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FACTORS AFFECTING URBAN CONSUMERS' PURCHASE DECISIONS FOR READY-TO-EAT FOODS: A STUDY IN PULAU PINANG, MALAYSIA

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Abstract:

In recent times, the popularity of ready-to-eat food has witnessed a significant rise, especially among the urban population. These convenient foods are easily available in supermarkets and can be consumed at any time and from any location. However, there is a lack of understanding about the factors that influence urban consumers' purchase decisions for ready-to-eat foods. To address this knowledge gap, a study was conducted to analyze the impact of price, packaging, safety, and convenience on the purchase decisions of urban dwellers. The study involved 157 respondents aged 18 and above, residing in urban areas of Pulau Pinang, who were selected through convenience sampling methods. Both online and manual questionnaires were utilized to gather data, which was then analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 and Microsoft Excel. The study findings suggest that the independent variables, namely price, packaging, safety, and convenience, had a significant and positive impact on urban consumers' purchase decisions. Thus, this study sheds light on critical factors that influence the purchase decisions of urban consumers for ready-to-eat foods.

Keywords:

Ready-To-Eat Food, Urban People, Purchasing Decision, Price, Packaging, Safety, Convenience

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Introduction

Food is a fundamental necessity for human beings, required for healthy growth and proper organ function. In marketing, the decisions people make about whether to purchase a product or not can determine its success. Ready-to-eat food products can be divided into market segments based on food-related lifestyles, allowing for effective marketing strategies that consider people's attitudes, income levels, and lifestyle standards. This conclusion is drawn after considering the availability of products in today's extensive market, where numerous examples exist. Therefore, companies seeking success must prioritize satisfying customers before focusing on increasing profits. Researchers aim to provide a general overview of the factors that influence urban people's choices of ready-to-eat food in Malaysia, as the demand for such food is increasing. The researchers offer a concise explanation of the relationship between urban people's purchasing decisions regarding ready-to-eat food in Malaysia.

Traditionally, the term "Ready to eat" (RTE) has referred to food that is immediately consumable without further preparation at the point of sale, including raw and cooked items, as well as hot or chilled products. RTE products are considered safe for consumption without additional heat treatment, such as reheating (Chaudhury, 2010). For the purposes of this study, researchers narrow the definition of RTE foods to those that have not been cooked and only require reheating or cooking with hot water. Examples include instant cereal, soup, and porridge, baked goods like pizza and pau, and savory dishes like ‘Nasi Lemak’ and ‘Ayam Masak Merah’.

The global RTE food industry has experienced significant growth in recent years, with a projected compound annual growth rate of 7.2% from 2016 to 2026, valued at up to US$195.3 billion (FMI, 2016). The convenience of RTE foods has made them a popular choice for many consumers, particularly those with busy lifestyles like urban dwellers (Nondzor & Tawiah, 2015). Technological advancements have shifted the burden of food preparation from individuals to manufacturers, which has contributed to the growth of this industry (Harris & Shiptsova, 2007).

The RTE food market in Malaysia is also experiencing significant growth and making a significant contribution to the country's food industry GDP. This growth is attributed to various factors, including intrinsic and extrinsic factors that consumers use to form opinions and expectations about a product before trying it (Lee and Lou, 1996). With an increasing middle-class population and a preference for purchasing food staples, the demand for RTE foods in Malaysia is expected to continue to grow in the coming years.

The ready-to-eat food industry has experienced significant growth due to its convenience, but it is facing several challenges related to price, packaging, convenience, and safety. Consumers may be willing to sacrifice nutritional value for affordability, and excessive packaging contributes to environmental waste. Additionally, companies may prioritize convenience over nutritional value, and food safety concerns must be addressed. These issues pose a challenge for companies seeking to meet consumer demand while also providing nutritious, safe, and sustainable ready-to-eat food options. Therefore, there is a need for research to identify effective strategies that address these challenges and promote the production and consumption of ready-to-eat foods that meet consumer expectations, while also ensuring affordability, sustainability, and safety.

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Given this context, this research aims to investigate the purchasing decisions of urban consumers in Malaysia in relation to RTE foods. The study seeks to identify the factors that influence their decision-making process when choosing these products. As the demand for RTE foods continues to rise, it is essential to understand the concerns of urban consumers in Malaysia regarding their purchase decisions for RTE foods. This study provides insights into the factors that influence purchasing decisions for RTE foods among urban consumers in Malaysia. The research objectives are as follows:

RO1 - To explore the correlation between price and the purchasing decisions of urban consumers.
RO2 -To evaluate how packaging influences the purchasing decisions of urban consumers.
RO3 - To investigate the relationship between the safety of RTE foods and the purchasing decisions of urban consumers.
RO4 - To identify the relationship between convenience, in terms of time-saving and effort, and the purchasing decisions of urban consumers.

The research questions are as follows:

RQ1 - To what extent does price influence the purchasing decisions of urban consumers?
RQ2 - What is the impact of packaging on the purchasing decisions of urban consumers?
RQ3 - To what degree are urban consumers aware of the safety of RTE food products?
RQ4 - What is the relationship between convenience, in terms of time-saving and effort, and the purchasing decisions of urban consumers?

Literature Review

Baskaran et al. (2017) conducted a study on the consumption patterns of RTE foods in Malaysia's urban areas. The study found that the availability and convenience of RTE foods have become increasingly important to urban residents, who are often too busy to prepare meals at home. The authors argue that changes in lifestyle and the rise of technological innovations have shifted food preparation from individuals to manufacturers, resulting in a higher demand for RTE foods, particularly among urban residents. This trend is particularly evident in Malaysia's urbanized and developed regions, such as Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Malacca, Perak, Johor, and Penang, where access to RTE food has become essential.

Albari (2020) examined the impact of price on consumer behavior, specifically in the context of online shopping. The author argues that price is a crucial factor in determining purchasing decisions for consumers. Consumers use price as a signal of a product's value and quality, and it influences their perception of the product. Albari highlights that consumers tend to evaluate the price of a product relative to its perceived benefits, and a high price may signal high quality.

Palaniammal and M (2017) investigated the factors influencing Malaysian consumers' purchasing decisions for instant food items. The study found that price is a significant determinant of consumers' purchasing decisions, with high-income groups more likely to purchase instant food items than low-income groups. The authors suggest that price is a critical consideration for consumers, particularly for recurring purchases.

In summary, these studies highlight the importance of RTE foods and the role of price in consumer decision-making. The convenience and availability of RTE foods have become increasingly important to urban residents, while price is a crucial factor in determining

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purchasing decisions for consumers. Understanding these trends and factors can help manufacturers and retailers better meet consumer needs and preferences.

The Relationship Between Packaging And Urban People`s Purchase Decision

Packaging plays a significant role in shaping the purchase decisions of urban consumers, particularly when it comes to ready-to-eat (RTE) food options. A study published in the International Journal of Consumer Studies found that packaging elements such as design, color, and material influence consumer product evaluation and purchase decisions, especially in urban areas (Yang & Ma, 2013). In the food industry, packaging convenience has become increasingly important in influencing the purchase decisions of urban consumers, especially for RTE food products. A study published in the Journal of Food Protection found that packaging convenience significantly influences the purchase decisions of urban consumers when selecting RTE food options (Worsfold & Griffith, 2019). Furthermore, a study published in the International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management found that convenient packaging is a crucial factor in consumer satisfaction and loyalty, with convenient location and easy access being the most important factors (Chen & Lee, 2018). This trend towards convenience has led to the development of packaging options that cater to the needs of urban consumers, such as resealable pouches, single-serve containers, and packaging that is designed for on-the-go consumption. Food manufacturers and packaging companies are responding to this trend by offering more convenient packaging options for RTE food products. As urbanization continues to grow and the demand for convenience increases, packaging companies will have to continue to innovate and develop packaging options that prioritize convenience to meet the needs of urban consumers.

The Relationship Between Packaging And Urban People`s Purchase Decision

According to a study conducted in China by Huang and Yang (2021), packaging design has a significant positive impact on consumers' purchase intention, particularly for ready-to-eat (RTE) food options. The study found that packaging design elements such as color, shape, and material have significant effects on consumers' purchase intention by influencing their perceptions of product quality, attractiveness, and uniqueness. Similarly, Sukamana and Murti (2020) examined the role of packaging design on consumer purchase decisions in urban areas of Indonesia and found that packaging design has a significant positive impact on consumers' purchase decisions for RTE food products. The study found that packaging design elements such as color, shape, and material have significant effects on consumers' perceptions of product quality, uniqueness, and attractiveness.

Another study conducted in Turkey by Aydin and Özer (2019) found that packaging design has a significant positive impact on consumers' purchase decisions for RTE food options, as it influences their perceptions of product quality, attractiveness, and uniqueness. The study also found that packaging design elements such as color, shape, typography, and imagery have significant effects on consumer perceptions of product quality, uniqueness, and attractiveness. These studies suggest that packaging design is a crucial factor in shaping consumer purchase decisions for RTE food products and highlight the importance of packaging design elements in influencing consumer perceptions of product quality, attractiveness, and uniqueness.

The Relationship Between Safety And Urban People`s Purchase Decision

Muhammad et al. (2010) highlights the importance of understanding the variations in consumer attitudes towards food safety. The study examines the influence of product packaging on consumers' perceptions, specifically among university students in Malaysia. The study found

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that consumers' perception of food safety is influenced by several factors, such as appearance, supplements, substance, flavor, and surface. Kindt et al. (2008) also emphasized the importance of understanding the development of food to meet consumer needs.

Recent advancements in technology have led to the availability of various product alternatives, which has resulted in consumers becoming more conscious of food safety and security issues (Bhaskaran et al., 2021; Li, Wang & Sun, 2021). The study by Hossain and Rahman (2021) found that consumers have a high level of awareness and concern about food safety issues, and this awareness has increased over time due to various factors such as media coverage and emerging technology. The study also found that consumers place a higher priority on food safety when making purchase decisions, and their purchase intentions are influenced by their perceptions of food safety and related risks.

Li, Chen, and Wang (2021) conducted a study in China to investigate the impact of food safety concerns on consumers' purchase intention for fresh produce. The study found that food safety concerns have a significant negative impact on consumers' purchase intention for fresh produce. The study suggests that food safety issues should be addressed to restore consumer confidence and encourage purchase behavior. Consumers consider factors such as ingredients, brand awareness, and packaging when deciding between ready-to-eat or ready-to-cook foods. This study emphasizes the crucial role of packaging in influencing consumer purchase decisions and highlights the need for food producers to ensure the safety and quality of their products.

The Relationship Between Convenience And Urban People`s Purchase Decision

Convenience is a critical factor in the purchase decisions of urban consumers across various industries. In the retail industry, a study by McKinsey & Company found that convenience is the most important factor for consumers when it comes to making purchasing decisions, especially in urban areas (McKinsey & Company, 2019). This trend is also observed in the food industry, where packaging convenience has become increasingly important in influencing the purchase decisions of urban consumers, particularly when it comes to ready-to-eat (RTE) food options. A study published in the Journal of Food Protection found that convenience significantly influences the purchase decisions of urban consumers when it comes to choosing RTE food options (Worsfold & Griffith, 2019). Furthermore, a study published in the Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services found that convenience significantly influences the purchase behavior of urban consumers, with easy accessibility and shorter waiting time being the most important factors (Liu & Liang, 2019). These studies highlight the importance of convenience in shaping the purchase decisions and shopping behavior of urban consumers across various industries. Companies that prioritize convenience in their offerings, such as online shopping, same-day delivery, and convenient packaging options, are likely to appeal to urban consumers who prioritize convenience in their busy lifestyles.

Methodology

The process of designing research involves making numerous interconnected decisions, with the selection of a research approach being critical as it determines how pertinent information will be obtained (Kassu, 2019). For our study, we utilized a quantitative research design that involved the collection of numerical data and the use of statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques to organize inquiry about a phenomenon (Olasile, 2020; Slevitch, 2011). This approach provides summary data on different traits and is effective in identifying trends.

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Moreover, we utilized causal design data to evaluate the factors that influence urban residents' decision to purchase ready-to-eat (RTE) foods. Causality studies involve comprehending a phenomenon in terms of conditional statements, such as "If X, then Y," and are used to measure the impact of a specific change on existing norms and assumptions. Social scientists commonly seek causal explanations that reflect tests of hypotheses (Bailiff, n.d.). We conducted a survey for two months, distributing and evaluating questionnaires to all residents of Pulau Pinang (Northeast and Southwest Penang Island) to collect data.

Population And Sampling

The study aimed to identify the factors that influence the purchase decision of urban residents in Malaysia towards ready-to-eat (RTE) food. To achieve this, researchers chose Pulau Pinang (Northeast and Southwest Penang Island) as the study area, given its status as one of the main economic zones and urban areas. An online questionnaire was distributed to the population of Pulau Pinang aged 18 years and above to collect data. The framework variables showed a strong relationship between them.

The sample size for the study was determined using Tabachnik and Fidell's (2013) formula, which requires a sample size of $N > 50 + 8m$, where m is the number of independent variables. However, Hair et al. (2010) recommended a minimum sample size of 100 to ensure adequate power for appropriate analysis and validity of significance tests. The study collected 157 respondents, which provides a desired level of accuracy.

Convenience sampling was used to collect the respondents, which is a cost-effective and time-efficient method (Speak et al., 2018). Prior research has shown that this method is relevant for the objectives of multivariate data analysis (Wu & Cheng, 2018). Furthermore, preliminary work was carried out in the early 2022s, and the central limit theorem (CLT) was applied. The CLT suggests that the distribution of sample means approximates a normal distribution as the sample size gets larger, regardless of the population's distribution. Sample sizes equal to or greater than 30 are often considered sufficient for the CLT to hold.

Research Instrumentation & Measurement

The researchers conducted an online survey using an online questionnaire created through Google Forms. The questions were designed to be simple and easy to understand, with both English and Bahasa Malaysia languages used. The survey consisted of six sections, starting with a screening question in Section A. Demographic information was collected in Section B, while Section C focused on dependent variable questions. Sections D through F dealt with independent variable questions. Likert scales ranging from 1 "Strongly Disagree" to 5 "Strongly Agree" were used in Sections C through G, while Sections A and B used multiple choice questions. The goal was to keep the survey instruments as straightforward as possible to ensure completion by participants.

Face Validity

Ghauri and Gronhaug (2005) suggest that the accuracy of collected data depends on how comprehensively it covers the scope of the survey, while Field (2005) defines validity as the extent to which the intended measure is actually being assessed. In this quantitative study, Drost (2011) employed face validity and pilot testing to ensure that the instrument accurately measured the intended constructs. Face validity, as explained by Taherdoost (2016), involves a specific assessment of how well a construct has been made operational. To ensure judgment in terms of face validity, a qualified individual evaluated the survey questionnaire to assess

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feasibility, readability, consistency of style and formatting, as well as the clarity of language used.

Pilot Test

For this pilot study, the researcher distributed online questionnaires to 30 participants from Pulau Pinang, specifically Northeast and Southwest Penang Island. All responses will be analysed using Cronbach's alpha reliability test for accuracy of the information gathered, using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 : Reliability Statistics For Pilot Test

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based On Standardized Items	N Of Items
.778	.789	16

Based on the SPSS results, all 16 questions from dependent and independent variables were combined, resulting in acceptable internal or reliability consistency as determined by an Alpha Cronbach's alpha value greater than 0.6, which is deemed reliable and acceptable according to Pallant (2001) and Nunnally and Bernstein (1994).

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection is the systematic process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest. This process enables researchers to answer research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes (Syed, 2016). For this particular study, primary data was collected through questionnaires and survey methods. This method was chosen because it allowed the researchers to obtain firsthand information from the respondents. According to Kassu (2019), primary data is considered more reliable and has a higher level of confidence in decision-making, as trusted analysis has a direct correlation with event occurrence.

The questionnaire and survey sets were distributed among a large population with the intention of gathering responses. The method of data collection used was an online questionnaire via the Google Forms platform. During the first step, questionnaires were personally distributed to random respondents (18 years of age and older) in Pulau Pinang (Northeast and Southwest Penang Island) to assist the researcher in answering the research question. The questionnaire survey method was used with Google Form, and it was expected to take two months to complete. Respondents were asked about their purchasing decisions for RTE (Ready-to-Eat) foods and were instructed to carefully read the survey explanation before answering the questions (Syed, 2016).

Findings

Response Rate

Data analysis is a crucial part of any research study. It involves the process of cleaning, transforming, and modelling data to extract useful information, draw conclusions, and support decision-making. In this study, the data collected from the questionnaire was analysed using SPSS software, version 27. The questionnaire was distributed to 159 total respondents using an online platform, a Google Form link. The questionnaire consists of 7 sections, in which a

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screening question is mandatory for every respondent before they proceed to the next section to confirm that they will be eligible to answer the questionnaire. The next sections consist of the independent and dependent variables involved in this study.

Demographic Profile Of Respondents

Demographic data, such as age, race, ethnicity, income, employment status, and marital status, can provide valuable insights into the background characteristics of an audience. By including demographic questions in surveys, we can gather data about current and potential respondents and use this information to create effective market segmentation strategies. The more we understand our target demographic, the better we can tailor our messaging to ensure it resonates with our audience.

Gender Distribution

According to the data collected, more women than men responded to the Google form questionnaire, with women answering 65.6% of the questions (103 respondents) and men answering 34.4% (54 respondents).

Age Distribution

The question was answered by four age groups, with the largest age group consisting of respondents between 18 to 24 years old, representing 70 individuals or 44.6% of the total. The second-highest age group was between 25 to 34 years, with 54 respondents or 34.4%. The age group between 35 to 54 years had 32 respondents or 20.4%, while the group of individuals aged 55 and above had the lowest number of respondents with only one person or 0.6% of the total.

Employment Status

The data from the study indicates that respondents were divided into two groups based on employment status: those who work and those who do not. The working group comprised 79% or 124 individuals, while the non-working group had 21% or 33 individuals.

Marital Status

Based on the study's findings, only 60 individuals or 38.2% of the married group answered the question, while 97 individuals or 61.85% of the unmarried group did. Therefore, the number of married respondents who participated in answering did not exceed half of the total number of respondents.

Income

Based on the study's findings, respondents were divided into three salary categories and a fourth category for those who were unemployed. The first income category, between RM0 and RM4849, had the highest number of individuals at 109 or 69.4% of the total population. The second income category, between RM4850 and RM10,959, had 25 individuals or 12.7%. The third income category, RM10,960 and above, had only three individuals or 1.9%. Additionally, there were 25 respondents or 15.9% of the total who reported having no income, with the majority being students.

Reliability Analysis (Cronbach Alpha)

To assess the consistency and stability of test results, a reliability test is typically conducted. In this study, the researchers used Cronbach's alpha coefficient to check the internal consistency and reliability of the score. According to Bonett and Wright (2014), Cronbach's

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alpha reliability is the most commonly used measure of reliability in the social and organizational sciences. Huck (2007) notes that testing for reliability is essential as it ensures consistency across the different parts of a measuring instrument. Sekaran (2013) explains that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranges from 0 to 1.00, with higher values indicating greater internal consistency and reliability of the measure. Values lower than 0.60 indicate poor internal consistency, while values higher than 0.70 are considered acceptable. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient above 0.80 indicates good internal consistency (Sekaran, 2013).

Reliability Statistics Of Urban People's Purchase Decision

The table presented below (Table 2) displays three questions associated with dependent variables. Upon comparing these three items using Cronbach's coefficient, a value of 0.746 was obtained, indicating that the data falls within an acceptable range of internal consistency. Therefore, the dimension of urban people's purchase decision can be considered suitable for use in data research.

Table 2 : Urban People`S Purchase Decision

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based On Standardized Items	N Of Items
.746	.748	3

Reliability Statistics of price towards urban people's purchase decision

Table 3 : Summary of Reliability Statistics for Each Dimension

Reliability Statistics			
Dimension	***Cronbach's Alpha***	***Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items***	***N of Items***
Price	*.566*	*.584*	*3*
Packaging	*.798*	*.799*	*4*
Safety	*.726*	*.729*	*4*
Convenience	*.758*	*.760*	*2*

It is worth noting that the above results (Table 3) indicate a Cronbach's alpha coefficient value of 0.566, which is generally considered to represent a low level of internal consistency. This suggests that the price dimension may not be a reliable indicator for use in data research.

Reliability Statistics Of Packaging Towards Urban People's Purchase Decision

The comparison of four items under packaging dimension in Table 3 reveals that the Cronbach's alpha for the independent variable of packaging is 0.798, indicating that the data falls within the acceptable range of internal consistency. As such, the packaging dimensions can be considered appropriate for use in data research.

Reliability Statistics Of Safety Towards Urban People's Purchase Decision

Based on the above results (Table 3), it can be inferred that safety is an independent variable. The Cronbach's coefficient for the comparison of four items is 0.726, which indicates that the

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data falls within the acceptable range of internal consistency. Thus, the safety dimension can be considered appropriate for use in data research.

Reliability Statistics Of Convenience Towards Urban People's Purchase Decision

According to the aforementioned findings (Table 3), the convenience dimension is deemed an independent variable for ease of use. The Cronbach's coefficient value of 0.758, obtained from comparing two items, falls within the acceptable range of internal consistency, indicating that the data is reliable. Hence, the convenience dimension can be considered appropriate for conducting research.

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis is a crucial component of data in any study (Kumar & Singh, 2016), as it provides a comprehensive description of the samples and measurements used in the investigation. Almost all quantitative analyses of data are based on descriptive analysis, which includes numerous visual analyses such as mean, median, mode, total, among others (Tukey, 1977). Furthermore, descriptive statistics were used to evaluate and examine the degree of agreement in each questionnaire dimension (Hair et al., 2017). This statistic is used to portray the average values, standard deviation, and highest and lowest values for each item. The descriptive analysis involved calculating the means and standard deviations based on a five-point Likert scale for each item in different categories, namely price, packaging, safety, and convenience for urban people's purchase decisions. It is important to note that the Likert Scale ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) (Likert, 1932).

Table 4 : Descriptive Analysis for Dependent Variable

Item	*N*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Mean*	*Std.Deviation*
In your opinion, the brand image of a food influences buyers to buy it?	***157***	***1***	***5***	***4.14***	***0.944***
Do you agree that price, packaging, safety, and convenience influence someone to buy ready-to-eat food?	***157***	***1***	***5***	***4.38***	***0.903***
In your opinion, does a person's lifestyle affect the purpose of eating ready-to-eat food?	***157***	***1***	***5***	***4.05***	***1.011***

Table 4, shows the mean analysis on urban people's purchase decisions. Item no. 2 had the highest mean value of 4.38 (SD=0.903), indicating that respondents agreed that price, packaging, safety, and convenience significantly influenced their purchase of ready-to-eat food. Conversely, item no. 3 had the lowest mean value of 4.05 (SD=1.011), suggesting that respondents did not consider the influence of their lifestyle significant in their decision to consume ready-to-eat food.

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Table 5 : Descriptive Analysis For Independent Variable – Price

Item	*N*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Mean*	*Std.Deviation*
Is price an important factor in purchasing decisions?	***157***	***1***	***5***	***4.27***	***0.813***
Do you agree that price is an indicator of food product quality?	***157***	***1***	***5***	***3.39***	***1.153***
Do you think it's worth it if the price offered is high but reasonable for the quantity of ready-to-eat food?	***157***	***1***	***5***	***4.09***	***0.963***

Table 5, shows the impact of price on purchasing decisions. Item no. 1 had the highest mean value of 4.27 (SD=0.813), indicating that price significantly influenced respondents' decisions. However, item no. 2 had the lowest mean value of 3.39 (SD=1.153), suggesting that price is not a reliable indicator of food quality for consumers. Other factors such as taste, packaging, and convenience may be more important in assessing the quality of ready-to-eat food.

Table 6 :Descriptive Analysis for Independent Variable – Packaging

Item	*N*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Mean*	*Std.Deviation*
The importance of food packaging	***157***	***1***	***5***	***4.31***	***0.815***
Customer response on the influence of food packaging on the purchase of purchase decision	***157***	***2***	***5***	***4.09***	***0.779***
Consumer preference for the type of food packaging	***157***	***2***	***5***	***3.96***	***0.831***
Consumer response to food packaging attributes	***157***	***1***	***5***	***4.03***	***0.854***

Table 6, shows the impact of packaging on urban people's purchasing decisions. Respondents deemed ready-to-eat food packaging important, with item no. 1 receiving the highest mean value of 4.31. However, item no. 3 had the lowest mean value of 3.96, indicating a neutral preference for a specific type of food packaging. This suggests that packaging is important but not the most critical factor in purchasing decisions.

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Table 7: Descriptive Analysis for Independent -Safety

Item	*N*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Mean*	*Std.Deviation*
Did you read the nutritional value or other safety information such as ingredients before you purchased the ready-to-eat food?	***157***	***1***	***5***	***3.50***	***1.029***
Does the nutritional label or other information on the food package make you aware of the safety of the ready-to-eat food products?	***157***	***2***	***5***	***4.01***	***0.851***
Does the nutritional information influence your choice of ready-to-eat food?	***157***	***1***	***5***	***3.80***	***0.983***
Do you think technology now makes ready-to-eat food safer to buy?	***157***	***1***	***5***	***3.65***	***0.973***

Table 7, shows how safety affects urban people's purchasing decisions. Most respondents agreed that safety information on food packages made them aware of the safety of ready-to-eat food products, with item no. 2 having the highest mean value of 4.01. Item no. 1 had the lowest mean value of 3.50, indicating a neutral opinion among respondents regarding the importance of reading nutritional and safety information before buying ready-to-eat food.

Table 8: Descriptive Analysis for Independent - Convenience

Item	*N*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Mean*	*Std.Deviation*
Do you think this ready-to- eat food saves time, especially for people who have a busy routine?	***157***	***2***	***5***	***4.42***	***0.744***
Will the convenience of ready-to-eat-foods make you buy them again?	***157***	***1***	***5***	***4.21***	***0.817***

Table 8, shows the mean analysis on the convenience factor of ready-to-eat food. Item no. 1 had the highest mean value of 4.42 (SD=0.744), indicating agreement among respondents that ready-to-eat food saves time, especially for busy individuals. Item no. 2 had the lowest mean value of 4.21 (SD=0.817), suggesting that convenience was not a crucial factor for respondents in making repeat purchases.

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Pearson Correlation

Table 9: Pearson Correlation

Correlations

		DV	IVA	IVB	IVC	IVD
DV	Pearson Correlation	1	.514**	.387**	.397**	.438**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	157	157	157	157	157
IVA	Pearson Correlation	.514**	1	.431**	.463**	.443**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	157	157	157	157	157
IVB	Pearson Correlation	.387**	.431**	1	.412**	.467**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001
	N	157	157	157	157	157
IVC	Pearson Correlation	.397**	.463**	.412**	1	.357**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001
	N	157	157	157	157	157
IVD	Pearson Correlation	.438**	.443**	.467**	.357**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	157	157	157	157	157

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 9, shows the correlation investigation between urban people's purchase decisions and the independent variables of price, packaging, safety, and convenience. All independent factors are significantly related to the dependent variable, as evidenced by their positive Pearson Correlation values, which are statistically significant with a p-value of <0.01. Price has a strong positive correlation (0.514), while packaging, safety, and convenience have moderate positive correlations (0.387, 0.397, and 0.438, respectively). These findings suggest that all four factors play a significant role in shaping purchase decisions, with price and convenience being the most influential. This information could help manufacturers design products that meet consumer needs, and policymakers enact regulations prioritizing affordability, convenience, safety, and packaging of ready-to-eat food products.

Regression Analysis (Hypothesis Testing)

Multiple regression analysis will be utilized to test this hypothesis with the objective of presenting the findings to determine whether significant statistical differences exist in the independent and dependent variables. The study's overall sample size, which includes 157 respondents, is appropriate for conducting multiple linear regression analysis. There are four hypotheses in this study, including:

H1, which suggests that if the price is affordable, then urban individuals are more likely to make a purchase;
H2, which posits that if the packaging is of high quality, then urban individuals are more likely to make a purchase;
H3, which suggests that if the safety of ready-to-eat food is clear and secure, then urban individuals are more likely to make a purchase; and
H4, which suggests that if ready-to-eat food is more convenient, then urban individuals are more likely to make a purchase.

Table 9, displays the required independent variables and the correlation coefficient between the independent and dependent variables in the regression model, which is 0.514 (R). The findings indicate that the independent variable of price is responsible for 26% of the variance

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(R square) in urban people's purchase decisions. The modified R square was also considered, and the 26% correlation suggests a relationship between the independent variable of price and the dependent variable of urban people's purchase decisions.

Table 10: Regression and Coefficient on Price

Regression Price				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.514[a]	.264	.259	2.00456
a. Predictors: (Constant), IVA				

Coefficients[a]						
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
	(Constant)	6.076	.886		6.860	.000
1	IVA	.553	.074	.514	7.459	.000
a. Dependent Variable: DV						

The analysis (Table 10) shows that the independent variable of price significantly impacts urban people's purchase decisions, with a p-value of less than 0.05. This suggests that pricing strategies are crucial for the success of ready-to-eat food products in the market. Table 9 displays the required independent variables for the regression model, and the correlation coefficient (R) between the independent and dependent variables is 0.514. The results indicate that the independent variable (price) accounts for 26% of the variance in the dependent variable (urban people's purchase decision). The coefficient table 10 supports the acceptance of the hypothesis that an affordable price influences urban people's decision to purchase ready-to-eat food. These findings highlight the importance of understanding consumer behavior in the food industry and the role of pricing strategies in gaining a competitive advantage.

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Table 11: Regression and Coefficient on Packaging

Regression Packaging				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.387[a]	.149	.144	2.15507
a. Predictors: (Constant), IVA				

Coefficients[a]						
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
	(Constant)	6.877	1.105		6.224	.000
1	IVA	.348	.067	.387	5.220	.000
a. Dependent Variable: DV						

Table 11, shows that the coefficient value is significant for H2, with a p-value of 0.000. The independent variable (packaging) accounts for 15% of the variance (R square) in the dependent variable (urban people's purchase decision). The adjusted R square indicates a link of 14%. The findings suggest that packaging is a significant independent variable that influences urban people's purchase decisions, with the coefficient table 11 supporting the acceptance of the H2 hypothesis at a significant threshold of p = 0.000. It can be concluded that good packaging increases the likelihood of urban people purchasing ready-to-eat food.

Table 12 : Regression and Coefficient on Safety

Regression Safety				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.397[a]	.158	.152	2.14483
a. Predictors: (Constant), IVA				

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Coefficients[a]						
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	7.721	.917		8.416	.000
	IVA	.324	.060	.397	5.384	.000
a. Dependent Variable: DV						

Table 12, displays the required independent variables for the regression model, and the correlation coefficient between safety and urban people's purchase decisions is R (0.397). The independent variable (safety) accounts for 16% of the variance (R square) in the dependent variable (urban people's purchase decision), with a link observed in 15% of cases (modified R square). The results indicate that safety significantly influences urban people's purchase decisions, with a p-value of less than 0.05. The coefficient Table 12 supports the acceptance of the H3 hypothesis at a significant threshold of p = 0.000. It suggests that clear and assured safety can influence urban people to purchase ready-to-eat food.

Table 13 : Regression and Coefficient on Convenient

Coefficients[a]						
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	6.288	1.049		5.996	.000
	IVA	.728	.120	.438	6.070	.000
a. Dependent Variable: DV						

Regression Safety				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.438[a]	.192	.187	2.10044
a. Predictors: (Constant), IVA				

Table 13 lists the independent variables required for the regression model, with R indicating the correlation coefficient between the independent and dependent variables (0.438). The independent variable (convenience) accounts for 19% of the variance (R square) in the dependent variable (urban people's purchase decision), with an adjusted R square indicating a link in 19% of cases. The results suggest that convenience significantly influences urban

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people's purchase decisions, with a p-value of less than 0.05 according to coefficient Table 2. The H4 hypothesis is accepted at a significant threshold of p = 0.000, indicating that convenience affects urban people's purchase decisions.

Discussion

During the discussion, the research findings were analyzed to assess how effectively they addressed the study's objectives.

Research Objective 1 - Aimed To Investigate The Correlation Between Price And Urban Individuals' Purchasing Decisions.

The reported correlation value (r = 0.514, p<0.5) in the study indicated a high positive relationship between price and urban individuals' purchasing decisions. This suggests that pricing has a significant impact on urban individuals' purchasing decisions, as higher-priced products tend to sell in fewer units, while products sold at lower-than-market rates tend to sell at higher volumes (Sadiq, et al., 2020). The majority of respondents in the study agreed that pricing was a crucial factor in their decision to purchase ready-to-eat foods, indicating that price is the most influential factor in this regard. These findings are consistent with previous research conducted by Komaladewi and Indika (2017), Djatmiko and Pradana (2015), and Termsnguanwong (2015), which also concluded that price plays a significant role in determining purchase decisions. Therefore, it can be inferred that the willingness of urban individuals to accept the price plays a crucial role in their purchasing decisions (r = 0.514).

Research Objective 2 - To Assess The Effect Of Packaging Towards Urban People's Purchasing Decisions.

A Pearson's correlation was conducted to investigate the relationship between packaging and urban individuals' purchasing decisions, resulting in a moderately positive correlation (r = 0.387, p<0.5), indicating a significant correlation between the variables. The study's questionnaire revealed that respondents considered food packaging an important factor in purchasing decisions, consistent with previous research (Rezaei, 2014 as cited in Baskaran et al., 2017). Packaging components such as color, shape, weight, curvature, and typeface can influence consumers' last impressions before purchasing ready-to-eat food products. Effective packaging can add value through branding, product functionality, imagery, and innovation. In conclusion, the researcher suggests that packaging has a significant influence on urban individuals' purchasing decisions, as supported by the moderately positive correlation (r = 0.387) resulting from Pearson's correlation.

Research Objective 3 - To Examine The Relationship Between The Safety Of Ready To Eat Food And Urban People's Purchasing Decision

A Pearson's correlation was conducted to investigate the relationship between safety and urban individuals' purchasing decisions, revealing a moderately positive correlation (r = 0.397, p<0.5), indicating a significant correlation between the variables. The data collected indicated that respondents prioritized safety when purchasing ready-to-eat food products, consistent with previous studies (Klaus, 2005 as cited in Baskaran et al., 2017), which suggest that food quality influences consumers' purchasing decisions. Food safety measures can protect consumers from foodborne illnesses or injuries caused by food consumption, making it a crucial factor for consumers. During the purchasing process, respondents tend to play a passive role, with food safety factors related to labeling, regulation, brand reputation, and certification, all available to consumers in the market. The researchers concluded that safety positively impacts urban

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individuals' purchasing decisions, consistent with previous studies indicating that urban individuals prioritize safety when purchasing ready-to-eat food product.

Research Objective 4 - To Identify The Relationship That Exists Between Time Saving And Effort (Convenience) In Urban People's Purchasing Decision

A Pearson's correlation was used to investigate the relationship between convenience and urban individuals' purchasing decisions, revealing a moderately positive correlation ($r = 0.438$, $p<0.5$), indicating a significant correlation between the variables. The questionnaire findings indicated that respondents believed ready-to-eat food saves time, particularly for those with busy routines. Convenience is defined as a benefit that saves consumers time and effort when purchasing products, according to previous research (Rohm & Swaminathan, 2004 as cited in Baskaran et al., 2017). Ready-to-eat foods require minimal time, energy, and cooking skills to prepare and consume, making them popular among urban individuals with busy lifestyles. These foods also reduce meal preparation time at home, and some can be eaten immediately or after adding water, heating, or thawing, like instant cereal and noodles. The researchers suggest that convenience has a significant influence on urban individuals' purchasing decisions, supported by the moderately positive correlation ($r = 0.438$) resulting from the Pearson's correlation.

Limitations & Recommendation Of The Study

The research has certain limitations that need to be addressed. Firstly, the Cronbach alpha value for our reliability test only met the minimum requirement, indicating that further improvements could have been made. As student researchers, we faced limitations due to a restricted budget and limited time to develop questions according to standard requirements. Additionally, there was a lack of previous studies that could guide our research, and we faced challenges in disseminating the questionnaire to our target respondents, who are Penang residents living in urban areas. To mitigate these challenges, we used the Google Form method to simplify the questionnaire response process. However, this approach has limitations, and face-to-face interactions could have improved the research's reliability and validity.

In the future, we need to carefully study our required target respondents and areas of focus to ensure that our research is feasible and that we can obtain the necessary resources. This will make it easier for us to gather data and explain the research's objective to our respondents. We also need to prioritize our tasks and set realistic timelines to ensure that we have sufficient time to conduct research and gather data. Additionally, we should conduct a thorough literature review to gain a deeper understanding of the topic and identify gaps in previous research. This will enable us to design more comprehensive questionnaires that capture all the essential variables. Overall, conducting thorough research requires significant time and effort, and we must allocate sufficient resources and prioritize our tasks accordingly.

Conclusion

The study, which focused on the urban population's purchase decisions in Pulau Pinang, discovered that various independent variables such as price, packaging, safety, and convenience have a significant impact on their buying behavior. By utilizing appropriate data collection methods and statistical techniques, the study was able to achieve its objectives and provide valuable insights into the factors that influence the urban population's buying behavior.

The collected data was analyzed using different approaches, including descriptive and reliability analysis, Pearson correlation, coefficient, and regression analysis. The study found

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a significant relationship between the dependent variable, which is the urban people's purchase decision, and the independent variables of price, packaging, safety, and convenience.

The study's findings have practical implications for businesses that are interested in marketing and selling ready-to-eat foods to urban consumers. The study provides valuable information about the critical factors that influence their purchasing decisions, including product pricing, packaging, safety measures, and convenience aspects. Therefore, the study has fulfilled its objectives and contributes to the existing knowledge in this area by shedding light on the urban population's buying behavior.

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