



## **EXPLORING CONSUMER PREFERENCES: ORGANIC VS. NON-ORGANIC BODY WASH BRANDS IN MALAYSIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened consumer awareness of personal hygiene, leading to a surge in demand for bath and shower products in Malaysia. Despite this growth, the organic body wash segment has faced challenges, including consumer skepticism due to the proliferation of greenwashing. This study explores the factors influencing consumer choices between organic and non-organic body wash brands in Malaysia, while understanding whether consumers' choices reflect their environmentally conscious behavior, with a focus on young adults aged 18-25. Through semi-structured interviews, the research draws on the Theory of Planned Behavior and Garvin's Eight Dimensions of Product Quality to analyze perceived quality, performance, price, and environmental concern. Findings reveal that price is the critical determinant of consumer preference, while perceived environmental concern plays a negligible role, challenging the previous research that suggests individuals' purchases of organic products reflects environmental concern. Parental influence also emerges as a key factor in the decision-making process, highlighting the importance of family and social influences on consumers' decisions. The study underscores the importance of transparent marketing and addresses the impact of greenwashing on consumer trust. The research contributes to understanding consumer behavior in the organic personal care sector and offers insights for marketers to refine their strategies. Future research should investigate the sustainable packaging role and expand demographic considerations to enhance generalizability.

JEL Classification: M31 Marketing

Keywords: Green marketing, Greenwashing, Consumer choices, Personal care products, Organic

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Submitted: 15/06/2024

Accepted: 30/09/2024

Published: 28/06/2025

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The bath and shower industry in Malaysia has witnessed a surge in demand as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. MarketResearch.com (2021) and Vodus (2021) reported that the pandemic heightened public awareness of personal hygiene, prompting consumers to seek hygiene products infused with antibacterial properties to prevent viral transmission since 2020. Simultaneously, Fortune Business Insights (2021) revealed a growing inclination toward organic and non-organic bath products reflecting a broader consumer trend towards embracing greener and healthier lifestyles.

For consumers, the trend centered ‘going green’ centered on promoting healthier living has given rise to an influx of organic products in the markets to satisfy saw emerge consumer desire for a healthy lifestyle (Osarodion et al., 2020). Following this trend, green marketing emerged as a strategy emphasizing improving product quality while minimizing negative environmental impact, capitalizing on consumers’ concerns for personal health to influence their optimism and purchase intentions toward organic products (Zollo et al., 2021). Notably, young consumers, as highlighted by both Sun et al. (2021) and Zollo et al. (2021) exhibit a willingness to pay for organic products.

Statista (2021) reported a significant revenue growth in Malaysia’s personal care industry in 2020 and 2021, with the personal hygiene sector presenting lucrative opportunities for bath and shower manufacturers. Several recent studies have shown that implementing organic practices can positively impact business performance and corporate image, prompting marketers to integrate organic attributes into products to align with consumer preferences for a healthier lifestyle (Alam and Islam, 2021; Darlius and Keni, 2021; Mukonza and Swarts, 2020).

Despite the growing preference for organic body wash products, however, the proliferation of greenwashing has resulted in consumers’ distrust of organic claims by brands, leading to a decreased desire for organic products (Szabo and Webster, 2021). As greenwashing is getting rampant in the market, Lin and Chang (2012) and Usrey et al. (2020) have argued that consumers might no longer favor brands and products with organic attributes. Fortune Business Insights (2021) also highlighted that, even with the surge in demand for bath and shower products during the COVID-19 outbreak, the

organic segment in the bath and shower industry has experienced a negative sales growth of -3.9 %, challenging the notion that consumers perceive organic products as superior. Hence, understanding the reasons influencing consumer choice and their perception of organic will provide insights into this phenomenon.

The objectives of this study are twofold; first, to explore the reasons behind consumers' choice of organic or non-organic body wash brands in Malaysia. Second, the study aims at understanding whether the choice of organic or non-organic body wash brands reflects environmentally conscious behavior among consumers. The investigation into the differences in consumers' decisions of organic and non-organic brands can overcome consumer trade-off behavior between organic and non-organic brands or products, while contributing useful insights for advertising agencies when creating advertising messages to avoid giving consumers the impression of greenwashing in organic brands.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 CONSUMERS' INTENTIONS ON CHOICE OF ORGANIC OR NON-ORGANIC

The shift in consumers' green preferences for environmentally friendly products has compelled companies to make their product development and marketing strategies increasingly greener (Osarodion et al., 2020). The trend toward adopting a green lifestyle has spurred extensive research on green purchasing intentions, aiming to comprehend consumers' willingness to invest in green products. Even though consumers show a preference for buying green products and are willing to pay premiums for organic items (Zollo et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2021), studies by Janssen and Vanhamme (2015) and Lin and Chang (2012) indicated the avoidance behavior in consumers' green purchase intentions. For instance, Janssen and Vanhamme (2015) discovered a disparity between consumers expressing green purchase intentions and their actual behavior during the purchasing stage. Lin and Chang (2012) noted that consumers, despite possessing green product knowledge, often face trade-offs between environmentalism and product attributes. These findings reflected the incongruity between consumers' green purchase intentions and purchase behaviors. Further, when exploring the relationship between green purchase intentions and behaviors, Usrey et al. (2020) found that consumers tend to negatively evaluate product's performance with

green attributes, such as eco-labels, eco-modes and green claims (environmental-related and eco-friendly advertising messages) when faced with a choice between organic or non-organic brands.

## 2.2 THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR

This study employs the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), a well-validated cognitive theory extensively used in studies on purchase intentions for organic products. Developed by Ajzen (1985) as an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), the TPB incorporates perceived behavioral control as antecedents to behavioral intentions, introducing three key constructs to explain consumers' purchase intentions: Attitude toward behavior, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975).

While the TPB has been widely used in previous quantitative research on consumers' purchase intentions for organic products (Shimul, Cheah, and Khan, 2022; Zhuang, Luo, and Riaz, 2021; Zhang et al., 2019), Ajzen (1991) proposed belief elicitation research that aims to gain insight into the salient beliefs of specific groups of people in specific contexts, as the result from such exploratory qualitative studies provide a list of relevant outcomes, referents, and control elements (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2009). Ajzen (1991) further asserted the necessity to elicit and evaluate the accessible behavioral, normative, and control beliefs if the goal of the study is to comprehend the elements that serve as the foundation for intentions, while Fishbein and Ajzen (2009) also state the need for qualitative research that looks at beliefs to comprehend what influences a target demographic to engage in a particular behavior. Additionally, despite the overall effectiveness of the theory, TPB can be enhanced through incorporating other factors to increase the predictive power of behavior in various contexts. Some previous studies have also adopted qualitative methods to understand consumers' beliefs about green products (Djafarova and Foots, 2022; Qi, Yu, and Ploeger, 2020), demonstrating that TPB can also be applied in qualitative settings. Therefore, the study introduces the variables including Perceived Quality and Perceived Performance from Garvin's Eight Dimensions of Product Quality (Garvin 1987), along with Perceived Price and Perceived Environmental Concern. This extended framework aims at exploring consumers' beliefs towards organic and non-organic body wash brands. In this research, the perceived quality of both organic and non-organic body wash was assessed based on factors such as ingredients and packaging. Meanwhile, the perceived performance of

these body washes was evaluated in terms of cleaning capability, fragrances, antibacterial properties, and other additional functions.

### 2.3 ATTITUDE

Attitudes toward behavior involves the general evaluation and judgement of items, individuals or topics (Moser, 2015). It is characterized by favorable and unfavorable evaluations of behavior, determining the likeability or aversion to engaging in the behavior (Paul, Modi, and Patel, 2016). Numerous studies have explored the relationship between attitude and green purchase intentions, emphasizing its pivotal role in predicting consumer willingness to choose environmentally friendly products (Yadav and Pathak, 2017; Zhang et al., 2019). Moser (2015) however discovered that attitude did not influence consumers' purchase intentions, highlighting the greater significance of the monetary counter value variable. Recent research has also emphasized the substantial impact of perceived price on consumer intention to purchase green products (Qomariah and Prabawani, 2020).

### 2.4 SUBJECTIVE NORMS

Beyond attitude, individuals' morality plays a role in influencing their purchase intentions (Moser, 2015). Subjective norms encompass the perceived social pressure from important individuals or groups regarding a specific behavior (Ahmed et al., 2021). While Roh, Seok, and Kim (2022) and Zhang et al. (2019) underscore the indispensable nature of subjective norms in predicting and influencing purchase intentions, Sharma and Foroapon (2019) expressed that subjective norms might not wield the expected influence on green product purchase intentions.

### 2.5. PERCEIVED BEHAVIORAL CONTROL

Perceived behavioral control gauges the ease or difficulty an individual faces in executing a behavior (Zhang et al., 2019). Perceived behavioral control comprises two factors including internal control factors (self-efficacy) and external control factors (perceived barriers) (Kautish, Paul, and Sharma, 2019). Self-efficacy reflects an individual's perception of their capability to perform the necessary actions, while perceived barriers denote the perceived difficulty associated with using the product (Vamvaka et al., 2020). While

Wang, Tao, and Chu (2020) as well as Zhuang et al. (2021) studies recognize the significant impact of perceived behavioral control on purchase intentions, Shimul et al. (2022) found that this factor does not influence consumer intention to purchase organic products.

## 2.6 GARVIN'S EIGHT DIMENSIONS OF PRODUCT QUALITY

### 2.6.1 PERCEIVED QUALITY

An integral dimension of Garvin's Eight Dimensions of Product Quality, perceived quality is frequently employed by researchers to study consumer perceptions and attitudes (Hoe and Mansori, 2018; Jakpar et al., 2012). It plays a crucial role in distinguishing a brand or product among competitors, as consumers often base their judgments on product superiority (Chen, Lin, and Chang, 2013). Research by Cheung, Lam, and Lau (2015) also suggested that consumers' green purchase intentions are influenced by perceived quality. As consumers' primary goal is to purchase high-quality products and products with acceptable functionality, they are more inclined to pick alternative brands or items when they do not perceive a reasonable degree of product quality (Song and Kim, 2018).

### 2.6.2 PERCEIVED PERFORMANCE

As another key element of Garvin's Eight Dimensions of Product Quality, performance denotes the primary operating characteristics, encompassing dimensions of traditional quality (Garvin 1987). In the context of body wash, performance characteristics include cleaning capability, long-lasting scent, moisturizing and hydrating benefits. Gouda et al. (2019) proposed a new evaluation notion in the field of 'green', where performance also represents the dimensions of green quality, emphasizing characteristics such as being paraben-free to minimize negative impacts on consumers and the environment.

### 2.6.3 PERCEIVED PRICE

Product pricing emerges as a pivotal factor influencing consumers' purchase intentions and brand behaviors. Notably, green products typically command higher prices than their conventional counterparts. Despite the initial perception that elevated prices might deter consumers from choosing these brands, Yang et al. (2019) suggested that consumers often equate higher pricing with superior brand

quality. This phenomenon in consumers' perceptions has been reflected in their purchase intentions, with Shahbandeh (2020) reporting that 61% of Generation Y, followed by Generation Z (56%), Generation X (55%), and Baby Boomers (46%), are willing to pay more for eco-friendly products. Lin and Chang (2012), however, highlighted an inherent discrepancy between consumer willingness to buy green and actual purchase behaviors.

## 2.6.4 PERCEIVED ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

Perceived environmental concern revolves around an individual's comprehension of facts, concepts, and relationships pertaining to the natural environment and ecosystems (Kaufmann, Panni, and Orphanidou, 2012). In contrast to the aforementioned perceived variables, perceived environmental concern delves into an individual's belief about the environment, encompassing their consistent evaluation, perception, and predisposition toward environmental considerations (Huang et al., 2014). Prior studies have explored the influence of consumers' environmental knowledge and consciousness on their green purchase intentions (Indriani, Rahayu, and Hadiwidjojo, 2019; Ariffin et al. 2016). Ariffin et al. (2016) emphasized the significance of environmental consciousness and knowledge as influential factors positively impacting consumers' purchase intentions and attitudes towards green products. Similarly, Indriani, Rahayu, and Hadiwidjojo (2019) asserted that environmental knowledge plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' attitudes to green products and positively influence their green purchase intentions.

# 3. METHODS

## 3.1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

To extend TPB, a qualitative approach was employed to identify a broad range of different beliefs about organic or non-organic body wash and the primary factors that influenced consumers' choice to prioritize such products. An elicitation study using semi-structured interviews was used to explore the beliefs of consumers related to organic or non-organic body wash. The sampling frame employed young adults aged 18 to 25 in Malaysia who purchase organic and non-organic body wash, and self-identify as either green or conventional consumers based on the criteria outlined by Fonseca-Santos, Corrêa,

and Chorilli (2015). Research reported that Generation Z aged 18-25 years is the largest age group in Malaysia making up 29% of the population, with a monthly disposable income of USD\$ 327 million (MYR1.35 billion) (Tjiptono et al., 2020). Due to their purchasing power, numerous researchers often use the age group of 18-25 as their research subjects (Khalid, Adnan, and Mohamed 2023; Djafarova and Foots 2022). Therefore, this study targets consumers aged 18-25 as the primary population.

The first category of semi-structured interviews was conducted with green consumers. By the sixth interview, the researchers observed that informants were offering similar opinions, with no new themes or concepts emerging. A similar pattern was observed during the interviews with conventional consumers. As a result, a total of 12 informants were purposively selected for this study, with an equal number of green and traditional consumers, ensuring a well-balanced representation. A semi-structured guide based on Nimri, Patiar, and Jin (2020), as well as Han (2020) was used to probe questions regarding attitude (e.g. “What do you believe are the benefits of using organic and non-organic body wash?”), subjective norms (Who of the people important to you would support your decision when purchasing body wash?”) and perceived behavioral control (e.g. “What would motivate you to purchase a body wash in the future?”). The discussions were transcribed verbatim, and thematic analysis was performed.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 12 informants, aged between 18 and 25 years, were selected using a purposive sampling method. The interviews were conducted both offline and online, each lasting approximately between 30 and 45 minutes. Six informants identified themselves as green consumers, while the remaining six identified as conventional consumers.

##### 4.1 ATTITUDE TOWARDS PERCEIVED QUALITY

The study revealed that perceived quality exerts an influence on the consumers' attitude. This is consistent with the research of Echchad and Ghaith (2022) and Cheung, Lam, and Lau (2015), which highlights the impact of perceived quality, particularly in the realm of organic product purchases. However, it is less impactful than perceived performance and price. Among the 12 informants, only four identified themselves as quality-conscious consumers, while the

remaining eight were less concerned with product quality. The weaker influence of perceived quality can be attributed to the fact that body wash is a low-involvement product, meaning that consumers typically do not spend a lot of time or cognitive effort comparing product attributes. In such cases, functional benefits (perceived performance) and cost considerations (perceived price) take precedence over product quality, as they provide more tangible and immediate value to the consumer. Additionally, brand reputation strongly influences perceived quality, with four informants noting that trusted brands often outweigh objective product attributes. This is crucial for low-involvement products, where consumers rely on familiar brands as a quality proxy.

A majority (9 out of 12) of the informants believed that organic body wash has higher quality due to stricter production and ingredient sourcing processes. This finding reinforces the common consumer perception that organic products are inherently superior in terms of purity and safety. However, the dissenting views of two informants, who could not differentiate between the quality of organic and non-organic, suggest that not all consumers are fully convinced of organic products' superiority. This skepticism reflects an important challenge for organic brands: despite the premium placed on their manufacturing processes, some consumers may see the benefits as marginal or even inflated by marketing tactics, as informants argued that "compared to conventional one, the organic body wash maybe just a slight improvement, because company always try to boost their products." (P4) and "organic and non-organic body wash they are the same" (P12). Therefore, although perceived quality matters, in the context of low-involvement products, brand reputation, performance, and price are often more decisive. Organic brands should focus on trust-building and clear messaging to stand out in the market.

#### 4.2 ATTITUDE TOWARD PERCEIVED PERFORMANCE

The findings emphasize that perceived performance plays a critical role in shaping consumers' attitudes toward body wash. Key performance attributes such as cleaning ability, antibacterial properties, and fragrance were discussed by informants, highlighting the importance of body wash in providing long-lasting cleanliness and pleasant, non-chemical fragrances. Verbal phrases including "light" (P7, P5), "fresh" (P7, P5) and "non-chemical fragrances" (P8, P4)

were highlighted when informants described their preferences in choosing and evaluating an ideal body wash.

When evaluating performance, the discussions were diverse. Five informants favored non-organic body wash, attributing its superior performance to artificial ingredients that enhance cleaning efficacy and bacteria prevention. Notably, informants tended to associate green attributes as a sign of weak performance, which aligns with study that suggest green products are sometimes perceived as less effective in previous study (Usrey et al., 2020). In contrast, another five informants believed organic body wash performed better, emphasizing its milder nature, natural ingredients, and safety, especially due to the absence of parabens. Nonetheless, two informants argued that there is no discernible difference between organic and non-organic body wash, because “most of the body wash cleaning capability can be achieved easily, based on my personal experience” (P3) and “each body wash can complete their basic cleaning task since they are body wash” (P5).

These varying perceptions indicate that performance preferences are subjective, driven by individual priorities. Some consumers associate artificial ingredients with better efficacy, while others prioritize safety and skin benefits linked to natural ingredients. This suggests that marketing strategies should be tailored to target different consumer segments. Conventional body wash brands could emphasize functional performance such as antibacterial properties, whereas organic brands should highlight ingredient safety and health benefits. Overall, while perceived performance is a key factor in shaping consumer choices, its influence depends on how consumers define a well-performing product.

#### 4.3 ATTITUDE TOWARD PERCEIVED PRICE

Findings showed that price is the most influential factor in affecting informant attitudes toward both organic and non-organic body wash, supporting findings by Qomariah and Prabawani (2020) on price's impact on consumer intentions toward purchasing green products.

While all informants agreed on the premium pricing of organic products, their perspectives on the justification varied. Some perceived the higher price as reasonable considering the cost of natural ingredients and production processes involved in organic body wash. Other informants viewed the higher price as a result of greenwashing and marketing tactics rather than genuine production costs. As one informant (P8) indicated, “organic deserved higher

price, because company putting a lot of effort in their business strategy, and I feel it is acceptable for them to gain a higher profit... but I curious about the organic production, not really sure whether the product has really gone through a strict production and manufacturing process to warrant the higher price.” This skepticism mirrors the Szabo and Webster (2021) findings, which indicated that greenwashing practices erode consumer trust in organic claims.

Notably, two informants believed that higher price products are more trustworthy. Statements such as “usually I think the higher price product is trustworthy” (P5) reflect this belief. Conversely, four informants expressed skepticism, arguing that higher prices could simply reflect brand reputation rather than product quality. Some informants highlighted that “I believe that the organic product is better than conventional products, but most of the time, the advertising agency is just trying to brag about their products” (P12) and “higher price may only indicate the fame of the brand, not the product itself..... the product which is really good may have been cheaper because of the brand reputation or something the price is inflated.....the cheapest product may actually be better than the more expensive product” (P8).

This divergence in perception indicates that premium pricing does not guarantee a positive attitude toward a product. In fact, high priced may lead to distrust, especially when consumers suspect greenwashing or fail to perceive a significant difference between expensive and cheaper alternatives. The findings suggest that price sensitivity plays a critical role in shaping consumer attitudes, with skepticism toward high-priced organic products often resulting from perceived marketing strategies rather than actual product differences. Thus, organic brands need to clearly justify their pricing to avoid consumer doubt and maintain trust.

#### 4.4 ATTITUDE TOWARD PERCEIVED ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

The study’s findings challenge common assumptions about the relationship between environmental concern and consumer attitudes towards organic body wash. While previous research by Ariffin et al. (2016), as well as Indriani, Rahayu, and Hadiwidjojo (2019), suggested a stronger influence of environmental concern on purchasing behavior, this study reveals that environment concern has the least impact in shaping attitudes toward organic products in this category.

A closer look at the findings reveals that informants do not necessarily associate buying organic products with reducing environmental harm. This highlights a possible limitation in the way organic body washes are perceived as part of environmental solutions. The divergence between the study's findings and previous research could be explained by the specificity of the product category. For instance, organic body wash may be viewed more as a "symbolic choice" rather than a functional solution to environmental issues. Consumers could be prioritizing actions that they perceive as having a direct and observable environmental impact (e.g., cutting down on plastic waste or energy consumption) rather than purchasing organic personal care products, which might feel like a more abstract contribution to environmental sustainability.

Given that perceived environmental concern exhibits the least impact on consumer attitudes towards body wash, marketing efforts for organic products in this category need reconsideration. Companies that aim to encourage environmentally conscious purchasing must address several issues, such as reframing environmental benefits by quantifying them in terms that resonate with consumers (e.g. fewer chemical pollutants), integrating health, safety, and performance benefits into messaging to highlight how organic products align with personal well-being and lifestyle preferences, and improving distribution channels, or offering incentives for eco-friendly purchases (e.g., discounts for sustainable packaging).

#### 4.5 ATTITUDE AND PURCHASE INTENTION

Attitude was found to have the most significant impact on purchase intention in this study. Informants in this study heavily relied on their attitudes to decide what to buy, which aligns with previous research by Yadav and Pathak (2017), Zhang et al. (2019) and Zhuang et al. (2021). The evaluations of organic and non-organic body wash by informants were significantly influenced by their perceived quality, perceived performance, and perceived price. This result was not unanticipated, as most consumers will rely on their evaluation whether the item is likeable or unlikeable to determine their purchase behavior (Paul, Modi, and Patel 2016). Interestingly, both green and conventional consumers unanimously expressed their favorability toward organic body wash. However, a noteworthy phenomenon emerged during the buying stage: despite expressing a preference for organic body wash, many of both green and conventional consumers indicated a tendency to purchase non-organic body wash after

assessing the two options. This points to the well-documented “attitude-behavior gap” in environmental psychology (Park and Lin 2020), where individuals express concern for the environment but do not translate this concern into consistent eco-friendly behavior. This finding aligns with the result of Lin and Chang (2012), who stated that consumers with green product knowledge are not necessarily embodied in their purchasing behaviors, as consumers always face trade-off between environmentalism and product attributes. Hence, the findings may prove that price is an essential variable in influencing consumer attitude, thus affecting consumers’ purchase intentions toward organic or non-organic body wash.

#### 4.6 SUBJECTIVE NORMS AND PURCHASE INTENTION

The study elucidated the substantial influence of subjective norms on purchase intention, which supported by the studies of Zhang et al. (2019) and Roh, Seok, and Kim (2022). The findings discovered that four informants sourced information on organic products from their parents, primarily their mothers, while six of them turned to online platforms. Furthermore, two informants obtained information from both parents and social media. Despite these diverse information sources, a majority of informants acknowledged being significantly influenced by their parents’ advice, a trend consistent with Agil, Ahmad, and Azlan (2022), highlighting the influence of family and friends recommendations among Generation Z consumers before making purchases.

An intriguing contradiction however surfaced when examining the influence of others on purchase behavior. Despite acknowledging the influence of their parents on attitudes to organic or non-organic body wash, all informants asserted that their parents’ opinions did not directly affect their actual purchase decisions. The informants views are as follows:

“My mom is an organic lover.....My mom told me that organic has higher quality..... But I don’t rely on my mom’s opinion when I buy body wash.” (P2).

“My choice of body wash is not affected by my family.....My mother thinks I should use organic product...I was independent in deciding what to buy” (P8).

“Yes, I am affected by my parents, but I highly rely on the academic research information on advertisements to decide whether the brand is trustworthy or not” (P3).

“If I feel the brands that my family purchased before are good, then I will continue to purchase it . . . . But I rely on news (scandal) to decide what to buy” (P10).

Interestingly, a deviation was observed when the informants were asked whether someone important to them think they should purchase organic body wash instead of non-organic. Three out of 12 informants indicated that their parents hope informants use organic body wash, and those expectations have affected informants purchase behavior, making informants purchase based on the expectations of others. Moreover, 11 informants exhibited a tendency to purchase the same brand that their parents purchased previously, contradicting their earlier statements regarding the limited impact of parents’ advice. Majority of informants indicated that they would purchase the body wash that their family often used and purchased because they were accustomed to a particular body wash brand from an early age. Nonetheless, one informant indicated that they were not influenced by their family at all because body wash is merely a common product: “I will not follow what they buy before . . .it is just a body wash, I just randomly buy it” (P7).

This contradiction result may be attributed to their unconscious habitual purchase behavior and the impact of social influence. According to Putri (2020), habitual buying behavior is a consumer buying decision with a low level of consumer involvement. This means that consumers do not search for much information among the available brands and they do not perceive significant differences between the brands, which generally occurs when the item is frequently bought and does not cost much money. Hence, consumers tend to purchase the same brand repeatedly out of habit. Yet, if the particular brand is no longer available or consumers found a better deal from another competing brand, they are more likely to switch (Putri 2020). Subjective norms, therefore, play a significant role in influencing consumers’ purchase intentions, even when consumers may not consciously recognize this influence.

#### 4.7 PERCEIVED BEHAVIORAL CONTROL AND PURCHASE INTENTION

Perceived behavioral control was also found to have substantial impact on purchase intention, consistent with the findings of Wang, Tao, and Chu (2020) as well as Zhuang et al. (2021). Seven informants emphasized the pivotal role of ease of availability in their decision to purchase body wash, with a preference for retail outlets such as Watson, Guardian, and Aeon Wellness, while online platforms emerged as their second choice. They further indicated that they only buy based on availability in the store. This result is not surprising because most consumers may perceive risk when purchasing online, including delivery uncertainties and potential product discrepancies (Mokhtar et al., 2020). While five informants self-identified as online shopping enthusiasts, only one informant expressed a willingness to purchase body wash online, whereas the others considered it as their second choice: “if I cannot buy from outlet, then I will consider buying from online channel” (P6).

Additionally, some informants even asserted that they would choose not to purchase a particular body wash brand if it were unavailable in retail outlets, emphasizing the perceived difficulty associated with online purchases. The study underscores the importance for body wash brands to establish a presence in physical stores, facilitating easy access for consumers and subsequently influencing their purchase behavior. Therefore, consumers’ purchase intentions were greatly affected by perceived behavioral control to execute their purchase behavior.

### 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

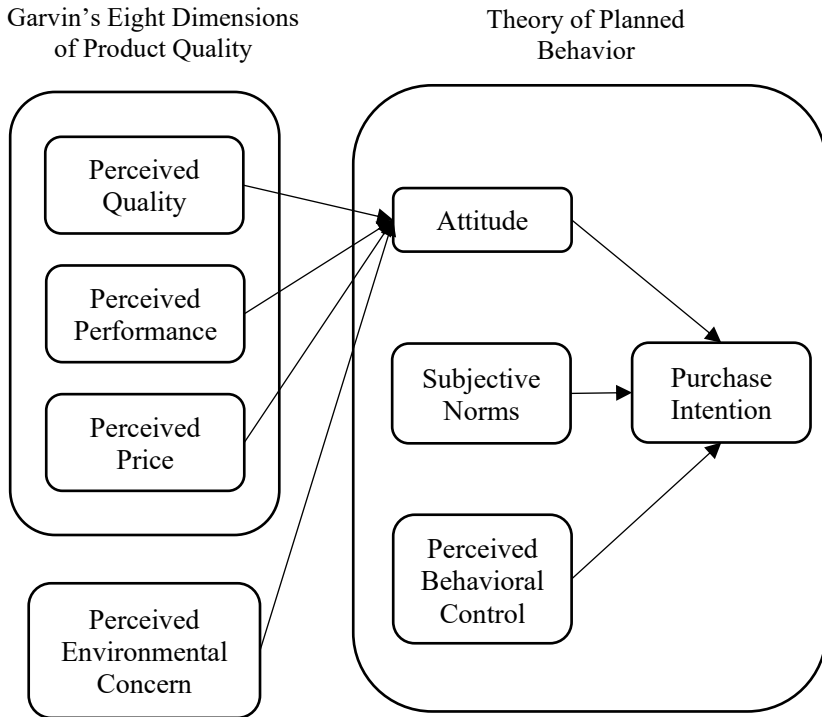
The study underscores the pivotal role of pricing in shaping consumers’ choices between organic and non-organic body wash. Consumers perceive high-priced body wash brands as potentially engaging in greenwashing, emphasizing the importance of appropriate pricing. Cleaning capabilities, antibacterial properties, and fragrance are key considerations for a good-performing body wash, outweighing the influence of ingredients. Perceived quality demonstrates a lesser impact on consumers’ attitudes compared to perceived performance and price, as most consumers are unable to discern quality disparities between organic and non-organic body wash. Despite informants’ self-identification as environmentally aware, perceived environmental

concern surprisingly exerts no influence on consumers' attitudes. Informants do not view purchasing organic products as a solution to reduce environmental issues. Hence, the study challenges the assumption that choosing organic products reflects environmentally conscious behavior.

This study introduces a new framework, combining the TPB and Garvin's Eight Dimensions of Product Quality, expanding the literature on consumer choices in the organic and non-organic personal care product domain (see the following Figure 1). The research contributes to the understanding of the green marketing trend and its impact on consumer choices. The study acknowledges the positive inclination of consumers toward organic products for health reasons but also highlights the challenge posed by greenwashing. It emphasizes the need for marketers to be cautious in their green marketing strategies to avoid eroding consumer trust. The findings provide practical implications for marketers and advertisers, specifically in avoiding greenwashing and tailoring advertising messages to address consumer concerns about quality, performance and price.

Future studies may investigate how product packaging influences consumer perceptions of organic and non-organic bath and shower products, assessing the adoption of sustainable and eco-friendly packaging significantly impacts purchase intentions and serves as a potential mitigating factor for greenwashing concerns. It is also necessary to further examine the preferences of Generation Z in Malaysia for sustainable practices, not only in personal care products but also across various aspects of their lives, providing a more holistic understanding of their eco-conscious lifestyle. There were some limitations in this study. First, this study focused on body wash products restricts generalizability to other personal care sectors such as cosmetics and skincare. Second, the exclusive concentration on Generation Z demographics prompts a call for further exploration across diverse personal care categories and demographic profiles, encompassing age, income, and regional variations. Third, acknowledging the qualitative nature of this study, it serves as a foundation for prospective quantitative investigations, offering the potential for objective data presentation through statistical analysis and numerical representation.

FIGURE 1  
Proposed Framework



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