Factors that Influence Consumer Behavior: A Case Study of a Multinational Consumer Goods Company in Malaysia

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

ABSTRACT

Unilever, a British multinational known for its consumer goods, operates in over 190 countries, including Malaysia. Unilever Malaysia was founded over 100 years ago and has improved the lives of millions of Malaysians for more than 70 years. This study aims to explore factors that influence consumer behavior in Unilever Malaysia. Consumer behavior describes the decisions individuals make while choosing, paying for, using, and discarding goods and services. Understanding consumer behavior is important because it allows companies to customize marketing strategies to produce products that are more satisfactory to customers, achieve stronger competitiveness, and customer loyalty for the company. This research collected primary data from 100 Unilever Malaysia customers via an online survey. The findings reveal that perceived quality, brand image, and perceived value significantly influence consumer behavior toward Unilever Malaysia, among which perceived value has the most significant impact. These factors have a positive impact on consumers' decision-making process. These findings provide Unilever Malaysia with advantages for future growth in terms of enhancing customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

Keywords: Brand Image; Consumer Behavior; Marketing; Perceived Quality; Perceived Value; Social Factors; Unilever

INTRODUCTION

Since 1947, Unilever has maintained a significant presence in Malaysia, serving as the company behind several popular brands, including Dove, Horlicks, Rexona, Lipton, Lifebuoy, and Magnum. Unilever has been a part of many Malaysians' lives for more than 65 years, producing and selling ice cream, home care, and personal care products there (Says, 2013). The company values the support and devotion of Malaysian consumers and is dedicated to providing high-quality goods for both the present and the future, according to Herry Budiazhari, Marketing Director at Unilever Malaysia. Unilever's continuous commitment to improving the lives of its customers and bolstering its brand recognition in Malaysia is shown in this. The mission of Unilever is to provide products that help people feel good, look good, and live better lives by meeting their daily needs for personal care, hygiene, and nutrition. This mission places a strong emphasis on offering daily goods that improve customers' quality of life while advancing the company's environmental and sustainability objectives through its vitality mission. Unilever's vision is to lead the world in sustainable business by showcasing how its future-ready, purpose-driven model propels exceptional performance and continuously produces financial results that place it in the top third of the sector. Together, the mission and vision guide Unilever's focus on improving lives, pioneering sustainability, and achieving excellence in the consumer goods sector (Young, 2023).

Research indicates that multiple factors, including social, personal, psychological, and cultural elements, influence consumer behavior. For instance, a study conducted in Jordan highlighted that brand image, quality, and innovation perceptions influence consumer choices for Unilever goods. The study utilized an online survey to analyze the preferences of 384 customers, revealing that effective marketing strategies must consider these consumer insights to enhance purchase intentions (Ismaeel & Alsariera, 2023). Moreover, the theory of planned behavior suggests that subjective norms and attitudes significantly impact consumers' intentions to buy specific products (Al-Swidi et al., 2014).

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has catalyzed substantial shifts in consumer behavior, prompting Unilever to adapt its marketing strategies accordingly. The pandemic caused health and hygiene goods to become more important as consumers prioritized safety and well-being over luxury items. A study indicated that during this period, consumers shifted their needs towards essential goods, reflecting a broader trend towards prioritizing physiological necessities (Fithry et al., 2021). This adaptability has allowed Unilever to remain relevant in a market that is changing quickly.

The effectiveness of behavior change interventions depends significantly on their content, making it essential to understand which types of content are effective for specific behaviors. Unfortunately, it might be challenging to pinpoint exactly what was in an intervention due to the lack of standardized definitions of behavior modification approaches used in them, which hinders reliable replication. Nudge, MINDSPACE, and similar frameworks for behavior change offer valuable insights into defining core behavior change techniques. However, advancing further will require systematic analyses of the components of more and less effective behavior change interventions and their target audiences. To address a number of the global challenges facing humanity, effective behavior modification interventions are required (Newson et al., 2013). Politicians are becoming more conscious of the necessity of implementing successful behavior change interventions to advance the welfare of the country. In order to comprehend change processes and mechanisms at the individual, group, societal, and global levels, behavioral scientists are obligated to create comprehensive and inclusive frameworks.

Furthermore, we must align these crucial change processes with well-defined behavior modification strategies.

Unilever's commitment to sustainability also resonates with a growing demographic of socially conscious consumers. The company's initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable practices align with consumer values, thereby fostering brand loyalty. By leveraging insights into consumer motivations and behaviors, Unilever has been able to craft marketing campaigns that emphasize social responsibility and environmental stewardship (Unilever, 2024).

In conclusion, understanding consumer behavior is essential for the sustained success of multinational consumer goods companies operating in competitive global markets. This study specifically explores the various factors influencing consumer buying behavior, including perceived quality, brand image, perceived value, social influences, and marketing strategies, within the Malaysian context. By examining how these factors shape consumer decisions, particularly in light of shifting market dynamics such as those brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the research provides valuable insights into how companies can adapt their strategies to maintain relevance and competitiveness. The significance of this study lies in its focus on consumer behavior in an emerging Southeast Asian market, offering context-specific insights that are often underrepresented in existing literature. The findings contribute to academic discourse by enhancing the understanding of consumer decision-making processes in a post-pandemic environment, while also providing practical implications for marketing professionals aiming to foster brand loyalty and improve engagement. The novelty of this research stems from its integration of behavioral, psychological, and situational variables in analyzing consumer behavior, presenting a comprehensive framework that can guide future studies and inform strategic planning in the consumer goods industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition and Conceptualization of Consumer Behavior
The "acquisition, consumption, and disposition of products, services, time, and ideas by decision-making units" is the definition of consumer behavior (Jacoby et al., 1998). The behavioral patterns, decision processes, and actions of a customer when they decide to purchase a product or service for their own use can also be referred to as consumer behavior (Pires et al., 2022). Based on the context of Unilever, consumer behavior is the study of how various elements affect customers' decision-making process when making purchases helps businesses to boost their marketing communications and increase sales (Ajibola & Njogo, 2012). A good understanding of this cycle is of great importance to marketers as it shows how to design the product and develop marketing strategies that would match the target audience's preferences and choice (Utama et al., 2020). Unilever focuses on understanding consumer expectations for products that are environmentally friendly and affordable, aligning these values with its business model (Unilever, 2023). Moreover, Unilever also uses consumer insights to innovate and deliver products that contribute to food security, reduce waste, and promote healthier lifestyles, in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (SDGs) (Unilever, 2021b).

Influencing Factors on Consumer Behavior
Perceived Quality
Perceived quality can be defined as the customer's opinion about the overall quality of a product or service or the brand itself compared to its alternatives. It is more biased toward the brand's image, consumer experiences with the brand and its other items, or peer

views rather than the actual product (Akoglu & Özbek, 2021). Perceived quality could help the product differentiate itself from its competitors. Other than that, the business might possibly increase profits with the aid of perceived quality if the process of product improvement is proceeding more quickly than that of its rivals. Delivering higher perceived quality consistently tends to increase customer satisfaction and encourage repeat purchases, which strengthens brand loyalty (Khawaja et al., 2021). Conversely, unfavorable customer experiences or low service may reduce perceived quality, which would affect sales and the reputation of the company.

Based on Unilever (2020b), they did not consider perceived quality as how well a product performs in terms of how it feels on the skin, tastes, and smells, but they are exploring many other things. For instance, in e-commerce, products must be delivered on time, leak-free, packaged in clear dimensions to meet customer expectations, and arrive with packaging intact. Moreover, the avoidance of over-packaging and excessive use of plastic ties into a sustainability factor. In conclusion, customers' expectations and preferences are shaped by perceived quality, which has a positive impact on their purchase decisions and significantly influences consumer behavior (Waebuesar et al., 2022). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Perceived quality is positively related to consumer behavior.

Brand Image
Brand image is a key driver of brand equity, playing a crucial role in determining which brands can thrive and succeed in their respective markets. According to Aaker and Keller (1993), brand image is a set of connections that are organized in meaningfully ways and relate to things like product attributes, benefits, or pricing (Zia et al., 2021). It is an opinion or viewpoint that consumers build about a certain brand over time as a result of their interactions with the product. The brand image can be shaped by other customers' experiences as well, although it may not be required for the customer to visit the brand shop in person or buy the particular goods. When consumers can identify the brand and its distinctiveness in terms of the value proposition and core values it offers, a positive and favorable brand image is created (Zhang, 2015).

The messages that a brand communicates to its consumer, whether through advertising or social media, could influence how consumers perceive that brand. A consistent and clear message of a brand helps to strengthen a favorable brand image. If the brand has a favorable reputation, then the product will rise and achieve more consumer buying behavior, and improve sales. On the other hand, a negative brand image will lead to the opposite results. In the context of Unilever, their goal is to create sustainable living as a norm, and it makes the brand image positive among its consumers. Above all, Unilever's declaration that "We want to act on the social and environmental issues facing the world and we want to enhance people's lives with our innovative, sustainable, and high-quality products" (Unilever, 2024) has made the consumers' perception of Unilever's commitment to accountability for society and environmental sustainability strongly influences their behavior towards purchasing its products and shapes how they view the brand's image. In summary, brand image is an overall impression formed by a consumer based on their experience of the product or service. Hence, brand image positively affects consumer behavior by influencing consumer perceptions, trust, and loyalty toward a brand (Singh et al., 2023). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H2: Brand image is positively related to consumer behavior.

Perceived Value

Perceived value, as used in marketing, refers to how consumers assess a product or service's worth and capacity to satisfy their requirements and expectations, particularly when compared to its rivals. According to its usefulness and utility, or the additional benefits and values that the consumer anticipates receiving when using it, marketers define perceived value as its qualities and attributes (Molinillo et al., 2021). The concept is that the price that the public is willing to pay for certain goods or services is known as perceived value. Most importantly, consumers purchase based on how valuable they think a particular thing is. Perceived value is crucial in businesses as consumer satisfaction is not only based on a product's price or features, but it also depends on other factors like products and branding (Samudro et al., 2020).

In the framework of Unilever (2024), they expect all their employees to represent the company's strong values of integrity, respect, responsibility, and high ethical standards. Unilever also stated that employees should not only follow all those values in their work, but also stay alert for any potential ethical issues that may occur. Moreover, Unilever's sustainability initiatives, like Unilever Sustainable Living Plan (USLP), contribute to its perceived value because consumers place a high value on companies that prioritize sustainability. Additionally, their dedication to improving public health directly impacts perceived value. Initiatives like reaching over 1.3 billion people through health programs help to build trust and loyalty among consumers (Unilever, 2024). Therefore, the purchasing decisions of a consumer are based on the perceived value of the goods or services provided, no matter what type of business we operate (Waebuesar et al., 2022; Zhang & Lee, 2022). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Perceived value is positively related to consumer behavior.

Social Factors

Social factor plays a crucial role in affecting the purchasing decisions of consumers (Jisana, 2014). Roles like parents, instructors, and coworkers, as well as social elements like family, influence consumer behavior. It can also be said that society's influence on individual consumers (Durmaz & Gündüz, 2021). For instance, family members impact kids' buying habits and preferences, which may affect their future purchase decisions. Over time, family preferences transform into brand loyalty, with people continuing to favor brands that are utilized in their family. Additionally, social media platforms have also boosted social influence with recommendations and reviews on foods, attire, and places, which shape consumers' preferences (Bhukya & Paul, 2023).

Since Unilever operates in global markets, it is crucial for them to understand each culture because in some places they may prefer sustainability, while others may prefer pricing. The social factor that strongly influences Unilever consumers is families, because they often focus on family-oriented products like food items, such as snacks, beverages, and household items as cleaning supplies like Lifebuoy. In summary, Unilever's success has influenced many social factors that affect consumer behavior. Understanding those factors could help Unilever to satisfy the demands and anticipations of various customers worldwide. Hence, social factors positively affect consumer behavior as they influence consumers towards a purchasing decision (Rumagit et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2021). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H4: Social factors are positively related to consumer behavior.

Marketing
According to Kotler et al. (2015), marketing is a social and management process that enables people and organizations to create and exchange value with others in order to get what they need and desire. Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and procedures that create, communicate, deliver, and exchange items that are valuable to consumers, clients, partners, and society as a whole (Elliott et al., 2023). Other than that, experts have defined that marketing is crucial for many reasons. Mainly, marketing builds brand loyalty and customer relationships and guides pricing decisions. Other than that, through focused advertising and social media efforts, marketing also assists businesses in reaching new audiences and breaking into new markets since it may draw in new clients and increase brand awareness (Rimadias et al., 2021).

Based on Unilever (2021a), they are committed to responsible marketing and stated that marketing helps them share the advantages of their innovation and products with people. It also gives them a chance to talk to customers about topics that are significant to them. Through surveys and market research, Unilever focuses especially on brand impression and awareness. Unilever assesses how consumers perceive and are aware of its brands.

This study analysis Unilever's future marketing strategy and helps the company understand how its marketing initiatives are affecting brand perception. Furthermore, by examining sales data and market share patterns, Unilever can determine how well its marketing activities are generating customer demand and gaining market share. Businesses may enhance their own marketing efforts and set themselves up for success in the competitive market by implementing this Unilever marketing strategy (Dzuhrina, 2023). Thus, marketing positively affects consumer behavior as it influences consumer decisions and actions, which leads to increased brand loyalty and impulse purchases (Mihart, 2012; Waebuesar et al., 2022). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H5: Marketing is positively related to consumer behavior.

Conceptual Framework
The study framework model is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Research Framework
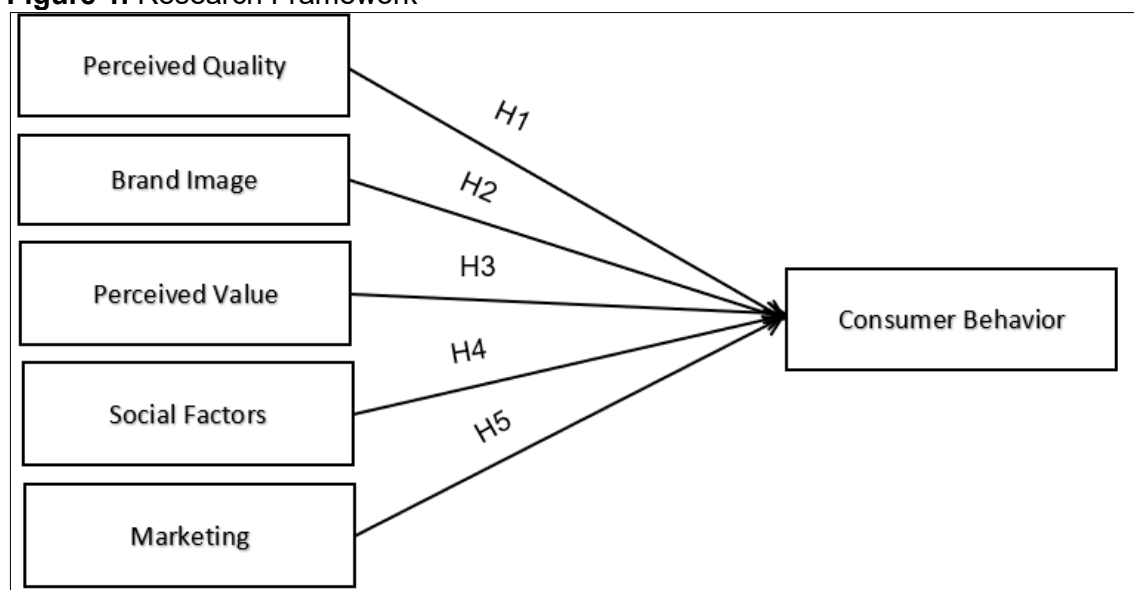
RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, the method used to obtain data is by connecting two types of methods. Among them are quantitative methods through questionnaires and qualitative methods through reference books, articles, journals, and the Internet. The type of data obtained is based on primary and secondary sources. The questionnaire that has been created is to obtain information about factors that influence consumer behavior as primary data, and reference books, articles, journals, and the Internet as secondary data. The researcher makes references from official websites, articles, and journals. The researcher has checked carefully and diligently to find information to support the results and discussion of the coursework. In addition, the researcher also tried to find statements related to the literature review and discussion of our topic through various articles, journals, and websites as a reference. Researchers refer to websites to obtain information related to the company background and more.

Sample and Procedure
This study uses sampling techniques to answer the objectives given by the researcher. A total of 100 respondents among the general public were randomly selected to answer the questionnaire in the form of a Google Forms survey as primary data. Through the use of this sampling procedure, every member of the public has a different opinion on the factors that influence the consumer behavior of Unilever in Malaysia. The study sample consists of 100 members of the public, and 100 sets of questionnaires will be distributed to them by using social media platforms (WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook) on a sampling basis to obtain accurate data. The respondents are chosen depending on their willingness to answer the questionnaire. Among the important characteristics during the respondent selection process is that they are consumers of Unilever products. In addition, the selection of respondents also does not consider race, gender, age, or the type of Unilever products used. The questionnaire was adapted from Rumagit et al. (2022), Teoh et al. (2021), and Waebuesar et al. (2022).

Measures
Descriptive methods were used to examine and analyze the data, which were presented as percentages. Data analysis is carried out when primary data is obtained from the questionnaire. After the data is gathered, edited, and transformed into figures, the level of analysis is reached. Next, the researcher also analyzed the data for dependent variables and independent variables using a 5-level Likert scale, i.e., using a score of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The respondents' demographic, including gender, age, nationality, ethnicity, occupation, monthly household income, and education level, was ascertained using single-statement questions for demographic-personal data. Besides that, single-statement questions were also developed to collect the customer experience of respondents. Examples of questions are "How frequently do you purchase Unilever products?", "Which kind of Unilever product have you purchased the most?", "How long have you been consuming Unilever products?" and "How much do you spend per month on Unilever products?".

We implemented a 15-item scale to investigate the factors that influence consumer behavior: A case study of Unilever in Malaysia. The scale consisted of five independent variables, which include perceived quality (3 items), brand image (3 items), perceived value (3 items), social factors (3 items), and marketing (3 items). The following are the examples of sample items: "The quality of the Unilever brand is superior compared to other brands." (Perceived Quality); "I purchase Unilever products because they promote environmental sustainability." (Brand Image); "Unilever products cater to my health and

nutrition needs." (Perceived Value); "I purchase Unilever products because I have grown up using them." (Social Factors) and "I purchase Unilever products because of the memorable advertisement and campaigns." (Marketing).

Next, we implemented a 3-item scale to identify the dependent variable, which is consumer buying behavior intention. A sample item included "I am satisfied with Unilever products", "I intend to continue purchasing Unilever products", and "I am more likely to recommend Unilever products to others".

Pre-testing guaranteed the reliability and clarity of the key variables' questions. The study's results were presented in tables and interpreted in accordance with the objectives. Then, the gathered data was examined for reliability and significance using SPSS 27.

RESULTS

Table 1. Summary of Respondents' Demography (N=100)

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
Under 18 years old	2	2
18-24 years old	46	46
25-34 years old	24	24
35-44 years old	17	17
45-54 years old	7	7
55 years old and above	4	4
Nationality		
Malaysian	91	91
Non-Malaysian	9	9
Ethnicity		
Malay	30	30
Chinese	52	52
India	18	18
Occupation		
Student	45	45
Employed	43	43
Unemployed	10	10
Retired	2	2
Monthly Household Income		
RM6,338 and below (B40)	54	54
RM6,339-RM10,959 (M40)	39	39
RM10,960 and above (T20)	7	7
Education Level		
Primary school	0	0
Secondary school	3	3
High school diploma or equivalent	24	24
Bachelor's Degree	64	64
Master's Degree	7	7
PHD's Degree	2	2

In this study, 100 sets of valid questionnaires were collected. Table 1 summarizes the respondents' demographic details. More than half of the respondents were female (66%), and most were in the 18–24 age range (46%), and almost all were Malaysian (91%), with

only nine non-Malaysian respondents (9%). Based on ethnicity, more than half of the respondents were Chinese (52%), followed by Malays (30%) and Indians (18%). The survey respondents are more students (45%) and employed people (43%), most of them have a bachelor's degree (64%), no respondent's educational level is primary school level (0%), and more than half of the respondents indicated that their monthly household income does not exceed RM 6,338 (54%).

Table 2. Summary of Customer Experience with Unilever (N=100)

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
How frequently do you purchase Unilever products?		
Daily	10	10
Weekly	41	41
Monthly	34	34
Occasionally	15	15
Never	0	0
Which kind of Unilever product have you purchased the most?		
Beauty and Wellbeing	25	25
Personal Care	23	23
Home Care	20	20
Nutrition	15	15
Ice Cream	17	17
How long have you been consuming Unilever products?		
Less than 1 year	14	14
1-3 years	38	38
More than 3 years	48	48
How much do you spend per month on Unilever products?		
Less than RM50	20	20
RM50-RM100	49	49
More than RM100	31	31

In order to further understand more about customer experience and preference for Unilever products, respondents were asked how frequently they purchase Unilever products and what type of products they purchase the most, and for how long they have been consuming Unilever products, as well as how much they spend on Unilever products per month. Table 2 summarizes the customer experience with Unilever. The findings demonstrate that 41% of the respondents said they consume the product weekly, and that no respondent has ever bought Unilever products. This indicates the validity of the data, as every respondent has purchased the products. Apart from that, nearly half (49%) noted that they spend between RM50 and RM100 per month on Unilever products. Customer loyalty is defined as a customer's determination to stick with a purchased good or service in the future, regardless of external factors or marketing campaigns that would influence them to do otherwise (Oliver, 1999). Loyal customer retention and repeat purchase behavior create a sustainable source of profit for the business (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). Most of the respondents stated that the products they spend the most money on are those related to beauty and wellbeing (25%) and personal care (23%). It is noteworthy that 80% of the respondents spend more than RM50 per month on the brand's products. This finding helps companies develop more precise marketing strategies.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha, and Zero-order Correlations for all study variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Perceived Quality	0.933					
Brand Image	0.877**	0.929				
Perceived Value	0.858**	0.874**	0.873			
Social Factors	0.899**	0.839**	0.854**	0.876		
Marketing	0.876**	0.848**	0.893**	0.875**	0.883	
Consumer Behavior	0.867**	0.866**	0.882**	0.838**	0.844**	0.912
Mean	3.9767	3.8467	3.9833	3.9500	4.0067	3.9367
Standard Deviation	0.75990	0.73767	0.64506	0.71126	0.67832	0.71019
Number of items	3	3	3	3	3	3

Note: N = 100; $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$, $***p < 0.001$. The diagonal entries represent Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha.

Descriptive statistics, measures of reliability, and Zero-order Correlations are all shown in Table 3. The table displays the correlation, Cronbach's alpha, standard deviation, and means of the factors. Pearson's correlation coefficient, also known as PCC or PPMCC, is a measure of a linear relationship between two variables that have been recorded on interval or ratio scales. The correlation between two normally distributed variables is the only thing it can measure (Laerd Statistics, 2020). Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to examine the connection between the variables. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all examined variables show high levels of dependability, ranging from 0.873 to 0.933. Although the literature occasionally uses lower thresholds, 0.7 is considered an adequate reliability coefficient (Santos, 1999). The five factors that influence consumer behavior in Unilever Malaysia include perceived quality, brand image, perceived value, social factors, and marketing are correlated with consumer behavior towards Unilever Malaysia. The mean for each variable is between 3.8467 to 4.0067, which represents that respondents have a neutral (a value '3' in Likert scale) and agree (a value '4' in Likert scale) for each factor in the survey.

Table 4. Summary of Regression Analysis

Consumer Behavior Towards Unilever	
Variables Entered	Beta
Perceived Quality	0.249*
Brand Image	0.234*
Perceived Value	0.379**
Social Factors	0.067
Marketing	0.030
R square	0.835
Adjusted R square	0.826
F value	95.146
Durbin - Watson Statistic	2.050

Note: N=100; $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$, $***p < 0.001$

Table 4 shows that perceived quality, brand image, and perceived value emerged as significant factors that influence consumer behavior, with perceived value (beta value 0.379) being the strongest driver. Similarly, perceived quality (beta value 0.249) and brand image (beta value 0.234) were found to significantly affect consumer behavior. Therefore, H1, H2, and H3 are accepted. On the other hand, social factors (beta value 0.067) and marketing (beta value 0.030) did not have a significant impact on influencing consumer behavior. This finding suggests that, in this context, social factors and marketing efforts may not play a direct role in influencing consumer behavior. Thus, H4 and H5 are rejected. The value of R^2 was 0.835, indicating that perceived quality, brand image, and perceived value account for 83.5% of the variance in consumer behavior.

Figure 2. Overview Result
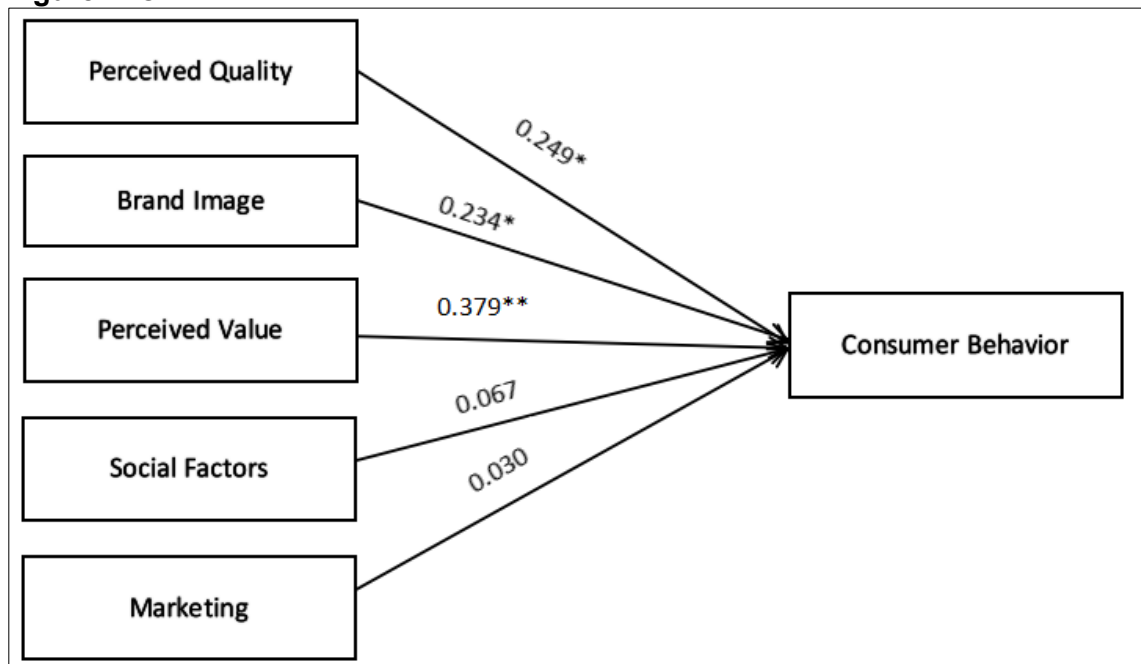
DISCUSSION

Perceived Quality
Our findings indicate that perceived quality (beta value 0.249) significantly influences consumer behavior toward Unilever Malaysia. This result correlates with the body of research finding that perceived quality acts as a critical role in decision making, brand loyalty, and customer satisfaction (Waebuesar et al., 2022). For instance, perceived quality refers to the buyer's personal judgments of the overall excellence or benefit of a brand, indicating that consumers convert awareness into action when they perceive high quality (Zhao et al., 2022). Besides that, high perceived quality develops satisfaction and trust, which enhances the possibility of recurring purchases and brand loyalty. Furthermore, perceived quality has an impact on customer perceptions about brands generally as well as word-of-mouth behaviors. By fostering excellent customer experiences, products that consistently exceed or satisfy consumer expectations about quality might gain a competitive edge (Singh et al., 2023). Such impacts are magnified in environments like live-streaming or e-commerce platforms, where interactive presentations aid in highlighting quality attributes and hence increase customer involvement and decision-making (Zhang, 2023). As product categories become more competitive, consumers' expectations shift, and more information becomes available, all of which affect how consumers perceive quality over time. Because quality is dynamic, marketers need to monitor perceptions over time and modify their product and

advertising strategy accordingly. Marketers may be able to teach customers how to assess quality as products and perceptions change. Managing advertising, package information, and product-related visual signals may all help to evoke the desired perception of quality (Zeithaml, 1988). This highlights how crucial it is for Unilever Malaysia to maintain strict manufacturing standards and quality assurance procedures in order to maintain and develop consumer behavior and trust.

Brand Image
Our findings indicate that brand image (beta value 0.234) significantly influences consumer behavior toward Unilever Malaysia. Brand image refers to the brand perception shaped by brand associations stored in consumers' memory. These brand associations, which represent the information nodes linked to the brand node in memory, encapsulate the brand's meaning for consumers. The dimensions of brand associations, such as likeability, intensity, and uniqueness, are key components of brand knowledge. These dimensions are essential in shaping the distinctive reaction that makes up brand equity, especially in situations where decision-making is highly involved (Keller, 1993).

A positive brand image builds emotional ties and trust, all of which are essential for promoting recurring business and sustained brand loyalty. Customers also desire to choose products from companies that are more socially responsible and kind, and some customers have a negative impact on companies that are irresponsible or socially unfriendly. Customers are increasingly drawn to brands that conform to their values, including ethical production and sustainability, reinforcing the role of brand image in driving behavior (Iqbal et al., 2013; Krishnan & Balachandran, 2004). In addition, consumers prefer the goods and services of firms that practice corporate social responsibility (CSR) when it improves the environment, the life of their workers, and the general public. This is due to the fact that CSR initiatives affect the brand image of products and services (Araújo et al., 2023; Maldonado-Guzman et al., 2017). As a result, the brand's image have significantly improved (Maldonado-Guzman et al., 2017), and consumers are conveying their intent to return and engage in further actions, such as revisiting their initial intention, recommending it to others, and showing a intention to spend more (Singh et al., 2023). Therefore, the companies should create communication strategies that support CSR activities and enhance their brand image (Araújo et al., 2023; Maldonado-Guzman et al., 2017; Bianchi et al., 2019). Unilever Malaysia can enhance its brand image, consumer loyalty, and purchasing behavior by conducting effective CSR activities.

Perceived Value
Our findings indicate that perceived value (beta value 0.379) is the most significant factor that influences consumer behavior toward Unilever Malaysia. According to Zeithaml (1988), perceived value is a consumer's overall assessment of a product's utility and usefulness based on their impressions and perceptions of what is provided and received. Even a product of superior quality will not be worth as much as one of worse quality at a lower price if the consumer does not have the money or does not want to pay the required sums (Zeithaml, 1988). Perceived value and purchase intention are also strongly correlated, as most consumers assess products and services before using them. Consumers evaluate which items will provide them with greater value when making decisions, which determines the degree of price elasticity, which varies with the overall supplied value (Zhang & Lee, 2022). Additionally, attitudes as well as behaviors of consumers may be affected differently by different values (Zhang et al., 2024). For example, emotional value plays a role in enhancing perceived value. The appeal of a product or service is a mix of both rational and emotional value. While emotions influence

every purchase decision, very few purchases are driven purely by emotions (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001).

Research on advertising and atmospherics suggests that marketing and promotional strategies can trigger emotional responses, which may then transfer to the products being marketed. Brands that connect emotionally with consumers provide value beyond functionality, fostering stronger attachments (Sheth et al., 1991). Businesses may utilize personalized recommendation systems to provide various value propositions to different customer groups by segmenting the consumer user base. Furthermore, businesses can use high-credibility materials like accepted certifications and credible pledges to organize advertising content that may directly increase customers' purchase intentions and behaviors (Zhang et al., 2024). Besides that, in social contexts, perceived value often intertwines with status signaling. Consumers perceive higher value in products that enhance their social standing; prestige brands may be desired by people as a symbolic indication of group affiliation, aligning with the theory of conspicuous consumption. In order to conform to their neighborhood's social conventions, a person may pick a humble brand on the weekends while choosing a prestige brand during the weekdays to maintain their professional image. In this sense, bandwagon customers enhance their self-concept by leveraging perceived expanded self-value of prestige brands (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999).

In summary, perceived value significantly influences consumer behavior, impacting loyalty, satisfaction, and purchasing decisions. Therefore, Unilever Malaysia should focus on optimizing the perceived value by balancing quality, price, emotional resonance, and social relevance in its marketing strategies, as well as leveraging certifications and credible endorsements to enhance consumer trust and develop consumer buying behavior.

Social Factors
According to Qazzafi (2020), Ramya & Ali (2016), and Shaw (2024), a person's relatives and friends have a greater effect on them than other people, like a corporation salesperson, and so on. A person has more trust in friends and family than in other people. The person is more likely to listen to the recommendations of friends or family than others. Family plays a vital role in a person's life. Individuals tend to trust their family more than anyone else. Family suggestions or recommendations carry significant weight in decision-making and can strongly influence a consumer's choices (Teoh et al., 2021). Although previous research had shown that consumer behavior was impacted by social factors (Rumagit et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2021), nonetheless, our study reveals that social factors (beta value 0.067) do not significantly influence consumer behavior towards Unilever Malaysia.

The study suggests that perceived value, perceived quality, and brand image are more important than social factors. This represents that consumers are more appreciative of these three factors when social factors are not taken into account as the main determinant of consumer behavioral intention. Consequently, the social factors in this research do not align with previous research. One explanation for this study can be the small sample size, which might limit how far the findings can be applied, or the inconsistent findings between social factors and consumer behavior. Moreover, it could also be because modern consumers increasingly value personal preferences over peer influences or societal norms. Gen Z and Millennials' consumption patterns show a dramatic shift away from the standards set by earlier generations. Their proficiency with technology, focus on experiences, moral concerns, and inclination for individualization lead to a new era of conscious consumerism (Pham & Lam, 2024). Since most of the

respondents in this study are Gen Z and Millennials, they could focus more on perceived value, perceived quality, and brand image rather than social factors when having purchase intention behavior.

Marketing

According to Kanopaite (2015) and Kotler & Keller (2006), marketing with the use of innovation, communication, and delivery produces more customer value for its target audience, which aids in achieving management objectives and making it more effective than competitors. In a saturated market of products and services, companies often strive to stand out by emphasizing their functional attributes in communication. These messages are designed to convey emotional and/or rational values that can influence consumer purchasing decisions (Mihart, 2012).

Marketing plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer behavior by influencing how individuals perceive, evaluate, and ultimately purchase products or services. However, our study reveals that marketing (beta value 0.030) does not significantly influence consumer behavior towards Unilever Malaysia. The study suggests that perceived value, perceived quality, and brand image are more important than marketing. This represents that consumers are more appreciative of these three factors when marketing is not taken into account as the main determinant of consumer behavioral intention. Consequently, the marketing factor in this research does not align with previous research. One explanation for this study can be the small sample size or the specific market context of this study, which might limit how far the findings can be applied. This finding suggests that Unilever Malaysia may need to redesign its marketing strategies by emphasizing value-driven messaging and personalized communications that are relevant to its target market and consumers.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the results of this research on Unilever Malaysia's consumer behavior survey show that perceived quality, brand image, and perceived value have a significant impact on influencing consumer behavior. This is a good indication that customer trust in product quality, as well as the positive image of the brand in the thoughts of customers and the overall sense of value that the product provides, are also important motivators that drive purchase decisions. In contrast, social factors and marketing are insignificant and relatively weak in influencing consumer behavior. This suggests that when choosing Unilever products, customers are more inclined to concentrate on core product attributes and the long-term value of the brand itself, rather than on external publicity and social influences.

This finding has important implications for Unilever Malaysia's business strategy, the company can enhance the perceived quality of its products by maintain strict manufacturing standards and quality assurance procedures make sure products are meet customers' expectations; strengthen the brand image by conduct CSR activities, strengthening the brand's association with the environment or creating a deeper emotional connection; increase the perceived value of its products through transparent pricing strategies, certifications, and added value such as service, packaging and design. Then, for low-impact factors such as social factors and marketing, the company should optimize its resource allocation by choosing to reduce its investment in social factors and marketing activities and focusing its resources on enhancing the brand and the products themselves to improve the core competitiveness.

LIMITATION

This study acknowledges several important limitations. First, this study uses a sample size of 100 respondents, which may not be sufficient to represent the entire population of Unilever consumers. Millennials and Gen Z comprised the majority of responders, which can restrict how generalizability the results can be applied. A bigger, more varied sample that encompasses a wider variety of customer categories across several countries might be advantageous for future research. The results of the study might not be applied to customers in other countries or regions because it focuses on Unilever customers in Malaysia. Cultural, economic, and social aspects can impact consumer behavior, and these elements might differ greatly depending on the area. To investigate how these elements could alter in various situations, cross-cultural research is required. One notable limitation is the finding that marketing has an insignificant impact on consumer behavior. This result contradicts traditional marketing theory and may indicate a gap in research focus or external factors that influence consumer responses. This may be due to the saturation of marketing messages in the market, with consumers responding less and less to traditional advertising strategies. Moreover, the lack of significant influence of social factors on consumer behavior, particularly in the case of Millennials and Gen Z, raises questions about the broader applicability of social influences in contemporary consumer behavior. This might indicate a change in consumer preferences, but it could also be explained by the study's shortcomings in capturing the variety of ways social influences influence behavior. By acknowledging these limitations, future research can address the gaps identified and give more thorough explanations of the complex relationships between consumer behavior.

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