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Determinants of Secondary School Teachers' Purchase Intention Towards Ready-To-Eat Products in Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia

*Mohd Izwan Mohd Zaki[1], Nur Amira Syasya Mohammad Samauludin[1], Siti Fatima Muhamad[1], Zatul Iffah Mohd Fuza[1], Abdullah Muhamed Yusoff[2]
[1]Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Terengganu Kampus Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia
[2]Faculty of Hospitality, Tourism and Wellness, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, City Campus, Pengkalan Chepa, Malaysia
*izwan@uitm.edu.my
Corresponding Author: Mohd Izwan Mohd Zaki

Abstract: The increasing demand for ready-to-eat products has become a significant trend, particularly among busy professionals like secondary school teachers in Dungun, who often face time constraints due to their professional commitments. While consumer behavior and purchase intentions in Malaysia have been widely studied, limited research specifically explores secondary school teachers' purchase intentions toward ready-to-eat products. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the factors, particularly the most significant ones, that impact secondary school teachers' purchase intentions for ready-to-eat products in Dungun. The study gathered 205 respondents by distributing a printed and online survey via WhatsApp to secondary school teachers in Dungun. Then, the data was analyzed using SmartPLS 4 to determine the frequency of demographic profiles, descriptive analyses, measurements, and structural models. This study reveals that the three independent variables- convenience, price and brand are significantly influenced by purchase intention, and brand is the most significant factor. Understanding the factors that influence school teachers to purchase their RTE items is crucial, as this knowledge will enable them to design high-quality RTE products.

Keywords: *Ready-To-Eat, Convenience, Brand, Price, Purchase Intention, Teachers*

1. Introduction

According to Panduan Malaysia (2020), teachers hold a crucial position in every school, not only for their teaching duties but also for their responsibility in addressing issues related to discipline, attendance, and student behavior. Antin and Kiflee (2018) mentioned that a teacher's workload is divided into two categories, which are academic tasks and non-academic tasks. The academic tasks include preparing daily teaching records, checking notebooks, classroom assessment, homework, and more. Non-academic tasks, such as recording students' attendance, planning curricular activities, and participating in school programs, are typically completed in the afternoon after the school session concludes (Ahmad, 2022). Moreover, teachers in Malaysia also face long working hours. This is because, according to the Malaysian School Governance (2021), teachers' working hours will be 8 to 10 hours, which start from 7:30 to 3:30 pm, while curriculum day will start from 7:30 to 5:30 pm. This statement indicates that teachers in Malaysia require assistance in stress management to effectively perform their duties and function more effectively (Kaur et al., 2022). In addition, women who work as teachers in this case must make many sacrifices, including giving up one of the most important family duties, which is cooking (Rathee, 2018). Hence, they need convenience food that does not require the next step of the cooking process. According to Bassura et al. (2020), people require goods and services to support and ease their hectic lives, particularly due to their extended work hours. Therefore, to simplify their meal preparation, they typically purchase ready-to-eat (RTE) meals from shops or restaurants and pack them to take home (Rathee et al., 2018).

RTE products are prepared and consumed with the least amount of effort, time, and cooking knowledge (Imtiyaz et al., 2022). According to Selvarathinam (2020), RTE refers to food products made from animals or plants that require freezing, cooking, and processing before direct consumption. Busy lifestyles have led to a growing popularity of instant or simple-to-prepare snacks and ready meals, particularly among working-class individuals, teenagers, hostel residents, and bachelors. (Mordor Intelligence, 2021). There is a wide range of RTE products available in the Malaysian market. Examples of domestically made convenience products include ready-to-eat meals, spiced fish and chicken, ethnic or traditional cuisine, instant powdered juice, and retort pouch products (Malaysian Investment Development Authority, 2019). In the global context, the market for

ready-to-eat food is predicted to reach a total value of USD 1,80,000 million in 2022 and is anticipated to grow rapidly, registering a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.7% and reaching USD 3,77,945.81 million by the year 2032 (Future Market Insight, 2022). Meanwhile, Baskaran et al. (2017) report that the ready-to-eat food market in Malaysia is expanding and currently contributes significantly to the country's food industry's GDP. In addition, MIDA (2019) identified ready-to-eat products as one of the three new investment opportunities in the country, alongside healthy food, functional food, and food ingredients. MIDA (2019) also highlighted that Malaysia's current population of 33.6 million has a purchasing power (per capita income) exceeding RM44,686, and lifestyle changes have increased the demand for convenience and healthy foods.

The importance of RTE food is growing in the modern food industry, and as a result, a lot of literature has been published about ready-to-eat products (Kaviyar, 2023; Mordor Intelligence, 2021; Meshram et al, 2020; Petal, 2019). The increasing demand for ready-to-eat products has become a significant trend, particularly among busy professionals like secondary school teachers in Dungun, who often face time constraints due to their professional commitments (Muhammad et al 2022). While consumer behavior and purchase intentions in Malaysia have been widely studied, limited research specifically explores secondary school teachers' purchase intentions toward ready-to-eat products. Factors such as perceived convenience, health considerations, price sensitivity, brand trust, and marketing strategies are likely to play a crucial role in influencing their purchasing decisions (Zainol et. al, 2017). Teachers may prioritize convenience and quick meal solutions while also considering the nutritional value and affordability of these products. However, existing studies on teachers' purchasing behaviors focus more on general online shopping rather than the specific context of ready-to-eat products. This gap highlights the need for targeted research to understand the unique factors driving this demographic's purchase intentions. For this reason, this study is being conducted to fill the research gap by investigating the most significant factors that influence purchase intention towards ready-to-eat products among secondary school teachers in Dungun. This study will undoubtedly contribute to valuable findings that could provide insights for marketers and product developers to better cater to the needs of secondary school teachers in Dungun.

2. Literature Review

School teachers make up one of Malaysia's most literate employment forces, with a total of 415,850 instructors as of 2020 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2020). This indicates a career prevalence of 2.6% within the country's 15.7 million labor force. Malaysia's teaching population is diversified, reflecting the country's multiethnic mix, which includes Malays, Chinese, Indians, and others. Mainly local teachers have a bachelor's degree in education, yet they still have to combine their teaching duties with basic administrative chores. Nonetheless, the growing demands of administrative tasks in schools have placed many teachers in demanding working environments (Nwoko et. al., 2023). Because of their busy work schedules and limited cooking time, most teachers opt for RTE products. Finding studies on RTE products among school teachers is a challenge in the field. Most RTE studies primarily focus on consumers. Recent research on consumer purchase intentions, particularly regarding ready-to-eat food products, continues to leverage the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) while incorporating additional factors such as brand perception, convenience, and price sensitivity (Sobaih et al, 2023). Brand trust significantly influences consumers' attitudes, as positive associations with a brand can enhance the likelihood of purchase intentions. Consumers often prefer brands that are perceived as reliable and of high quality, which aligns with their values and lifestyle choices (Meshram et al, 2020). Convenience is another critical factor; the TPB suggests that when consumers perceive ready-to-eat products as time-saving and easy to prepare, their intention to purchase increases. This is especially relevant for busy individuals who prioritize efficiency in meal preparation. Furthermore, price sensitivity plays a vital role in shaping purchase intentions; studies indicate that consumers of ready-to-eat foods tend to be less price-sensitive compared to those purchasing traditional food items, reflecting a willingness to pay more for the convenience and time savings these products offer (Nardi et. al., 2019). Thus, integrating these elements into the TPB framework provides a more comprehensive understanding of the factors driving purchase intentions in the ready-to-eat food market.

Based on the literature review, several factors influenced the choice of RTE products in previous studies. RTE refers to convenience food, which is typically a complete meal that has been prepared in advance commercially and needs only minimal additional preparation on the part of the consumer (Srinivasan & Kulkarni, 2019). Sen

et al. (2021) found that convenience indicates a consumer's preference for energy and time savings in food preparation, as it often requires a significant amount of time. Convenience allows consumers to save time on preparation, as it eliminates the need for additional ingredients and subsequent cooking (Horning et al., 2017). Additionally, a study by Rathee et al. (2018) revealed that women who work evaluate convenience as the most preferred product. Sen et al. (2021) clarified that the rise in household incomes and activity among women with longer workdays would encourage them to consume frozen food products. Hence, RTE food has been considered a unique product offering due to its perceived convenience benefits, which include the elimination or reduction of meal preparation stress, especially among urban people who lead hectic lifestyles (Azman et al., 2023). Agreeing with this statement, Basurra et al. (2020) explained that customers need goods since they work longer hours, spend more time in traffic, and want to make the most of their free time.

Besides convenience, brand image is another factor that refers to the beliefs and perceptions held by consumers, as reflected in the relationships that are formed in their memory (Mulyandi & Tjandra, 2023). According to Genoneva and Samukti (2020), a product's brand image represents how consumers view it generally and is shaped by information and previous experiences with it. Therefore, when consumers have experience with a particular brand, they will have the confidence to purchase or repurchase. Additionally, a branded food product can persuade people to be willing to pay, even if the product is priced at a premium. This is because, as Safeer et al. (2021) explain, consumers in this modern era demand authentic brands and are willing to pay for them. In addition, brands define consumer status. According to Shahid et al. (2017), consumers perceive owning a branded food product as a sign of their elevated status. Therefore, brand awareness can influence purchase intention (Janoskova & Kral, 2020).

Next, the perception of food prices varies depending on whether consumers are low- or high-income. Suvadarshini and Mishra (2021) assert that higher prices are perceived as a barrier to purchasing decisions, particularly for those with lower incomes. Price controls purchasing behavior by limiting consumers based on their income (Suvadarshini & Mishra, 2021). Therefore, price is the most crucial factor in determining whether or not to purchase a product (Zhao et al, 2021). Besides, according to Othman et al. (2022), prices inform customers about the product's quality level. Hence, it is apparent that price has a big impact on customer satisfaction, and service providers should focus on product pricing to attract customers, particularly price-sensitive customers (Othman et al., 2022). Other than that, Friani, et. al. (2018) revealed that after reaching the desired degree of customer satisfaction, price appropriateness may increase customer pleasure, allowing customers to continue to trust and make repeat purchases. Meanwhile, Kee et al. (2022) asserted that buyers typically seek low prices to maximize their purchasing power, while sellers, conversely, aim for high prices to generate substantial profits. Hence, according to Li et al. (2022), when consumer perceptions and attitudes align with their expectations, it can foster purchase intention, which is defined as the deliberate effort by consumers to select specific goods or services. Wong et al. (2018) elaborate on this by stating that consumer behavior—shaped by preferences, endorsements, and product features—plays a crucial role in purchasing decisions.

3. Research Methodology

This study is quantitative and uses primary data; the researchers distributed self-administered questionnaires to the targeted participants, who are secondary school teachers in Dungun. In terms of research design, this study has employed both descriptive and inferential statistics to provide a comprehensive analysis of the data, using descriptive statistics to summarize and characterize the sample's demographics and purchase intentions, while inferential statistics are utilized to draw conclusions and make generalizations about the broader population of secondary school teachers in Dungun based on the observed data (Jalolov, 2024). This study operates in a non-contrived setting, and the time horizon is cross-sectional. The reason for this is that researchers collect data from each participant only once. This gives researchers an advantage as it allows them to compare numerous variables at once. For this study, the unit of analysis is the individual, specifically secondary school teachers. This is because the study is focused on the factors that influence the intention to purchase RTE products among secondary school teachers in Dungun. Mumtaz et al. (2020) stated that choosing an appropriate sample size is essential to drawing rational conclusions from research findings. Based on data from My Schoolchildren (2020), there are 437 secondary school teachers in Dungun. Hence, the researchers determined the sample size using the Krejcie and Morgan Table (1970). Using the population size of N = 440

from the Krejcie and Morgan Table (1970), the study determined the sample size to be N = 205.

For data analysis, this study employs partial least squares (PLS) or structural equation modelling (SEM). SEM is a second-generation multivariate analysis method that allows researchers to estimate complex relationships between multiple dependent and independent variables while stimulating them at the same time (Hair et al., 2022). Many researchers have been applying this technique over the past decade, and its use is increasing. PLS-SEM makes it quicker for researchers to determine the way independent and dependent constructs are related to each other. In addition, PLS-SEM provides plenty of flexibility in handling different measurement model setups; for example, PLS-SEM can handle reflective and formative measurement methods without additional requirements and constraints (Hair et al., 2022).

4. Findings

Demographic results as shown in Table 1.0 show that the gender distribution for female respondents was higher than for male respondents. Among 205, the majority were female (67.8%, N=139) and the rest were male (32.2%, N=66). In terms of age, most respondents were in the age range of 41 to 50 years old (38.5%, N=79) and 31 to 40 years old (23.9%, N=49). Both the age group of 21–30 and those above 51 accounted for 18.5%, N = 38. The remainder was the range of ages below 20 years old (0.5%, N=1). For race, most respondents were Malay (95.1%, N=195), followed by Chinese (3.4%, N=7), Indian (1.0%, N=2), and the remainder were other races (0.5%, N=1). As for status, respondents with married status were the majority: 77.1% (N = 158), while respondents with single and divorced status were 19.0% (N = 39) and 3.9% (N = 8), respectively. Lastly, for income, most respondents had an income above RM4001 (65.4%, N=134), followed by RM3001-RM4000 (17.6%, N=36), RM2001-RM3000 (10.2%, N=21), RM1001-RM2000 (6.3%, N=13), and below RM1000 was the least (0.5%, N=1).

Table 1: Demographic Profile

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	67.8
	Male	32.2
Age	Below 20 years old	0.5
	21-30 years old	18.5
	31-40 years old	23.9
	41-50 years old	38.5
	Over 51 years old	18.5
Race	Malay	95.1
	Chinese	3.4
	Indian	1.0
	Others	0.5
Status	Single	19.0
	Married	77.1
	Divorced	3.9
Income	Below RM1000	0.5
	RM1001-RM2000	6.3
	RM2001-RM3000	10.2
	RM3001-RM4000	17.6
	Above RM4001	65.4

In terms of reliability and convergent validity, a composite reliability (CR) score exceeding 0.70 signifies that all the constructs exhibited strong internal reliability (Hair et al., 2017). Meanwhile, the average variance extracted (AVE) from the measurement model exceeded 0.50, with the lowest score of 0.502 (purchase intention) and the highest score of 0.622 (brand). This is an acceptable result since the acceptable value of average variance extracted (AVE) is at least 0.50, according to Hair et al. (2017).

Table 2: Reliability and Convergent Validity Analysis

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Brand	0.848	0.891	0.622
Convenience	0.790	0.857	0.551
Price	0.826	0.878	0.590
Purchase Intention	0.748	0.833	0.502

Table 3: Discriminant Validity HTMT

Variables	Brand	Convenience	Price	Purchase Intention
Brand				
Convenience	0.544			
Price	0.552	0.637		
Purchase Intention	0.904	0.720	0.699	

For discriminant validity purposes, the table above summarizes the HTMT analysis. According to Hair et al. (2017), an excellent discriminant validity test for the PLS-SEM reflective model is the HTMT analysis. Consequently, a few correlations achieved a score of less than 0.85, demonstrating concept discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2017). Thus, several indicators were implemented to assess the statistical significance of the path coefficient. The statistically significant path association has been identified at the 0.05 significance level. When the p-value is 0.05 or below, the result is considered significant. If it is greater than 0.05, the result is likely insignificant and should be ignored. Plus, t-values above 1.96 for a two-tailed test and 1.645 for a one-tailed test show that the relationship is important because those are the values needed for a significance level of 5% (± = 0.05).

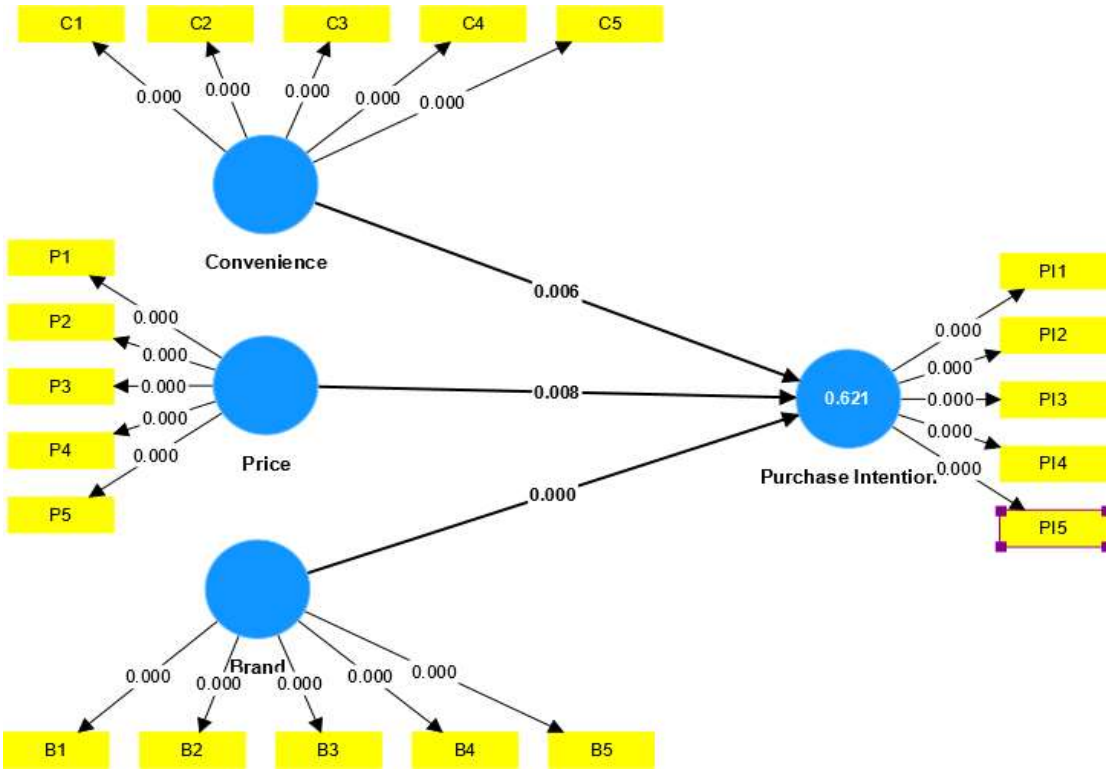


Table 4: Result Path Analysis

Path Analysis	Original (O)	STDEV	T statistic	P values
Brand -> Purchase Intention	0.532	0.527	0.062	0.000
Convenience -> Purchase Intention	0.227	0.237	0.083	0.006
Price -> Purchase Intention	0.193	0.190	0.073	0.008

Path Analysis	Result
Brand -> Purchase Intention	Supported
Convenience -> Purchase Intention	Supported
Price -> Purchase Intention	Supported

Based on the analysis, brand was found to be statistically significant towards purchase intention (B=0.532, p-value 0.000). When the brand increased by 1 standard deviation, customer purchase intention increased by 0.532. Therefore, the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between brand and purchase intention is supported. Furthermore, the results show a significant correlation between convenience and purchase intention (B=0.227, p-value 0.006). Thus, the next hypothesis, which is that there is a positive relationship between convenience and purchase intention, is supported. When convenience is increased by 1 standard deviation, customers' purchase intentions increase by 0.227. Moreover, the correlation between price and purchase intention was statistically significant (B=0.193, p-value 0.008). So, the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between price and purchase intention is supported. When the price is increased by 1 standard deviation, customers' purchase intentions increase by 0.193.

Discussion

Based on the analysis using Partial Least Squares (PLS), factors influencing secondary school teachers' purchase intention towards ready-to-eat products in Dungun were significant towards the three variables, which are convenience, price, and brand. The hypothesis, that there is a positive relationship between convenience and purchase intention, is supported where it shows the result (B = 0.227, p-value 0.006). This indicates convenience is the important factor that influences consumers' purchase intentions toward ready-to-eat products. Imtiyaz et al. (2022) found that due to time constraints resulting from long and unpredictable work hours, demanding work schedules, organizational responsibilities, and preferences for leisure activities, employed consumers tended to prefer convenience food products. According to Malaysian School Governance (2021), teachers in Malaysia also encounter extended working hours, typically ranging from 8 to 10 hours per day. As a result of these long working hours, teachers tend to opt for quick food products and reduce their cooking preparation time, as they lack the necessary time (Kaviyar, 2023). In addition, the demographic analysis reveals that 67.8% of the teachers in Dungun are women, while 32.2% are men. It indicates that most of the teachers in Dungun are women. According to Rathee et al. (2018), working women contribute to increasing the preference for ready-to-eat products because they are convenient and help them to serve quick meals for their families. Therefore, it is evident that in the modern era, ready-to-eat food products play a crucial role in satisfying the lifestyles of modern working women (Rathee et al., 2018). Hence, ready-to-eat products have altered people's lifestyles and given them a selection of high-quality, innovative convenient foods that save their time and energy.

Brand is also an important factor that influences consumers' purchases of ready-to-eat products. The structure model analysis revealed that the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between brand and purchase intention is supported since the result was B = 0.532, p-value = 0.000. According to Petal (2019), brands influence purchase intention by educating consumers about product information and forming associations in their minds that influence the purchasing process. However, Safeer et al. (2021) discovered that the perceived brand is critical in this modern era due to the consumer demand for authentic brands and willingness to pay. Therefore, based on the analysis, respondents stated that they were very concerned about the quality of the product and brand familiarity. Brand familiarity gives consumers trust and confidence to use the specific brand (Ushiama et al., 2021). In addition, unfamiliar food brands are encountered for the first time, and consumers are typically somewhat anxious to put the food in their mouths (Ushiama et al., 2021). Thus, strong brand identity can influence consumers to have purchase intentions.

Moreover, price is one of the factors that motivates and drives consumers toward ready-to-eat food products (Imtiyaz et al., 2022). Thus, the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between price and purchase intention is supported by the result (B=0.193, p-value 0.008). Imtiyaz et al. (2022) stated that competitive prices, promotional offers, and excellent value for money were the primary elements that positively influenced convenience food purchase intention and consumption. However, Suvadarshini and Mishra (2021) noted that the ability of a price to limit consumers based on their income led to its use in controlling purchasing behavior. Therefore, based on the analysis, the majority of teachers' income in Dungun is above RM 4001. This suggests that professional occupations like education do not face significant financial challenges when it comes to spending. According to the Department of Statistics in Malaysia (DOSM), an initial salary of RM4000 is considered a reasonably good salary, given that the basic minimum wage for teachers is RM2200 without allowance, and their salary is determined by their grade (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2023). Finally, the respondents found that the most significant factor influencing their intention to purchase ready-to-eat products was the brand. This is because consumers hold both positive and negative perceptions about the quality of products associated with a given brand. According to Jia et al. (2022), brand awareness influences a consumer's choice of a product, and they always think about it before making a purchase. Therefore, consumers are more likely to choose sustainable brands when purchasing ready-to-eat products.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to determine the attributes that influence secondary school teachers' purchasing intentions for ready-to-eat items in Dungun. The findings support all hypotheses, with brand being the most significant factor impacting purchase intention for ready-to-eat products among secondary school teachers in Dungun. This study has significant implications for both theoretical frameworks and practical applications. Theoretically, by integrating factors such as brand perception, convenience, and price sensitivity into the TPB framework, the study enhances our understanding of how these elements interact to influence purchase intentions specifically within the context of ready-to-eat foods. This nuanced approach allows for a more comprehensive model that can be applied to similar consumer behavior studies in emerging markets, highlighting the importance of cultural and contextual factors in shaping purchasing decisions. Practically, the findings from this study can inform marketing strategies targeted at secondary school teachers; a demographic that often faces time constraints due to their professional responsibilities. Understanding that convenience and brand trust significantly impact their purchasing decisions can guide food manufacturers and retailers in developing products that cater to these needs. Additionally, recognizing the role of price sensitivity can help businesses optimize pricing strategies to enhance attractiveness while maintaining profitability. By aligning product offerings with the specific preferences and behaviors of this consumer segment, marketers can effectively increase engagement and sales in the ready-to-eat food category, ultimately contributing to better market penetration in Dungun and similar regions. This study focused solely on secondary school teachers in Dungun; hence, the results may be limited to the teachers in Dungun only. For future research, researchers need to concentrate on other targeted demographics in Malaysia, as other variables may influence purchase intention for ready-to-eat items.

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