on behavioral intention will be channelled through the positive or negative evaluations they generate. This research will contribute novel insights to the literature by delineating the cognitive process through which tangible product attributes are translated into purchase decisions. For industry practitioners, the findings will underscore the strategic imperative of moving beyond a focus on functional benefits alone. Instead, successfully fostering lasting purchase intention will require integrated strategies that meticulously manage price perceptions, ensure superior quality, and highlight convenience, all while actively cultivating a positive and resonant consumer attitude.

**Keywords:** Price, Product Quality, Convenience, Attitude, Intention

## 1. Introduction

The intention to purchase ready-to-eat (RTE) food is a critical precursor to actual consumer behavior, serving as a key indicator for market demand and a focal point for strategic planning in the food industry (Roy & Khatun, 2023). Understanding this intention is paramount as it directly influences production volumes, marketing strategies, and the overall economic vitality of the RTE sector. Globally, the intention to purchase RTE food is trending upwards, driven by urbanization, busier lifestyles, and the increasing number of dual-income households (Mohammad et al., 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this trend, solidifying reliance on convenient, shelf-stable, and delivery-friendly meal solutions (Putri & Nuralina,

2023). Current issues, however, temper this positive intention. Growing health consciousness has led to heightened scrutiny of nutritional content, preservatives, and calorie counts (Bansal et al., 2025; Hsu et al., 2023). Simultaneously, environmental and ethical concerns regarding packaging waste and sourcing practices are increasingly influencing purchase decisions, creating a complex landscape for consumers (Samarakoon Mudiyansele et al., 2025). A significant research gap exists in understanding the nuanced interplay between these conflicting drivers.

While studies often focus on convenience or price, fewer explore how health and sustainability attributes ultimately override or coexist with the core intention to buy for convenience (Rosli & Sahak, 2024). Furthermore, cultural and regional variations in these intentions are underexplored, limiting the global applicability of findings (Ismail et al., 2024). The central problem is the volatility of purchase intention. A consumer may intend to buy an RTE meal for its convenience but abandon the purchase upon encountering undesirable health credentials or excessive plastic packaging (Arlansah & Gularso, 2024; Huang et al., 2024). This gap between intention and action represents a major challenge for the industry.

For policymakers, studying this intention is vital for crafting public health guidelines and environmental regulations that ensure a safe and sustainable RTE market. For the RTE market and sellers, these insights are crucial for product development, allowing them to innovate by addressing health and eco-conscious concerns, thereby converting positive intention into loyal purchases. For buyers, a deeper industry understanding leads to better product choices that align with their values, ensuring the market evolves to offer convenient options that are also healthy and responsibly produced. Ultimately, deciphering purchase intention is the key to a thriving and responsible ready-to-eat food ecosystem. This study aims to evaluate the direct and indirect relationship between price, product quality, and convenience with intention to purchase, with attitude as a mediator among the consumers in Malaysia.

## 2. Literature Review

### *Underpinning Theory*

This study is underpinned by an integrated theoretical framework combining the Value-Attitude-Behavior (VAB) hierarchy (Homer & Kahle, 1988) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), which together provide a comprehensive lens to analyze the formation of purchase intention for ready-to-eat food. The integrated model proposes that the external stimuli of product quality, price, and convenience are first conceptualized as utilitarian values that consumers derive from a product. These values form the foundational antecedents that directly shape a consumer's overall attitude (Homer & Kahle, 1988), creating an evaluative foundation for subsequent decision-making processes. The TPB then extends this sequence by arguing that intention is not only driven by this attitude but also by subjective norms (social pressure) and perceived behavioral control (ease of performance) (Ajzen, 1991). This integration is particularly powerful as it acknowledges that while core product attributes drive initial attitude formation, the actual conversion to purchase intention is moderated by broader social and contextual factors. Thereby, the attitude formed from value perceptions becomes a key mediating variable that directly affects purchase intention, resulting in a dual-theory approach that offers a more holistic explanation by linking specific product attributes to attitude formation via VAB and then situating that attitude within the broader cognitive and social determinants of behavioral intention as outlined by TPB. This combined framework provides superior explanatory power for understanding the complex cognitive processes behind ready-to-eat food purchases.

### *Relationship between Price, Attitude & Intention to Purchase*

The relationship between price and the intention to purchase ready-to-eat (RTE) food is complex and is critically mediated by consumer attitude (Omar et al., 2023). Price operates not merely as a financial barrier but as a multi-faceted signal of value, risk, and quality (Zheng et al., 2024). A higher price can negatively impact purchase intention directly by creating a perception of economic unaffordability; however, its full effect is filtered through the consumer's attitudinal evaluation (Raj et al., 2024). If a consumer perceives a high-priced RTE product as offering superior quality, exclusivity, or health benefits, this can foster a positive attitude, which may attenuate the negative direct effect of price and even enhance purchase intention by justifying the premium cost (Sulistiyo & Simanjuntak, 2023). Conversely, a low price may directly encourage purchase by reducing financial impediments, but if it generates a negative attitude by signaling poor quality, excessive preservatives, or inferior ingredients (a phenomenon often termed 'perceived risk'), the positive direct effect can be diminished or reversed. Therefore, attitude acts as the crucial interpretive lens, determining whether a price point is ultimately viewed as a cost or an investment, thereby mediating its overall influence on the behavioral intention to purchase (Ilieva et al., 2024). This underscores that pricing strategy must be developed in tandem with attributes that cultivate a positive product attitude to effectively drive consumer demand. *Therefore, the following hypotheses were proposed for this study:*

*H1: There is a relationship between price and intention to purchase ready-to-eat food.*

*H2: There is a relationship between price and attitude towards the intention to purchase ready-to-eat food.*

*H3: There is a mediating effect of attitude on the relationship between price and intention to purchase ready-to-eat food.*

### *Relationship between Product Quality, Attitude & Intention to Purchase*

The relationship between product quality and the intention to purchase ready-to-eat food is fundamentally shaped by the mediating role of consumer attitude (Klink et al., 2025; Kasza et al., 2024). Product quality, encompassing factors like taste, freshness, nutritional content, and safety, does not influence purchase intention in a vacuum; its effect is channeled through the positive or negative attitude it cultivates in the consumer (Núñez-Fernández et al., 2021). High perceived quality directly fosters a favorable attitude by satisfying core consumer needs for health, enjoyment, and reliability, transforming the product from a mere convenience into a worthwhile and trustworthy choice. This positive attitude then becomes a powerful driver of purchase intention, as consumers are motivated to act consistently with their positive evaluations (Aeni et al., 2025; Abiba et al., 2024). Conversely, perceptions of low quality, whether from poor ingredient sourcing, excessive preservatives, or inconsistent taste, directly breed a negative attitude rooted in distrust and anticipated dissatisfaction. This negative attitude effectively suppresses the intention to buy, even if other factors like price or convenience are appealing. Therefore, attitude acts as the essential psychological bridge, translating objective quality attributes into a subjective evaluation that ultimately dictates behavioral intent (Klink et al., 2025). A strategy focused solely on convenience or price will fail without the foundational positive attitude that only superior and reliably perceived product quality can provide. Thus, the following hypotheses were proposed for this study:

*H4: There is a relationship between product quality and intention to purchase ready-to-eat food.*

*H5: There is a relationship between product quality and attitude towards the intention to purchase ready-to-eat food.*

*H6: There is a mediating effect of attitude on the relationship between product quality and intention to purchase ready-to-eat food.*

#### *Relationship between Convenience, Attitude & Intention to Purchase*

The relationship between convenience and the intention to purchase ready-to-eat food is profoundly mediated by the consumer's attitude, forming a critical psychological pathway that translates practical benefits into behavioral outcomes (Nordin & Teo, 2024). Convenience, characterized by time savings, ease of access, and minimal preparation effort, initially functions as a powerful external driver (Fu et al., 2024). However, its influence on purchase intention is not direct; instead, it operates by shaping a positive attitude towards the product (Malhotra, 2025). When consumers perceive a ready-to-eat option as highly convenient, it alleviates the cognitive and physical burdens associated with meal preparation, generating feelings of efficiency, modernity, and self-efficacy (Hou et al., 2025). This positive emotional and evaluative response, which constitutes a favorable attitude, then becomes the primary motivator for forming a purchase intention (Cankül & Çıtak, 2025). The attitude effectively internalizes the external attribute of convenience, transforming it from a simple feature into a valued benefit that resonates with the consumer's lifestyle and aspirations. Consequently, a highly convenient product that fails to cultivate a positive attitude, perhaps due to other shortcomings like poor taste or health concerns, will see its advantage diminished (Malhotra, 2025). Therefore, convenience ultimately drives purchase decisions by first successfully fostering a mediating attitude of appreciation and satisfaction, proving that the perceived value of saved time and effort must be emotionally validated before it can consistently translate into commercial action (Nordin & Teo, 2024). This underscores that while convenience is a key market entry point, its true power in securing consumer loyalty and driving repeat purchases is unlocked only through the positive attitudes it generates. Hence, the following hypotheses were proposed for this study:

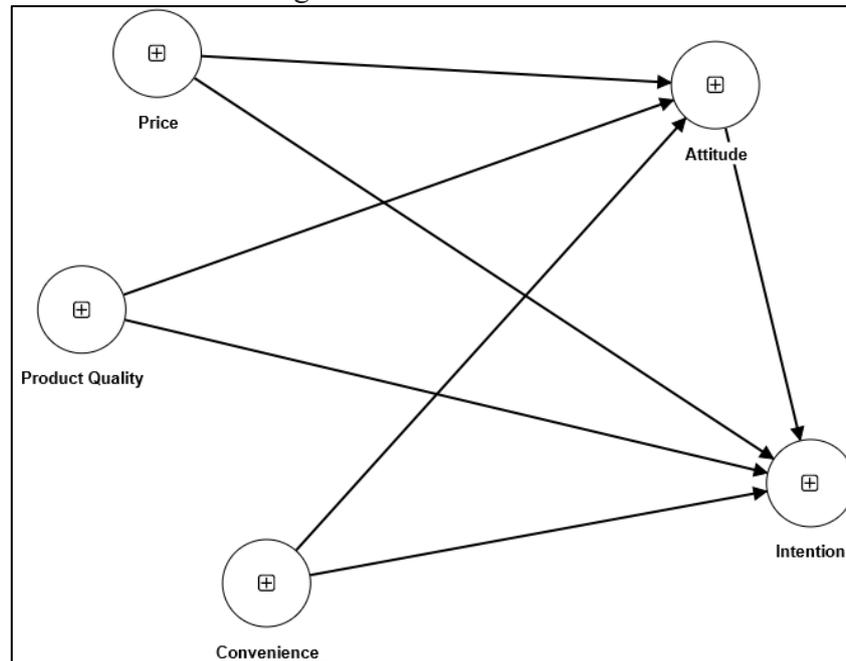
*H7: There is a relationship between convenience and intention to purchase ready-to-eat food.*

*H8: There is a relationship between convenience and attitude towards the intention to purchase ready-to-eat food.*

*H9: There is a relationship between attitude and intention to purchase ready-to-eat food.*

*H10: There is a mediating effect of attitude on the relationship between convenience and intention to purchase ready-to-eat food.*

Figure 1: Research Model



### 3. Methodology

This proposed study will investigate the complex relationships between key marketing mix elements and consumer behavior by examining how price, product quality, and convenience both directly and indirectly influence purchase intention of ready-to-eat food products, with consumer attitude serving as a mediating variable. The research framework is grounded in established consumer behavior theories, particularly the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Value-Attitude-Behavior hierarchy, which provide robust theoretical foundations for understanding the psychological processes underlying purchase decisions. To accomplish this research objective, investigators will gather primary data using measurement instruments with established validity and reliability, identified through an extensive review of existing literature in consumer behavior and food marketing.

Due to the practical impossibility of obtaining a complete population list of ready-to-eat food consumers, the study will employ survey questionnaires distributed digitally to participants selected through purposive sampling techniques, specifically targeting individuals who have experience purchasing and consuming ready-to-eat food products. As a perceptual study examining causal-effect relationships between constructs, the research will utilize advanced statistical methods to ensure rigorous analysis.

Primary data collected will undergo thorough screening procedures to identify and remove outliers, missing values, and response biases, ensuring that only clean, high-quality data is used for subsequent analysis. Preliminary analysis of respondent demographic and behavioral profiles will be conducted using SPSS software to establish sample characteristics and representativeness. For hypothesis testing, the study will employ structural equation modeling (SEM), a multivariate technique particularly suited for examining complex relationships between multiple independent and dependent variables simultaneously. SmartPLS 4 software will be utilized to assess both the measurement model (evaluating the reliability and validity of constructs) and the structural model (testing hypothesized relationships between variables).

This analytical approach will allow researchers to not only examine direct effects but also quantify the mediating role of consumer attitude in the relationship between product attributes and purchase intention, providing comprehensive insights into the psychological mechanisms driving consumer decision-making in the ready-to-eat food market.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study will establish that price, product quality, and convenience will significantly influence the intention to purchase ready-to-eat food, both directly and through the critical mediating role of consumer attitude. The findings will demonstrate that while these attributes are important external drivers, their ultimate impact on purchase decisions will be filtered through the consumer's internal attitudinal evaluation. A positive attitude, cultivated by perceptions of good value, high quality, and time-saving benefits, will emerge as the essential psychological mechanism that translates product features into commercial action. These insights will provide a nuanced understanding of consumer decision-making processes in the rapidly evolving ready-to-eat food sector. For practitioners, this will underscore the necessity of developing holistic marketing strategies that not only highlight functional benefits like convenience and affordability but also actively cultivate positive consumer attitudes through transparent communication, quality assurance, and value proposition alignment. Ultimately, fostering a favorable overall attitude will be paramount for converting market potential into sustained purchasing behavior.

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