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# Generation Y Purchase Intention of Personal Care Products: The Influence of Attitude, Subjective Norms and Perceived Behavioural Control

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**Abstract** - Rising cost of living in Malaysia has negatively affected the demand for personal care products as consumers prefer to switch to cheaper alternatives. This has resulted in an increase in the number of registered and unregistered personal care products in the market. This situation has an impact on Malaysian consumption as some of the products contain hazardous and poisonous ingredients which may cause adverse effects on personal health. However, customers still consume the products although they are aware and conscious of the danger and the side effects of these products for self-satisfaction. Thus, using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), this study aims to shed further light on the factors that influence consumer decision making in the purchase of personal care products among Generation Y. The study was conducted using primary approach with the use of validated questionnaire from 390 university students. The findings revealed that subjective norm and perceived behavioural control influence consumer decision making. Findings provide evidence for businesses and policy makers to better understand the factors that influence consumer decision making. Further implications allow authorized body to identify the target group and conduct programs to educate consumers to engage in good judgement before making decisions to ensure healthy consumption choices aligned with the National Strategic Plan on promoting optimal healthy lifestyles.

**Keywords** – *Theory of Planned Behaviour; Attitude; Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioural Control; Personal Care Products*

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## I. Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest and growing trend towards personal care products (Star, 2016). Personal care products are defined as a wide variety of items that are commonly found in the health and beauty sections of drug and department stores such as skin moisturizers, perfumes, makeups, shampoos, toothpaste, mouthwashes, deodorants and others (Food and Drug Administration, 2016). A survey conducted by the U.S Commercial Service in 2016 revealed that the main skin care concerns cited by Malaysians fall under whitening/lightening or brightening, acne scars as well as anti-aging products. In 2016, Malaysia recorded a mere 4% in GDP growth, which was relatively slow economic growth compared to 2015. Weakening consumer sentiment as a result of rising costs of living has also negatively affected demand for beauty and personal care

products since many local consumers prefer to save on their purchases or switch to cheaper alternatives. Therefore, many manufacturers and retailers in the beauty and personal care industry prefer to generate greater volume sales through price discounts and promotional activities. Moreover, rising costs of living led to consumers to look for cheaper alternatives (Euromonitor, 2017). This resulted in an increase in the number of registered and unregistered personal care products in Malaysia (News Strait Times, 2017). It appears the counterfeit conundrum phenomenon has plagued Malaysia too where the demand of counterfeit goods including health products and medicine as well as personal care products is apparent (Teo & Zahin, 2017).

This situation has given impact on Malaysian consumption as some of the products contain hazardous and poisonous ingredients such as mercury, hydroquinone and dexamethasone. Those substances may cause adverse effects on an individual's health such as irregular heartbeat, hypertension, cataract, kidney failure, high blood glucose level and Cushing syndrome which can lead to morbidity (Ministry of Health, 2015). However, customers still continue to consume the products although they may be aware and conscious on the danger as well as the side effects of the products for self-satisfaction (Rusmadi, Syed Ismail & Praveena, 2015). Similarly, consumers are easily influenced by testimonials given by sellers and they easily fall prey into false promise of immediate results from these products. Since the demand for counterfeit and unregistered products are increasing, there are some sellers who take advantage to promote or sell their products without approvals from National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Agency (NPRRA).

Consumer behaviour can be broadly classified as the decisions and actions that influence the purchasing behaviour of a consumer. Consumer decision making are known to be greatly influenced by the economic situation, personal preferences and group influences. The difficulty of consumer decision making is influenced not only by the element of the task but also by how the information is provided in the environment (Bettman et al., 1991). Generation Y or Millennials represent a group with tremendous purchasing power (Pament, 2013) and there are interested in fashion, trends and shopping (Tran, 2008). Many Generation Y'ers have been brought up in household where both parents work and have learn to shop and make brand decisions sooner compare with previous generations (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2003). Past study revealed that attitude (Kim & Chung, 2011), subjective norms (Kim & Chung, 2011; Sumaedi et al., 2015) and perceived behavioural control (Sumaedi et al., 2015) influenced consumer decision making. Determining the specific factors that influence Generation Y has become an important focus of consumer research as their potential spending power, the ability to be a trendsetter, adoption to new products and potential for becoming a lifetime customer (Martin & Bush, 2000). Study on consumer decision making on personal care products in Malaysia specifically among Generation Y'ers is very limited. Therefore, this study was conducted to identify the influence of attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control on consumer decision making on personal care products among Generation Y'ers.

## II. Literature Review

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest and growing trends towards personal care products (Fong, 2016). Personal care products play a vital daily role in health and hygiene. Personal care products can be defined as a wide variety of items that are commonly found in the health and beauty sections of drug and department stores such as skin moisturizers, perfumes, make up, shampoos, toothpaste, deodorants and others (Food and Drug Administration, 2016). The aim of the study is to investigate the factors that influence consumer decision making on personal care products. Guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) developed by Ajzen (1991), there are three factors that influence behavioral intention namely attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control (PBC).

### A. Attitude

Attitude can be positive, negative or neutral towards a behaviour which will influence a person to engage with it. Kim and Chung (2011) stated that attitude towards behaviour can be defined as personal evaluation being favourable or unfavourable to perform the behaviour. An individual will have a greater behavioural intention when his or her attitude is positive (Armitage & Conner, 2001). However, Kim and Chung (2011) revealed that a person may have a positive attitude towards a certain behaviour but he or she might not have the intention to perform the behaviour. For example, an individual might have a positive attitude towards a product, may not choose to purchase it. A person's positive attitude on buying personal care products may not always lead to the intention of purchasing the products (Kim & Chung, 2011). Thus, attitude may or may not influence the consumer decision making on purchasing personal care products. People who have a positive attitude towards personal care products may influence their buying decision. From the discussion, it is hypothesized that:

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant relationship between attitude and consumer decision making among Generation Y.

### *B. Subjective Norm*

Subjective norm can be defined as one's perceptions or assumptions about others' expectations of certain behaviours that one will perform or not. Since perception is very subjective in nature, this dimension is referred as the subjective norm. Similar to attitude towards behaviour, subjective norm is also influenced by beliefs (Liu, Brock, Shi, Chu & Tseng, 2013). It reflects a person's perceived social pressure on performing a certain behaviour (Kim & Chung, 2011). For example, a person will be influenced when he or she thinks other people have a positive attitude towards a product; hence increasing his or her intention to purchase it (Kim & Chung, 2011). Sumaedi et al. (2015) stated that a person may perform a behaviour if any important referents who he or she believes, think that the person should engage with the behaviour even though the person does not have a positive feeling towards the behaviour or its consequences but because of the influences, the person could be motivated enough to follow the referents. Subjective norm is the major driver of human behaviour and very crucial in consumer decision making. Consumers always consider the expectations and behaviour of others when they are deciding what is appropriate for them and thus subjective norm influenced their preferences and behaviour. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant relationship between subjective norm and consumer decision making among Generation Y.

### *C. Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC)*

Perceived behavioural control is defined as a person's belief as how easy or difficult performance of the behaviour is likely to be (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). According to Sumaedi et al. (2015), PBC shows the degree of what a person feels on his or her ability to overcome constraints to perform the behaviour. PBC can be defined as the extent of control that a person perceives to perform the behaviour and could be influenced by second-hand information regarding the behaviour such as experiences from acquaintances and friends or by other factors that could increase or decrease the perceived difficulty in performing the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Respectively, this relates to intention and behaviour which are linked to control belief. Intention and PBC are posited to have direct effects on consumer buying behaviour. Intention indicates the extent to which an individual is willing to perform the behaviour. However, Ajzen (1991) stated that a person may not perform a behaviour if it is difficult to do even though he or she has a positive evaluation on the behaviour or people surrounding the person suggest the behaviour (Sumaedi et al., 2015). The effect of perceived behavioural control on behavioural intention will be stronger when the consumers have low level of subjective product knowledge than those who have a high level of subjective product knowledge. Based on the discussion, it is hypothesised that:

H<sub>3</sub>: There is a significant relationship between perceived behavioural control and consumer decision making among Generation Y.

## **III. Methodology**

A positivist approach was used to explore the relationships between the variables. The study was conducted using primary approach via survey method among 420 undergraduate students from various programmes at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling technique as this type of sampling is confined to specific types of people who can provide the desired information, either because they are identified as those who have it, or conform to some criteria set by the researcher (Sekaran & Bougie, 2014). A set of research instrument was adapted to measure each of the dimensions based on Theory of Planned Behaviour (Lautianinen, 2015). A five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree was used as the measurement tool. Item modification was performed to fit the context of the study and validated by experts in marketing. A total of 400 questionnaires were received, however, only 390 questionnaires were deemed usable.

A reliability test was conducted prior to the actual data collection for ensuring the consistency of the measure. Based on the pilot test on 30 respondents, the internal consistency value for 20 items was 0.831 which met the minimum requirement of 0.7. As the data of independent and dependent variables of this study were collected from judgement of single individual at one point in time, there was a potential for common method bias. A common method bias is defined as variance that is attributable to the measurement method rather than to the constructs the measure represent (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee & Podsakoff, 2003). Common method bias is a critical problem for the measurement validity in self-report research. Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) in which all items are loaded into one common factor was employed to address the issue of common method bias. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted and the result revealed that there were no common factor loading on all measures, where the total variance for a single factor was 27.28 per cent which is

less than the suggested cut off point of 50 per cent (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Therefore, it can be concluded than common method bias was not a threat in this research.

#### IV. Findings and Discussion

##### A. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

A majority of the respondents were female (53.1 per cent), aged between 21-23 (63.3 per cent) years old. Table 1 displays the demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Profile

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	183	46.9
Female	207	53.1
<b>Age</b>		
Less than 20	65	16.7
21-23	246	63.3
24 and above	78	20.0

##### B. Factor Analysis

In an attempt to explore the validity of attitude to ageing measures, 15 items were entered by principal component analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation. Prior to performing PCA, the suitability of data for factor analysis was assessed. The KMO value was 0.844, exceeding the recommended value of 0.6 (Kaiser 1970). The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity reached statistical significance, supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix. PCA revealed the presence of three components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 53.542 per cent of the variance respectively. The results are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Factor Analysis

Variables	Items	Factor			
		1	2	3	4
Attitude	I have a positive attitude towards personal care products.	.536			
	I believe that personal care products may cause side effects.	.561			
	I tend to buy personal care products if a promoter/salesperson recommends it to me.	.620			
	I tend to buy personal care products if peers recommend it to me.	.672			
	I am aware whether the product that I bought is registered by National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Agency (NPRA) or not.	.510			
	I have a positive attitude towards personal care products.	.618			
	Subjective Norms	I will purchase a personal care product because the packaging is attractive.		.601	
I will purchase a personal care product because of the model or ambassador.			.702		
I will purchase a personal care product because my peers are the product's user.			.645		
I will purchase a personal care product because my family members also using it.			.738		
Perceived Behavioural Control	I think advertisements may affect me to buy personal care products.			.644	
	Before buying a product, I will do some research regarding the product.			.676	
	I am easily influenced by a product that has a quick or fast effect.			.614	

	The price will affect my decision on buying the personal care products.				.689
	Testimonies of personal care products are able to influence me to purchase the product.				.623
Consumer Decision Making (CDM)	Acquaintances affect my decision making on buying the personal care products.				.510
	Ingredients in a personal care product will affect my decision making on buying it.				.685
	I will buy a personal care product if it fulfil my needs.				.665
	I do not feel guilty for the money spent if I buy a personal care product.				.469
	I feel satisfied after I have purchased personal care products.				.565
Per cent of variance explained		23.79	35.14	45.43	53.54
KMO					0.844
Approxim. Chi Square					2536.12
Df					190
Sig.					0.00

### C. Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression was used to assess the influence of attitude, subjective norms and PBC on consumer decision making. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumption of normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity. The results of the regression indicated the three predictors explained 25 per cent of the variance. In order to identify which variable is the most influential on consumer decision making, beta values under standardized coefficient were compared. As depicted in Table 3, it was observed that subjective norm has the highest significant influence on consumer decision making ( $\beta = .399$ ,  $t = 7.622$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ), therefore H2 is supported. In addition, PBC also has a significant influence on consumer decision making ( $\beta = .250$ ,  $t = 5.009$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ), thus hypothesis 3 is supported. Meanwhile, attitude did not have a significant influence on consumer decision making ( $\beta = -0.72$ ,  $t = -1.313$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis

Independent Variables	Hypothesis	$\beta$	T	Sig	Findings
Attitude	H1: Attitude $\rightarrow$ CDM	-0.72	-1.313	.190	Not supported
Subjective Norm	H2: Subjective Norm $\rightarrow$ CDM	.399	7.622	.000	Supported
Perceived Behavioural Control	H3: PBC $\rightarrow$ CDM	.250	5.009	.000	Supported
R		.499			
R <sup>2</sup>		.249			
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>		.243			
F value		42.706			
Sig F value		.000			

Findings revealed that subjective norm and perceived behavioural control influence consumer decision making on personal care products. The results revealed that subjective norm has the highest positive influence on consumer decision making. This finding lends support to previous studies that supported the influence of subjective norms and consumer decision making (Amin and Chong, 2011; Bindin et al., 2009; Chen and Yang, 2007; Chiou, 1998; Ravi et al., 2007; Sumaedi et al., 2015 and Yousafzai et al., 2010). This indicates that social influence could have an impact on Gen Y's decision making on personal care products as individuals' referent or group can affect the other feeling, attitude, and behaviour. As the respondents of this study were Gen Y'ers, they feel the social pressure to comply with groups or individuals to make sure their behaviour is approved by significant others. Moreover, Gen Y simply tend to believe what their peers say, and they are more likely to make a purchase if the product or services are recommended by others (Arnold, 2017). If they think that consuming

certain products will be viewed favourable by significant others, such as classmate, friends, parents, peer group they are more likely to carry out that behaviour (Khaled, Filzah, Siti Norezam, Ali Hussien, 2017).

Findings also indicate that perceived behavioural control positively influences consumer decision making. This finding corroborates extant studies that investigated the relationship between perceived behavioural control and consumer decision making (Ajzen, 1991; Kololo & Kibusi, 2015; Sumaedi et al., 2015; Kidwell & Jewell, 2003). As such, it can be interpreted that an increase in PBC could lead to more favourable consumer decision making of personal care products. The findings demonstrate that when a purchase is easy to perform, consumers elicit higher levels of ability to make the purchase which in turn influences their decision making towards personal care products.

One unanticipated finding of this study was that attitude did not influence consumer decision making on personal care products. However, this result has not previously been described (Matos, Ituassu & Rossi, 2000). Attitude is considered as key concept on consumer behaviour which is defined as set of beliefs, experience and feelings forming a predisposition to act in a given direction. However, attitude does not always influence decision making, thus measuring consumer attitudes towards a product or services do not necessarily measure the consumer's purchase intention. A possible explanation for this is that among the Generation Y particularly the students are not fully matured in buying behaviour and are easily influenced by fashion, television, social media and celebrity endorsement. They easily come under peer pressure and follow what is new in the market. Malaysians tend towards a family-oriented society where the role and influence of family members in buying a product or brand is obvious. In the case of young consumer group, both family members and peer group pressure are the main influencers especially in the purchase of personal care products. Finally, Generation Y students tend to attach more importance to the direct and fast effect of personal care products to satisfy their inner urge of looking good and smart without thinking about the harmful effect on health and environment.

## V. Conclusion and Recommendation

The desire to look good is almost universal among consumers worldwide and this have a huge impact on personal care products. Understanding, analysing and keeping track of consumer behaviour is very crucial for the companies as well as the brand management in this industry to sustain in the market. In general, the findings of this study provide a number of valuable insights that can help businesses in developing strategies to improve the promotion and development of their products. Based on the findings, a considerable amount of attention pertaining to subjective norm is evident in influencing consumer decision making. Therefore, this variable should not be neglected as this influence the action of the consumers especially among Generation Y as the purchasing power of this group has an unprecedented impact on the economy. On the other hand, the findings of this study can help the consumer to be more careful in making decisions and to educate them to engage in good judgement before purchasing personal care products. Consumers must have initiatives to develop their knowledge and have the desire to think before they buy any health products, cosmetics and medications.

However, this research is limited in several ways. First, the respondents were limited to students from a local University. Therefore, the generalisation of the overall findings should be made with caution to the overall population. Second, the research design employed in this study was cross-section and this limits the extent to which causality can be gathered from the results. It will be beneficial that future research be conducted using longitudinal methods as the data can be collected at more than one point in time.

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