

## The Decision-Making Journey of Buying Personal Care Product at Indonesia Supermarket: A Qualitative Study



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**ABSTRACT:** This study investigates the current purchasing behaviour of women regarding personal care products, using a decision journey methodology. It examines the impact of post-pandemic shopping shifts on XYZ Supermarket's sales, particularly in the personal care category, which experienced a 25% decrease from 2021 to 2023. Through qualitative analysis, including interviews with 16 regular supermarket shoppers, insights were gained into the diverse decision-making processes within this product category. The findings emphasize the necessity for tailored marketing approaches based on product attributes. Overall, this research sheds light on evolving consumer behaviour in personal care, offering valuable implications for strategic marketing in a post-pandemic retail landscape.

**KEYWORDS:** Decision Journey, Decision Rule, Hierarchies of Effect, Consumer Behaviour, Marketing Strategy

### I. INTRODUCTION

The retail industry encompasses the sale of goods and services to consumers for personal or household use (Tseng, 2023), with a focus on selling directly to end customers (Hagberg, Sundstorm, & Egels-Zanden, 2016). Within this industry, various business sectors exist, including department stores, specialty stores, convenience stores, superstores, retailer services, and supermarkets (Hameli, 2018). Supermarkets, which primarily sell food and beverage products followed by cleaning and personal care items, are among the most commonly patronized retail stores due to their offering of daily necessities (Databoks, 2022; Hameli, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted consumer purchasing behaviors, including shifts in shopping habits and store format preferences, as well as changes in consumption patterns (M.K., et al., 2021; S, A.N., A, & A, 2020; Gordon-Wilson, 2021). These changes have had a noticeable effect on the performance of retailers such as XYZ Supermarket in Cibubur, Indonesia. XYZ Supermarket experienced a decrease in sales beginning in 2021, with a 7% decline in 2022 and a further 12% decrease by December 2023, resulting in a substantial loss of revenue. Notably, sales of personal care products, one of the supermarket's dominant categories alongside grocery items, decreased by 25% during this period. Given this decline, this study focuses on analyzing the consumer behavior surrounding personal care product purchases to address the challenges faced by XYZ Supermarket in its post-pandemic economic recovery efforts.

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### A. Consumer Behaviour

Each person's consumer behaviour is unique. Every human being has unique behaviour, including decision-making behavior. Consumer behaviour can be influenced by a variety of aspects including psychology, sociology, anthropology, and economics, leading to the conclusion that consumer behavior is a combination of all the disciplines of science (Ariyani, Yusnitasari, Oswari, Kusumawati, & Mittal, 2019). The acts of individuals who are directly involved in efforts to purchase, use, and determine items and services, including the decision-making process that precedes and follows these actions, are referred to as consumer behaviour (Tjiptono, 2001). According to another definition, consumer behaviour is the study of how people, communities, and organizations select, buy, use, and dispose of goods, services, ideas, or experiences to meet their needs and preferences (Kotler & Keller, Marketing Management, 2016). Based on this overview, it is possible to conclude that consumer behaviour is a process in which each individual selects their perceptions of a product or service, as well as various other thoughts such as experiences, in order to meet all of their needs and desires

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## **B. Consumer Purchase Decision-Making**

The process of making a decision to purchase a product is the stages carried out before the purchase is made until the impact felt after consuming the product (Ferawati, 2019). Consumer purchase decision-making is a complex process that individuals go through when selecting whether or not to purchase a specific product or service. A variety of factors, including personal, psychological, social, and situational components, influence this process (Hawkins, Mothersbaugh, & Best, 2019). Consumer purchase decision-making involves several stages, starting with problem recognition and followed by information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase evaluation (Solomon, 2019). In the problem recognition phase, consumers identify their needs, which can be triggered by internal or external stimuli (Agrawal, 2006). Information search involves researching product details from various sources, including personal, commercial, public, and experimental (Kotler, 2017). During the evaluation of alternatives, consumers compare different products based on criteria such as quality, price, and features. The purchase decision stage sees consumers choosing a product based on their evaluation, either through planned or impulsive purchases (Kacen & Lee, 2002). Finally, post-purchase evaluation reflects consumers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the product, impacting future purchasing decisions and influencing others' choices.

## **C. Decision Rule**

Decision rules are guiding principles used by decision makers to select the most suitable option from multiple choices based on available information (Jiang, 2022). These rules provide structured methods for evaluating options, ensuring consistent assessment of criteria and considerations. Key decision rules include:

- **Conjunctive Rule**  
Ensures that a product meets all essential attributes while lacking undesirable characteristics, thus meeting minimum acceptability requirements (Hauser, 2014).
- **Lexicographic Rule**  
Ranks product aspects by importance and evaluates options based on performance in each aspect, prioritizing higher-ranking attributes (Hauser, 2014).
- **Heuristic Decision**  
Utilizes mental shortcuts to simplify decision-making processes, minimizing effort by relying on pre-existing knowledge or expert opinion (Pathak et al., 2022). Common heuristics include brand Loyalty Heuristic, which relies on purchasing familiar brands without comparing alternatives (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011). The other is Satisficing Heuristic, which selects the first acceptable option rather than seeking the optimal one (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011). The last example is Social Influence Heuristic, which makes decisions based on cues like popularity or recommendations from trusted individuals (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011).

## **III. RESEARCH METHOD**

The primary aim of this research is to understand the prevailing behaviours of consumers when purchasing personal care products at supermarkets. To achieve this, the study employs the decision journey model to delve into consumer behaviour, focusing specifically on the decision rules consumers follow when selecting personal care products and how these choices are influenced by the hierarchy of effects. Primary data is used to get data. Primary data is information gathered directly by the researcher for the aim of addressing the study subject at hand. It is data sourced by the researcher rather than data collected earlier by others (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

A qualitative research approach has been adopted, leveraging semi-structured interviews to gather data directly from consumers. Semi-structured interview enable interviewer to use some pre-determined questions or topic but not limited to that topic. Interviewer could ask more to get deeper understanding of the answer and could vary the question order, it balance the topic focus and flexibility (Adam, 2015). A total of 16 women, who regularly engage in monthly shopping at supermarkets, participated in these interviews. The interview questions were meticulously designed for each step of the decision journey until purchase decision. Loyalty is not involved due to objective is until purchase decision. This methodical approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that guide consumer decisions in the personal care segment, offering valuable insights into consumer preferences and behaviours.

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**Table 1. Interview Question**

No	Interview Question	Scope	Objective
1	What makes you aware that you need to buy basic food, snack and personal care product?	<b>Problem Recognition</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Internal Stimuli (Ex: Stock out)</li> <li>External Stimuli (Ex: Look at ads, look at content on social media, etc)</li> </ul>	To know what is the first trigger that makes people intended to buy basic food, snack and personal care product
2	Will you look for information before buying basic food, snack and personal care product?  If yes, where do you usually look for the information	<b>Information Search</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personal (Ex: Friends, Family)</li> <li>Commercial (Ex: Ads)</li> <li>Public Sources (Ex: Review on social media)</li> <li>Experimental (Ex: From experience)</li> </ul>	To know the main source of information that the customer used to compare the product they want to buy.
3.	When you find several alternatives, what will be your consideration in terms of the product price, place and promotion?	<b>Evaluation of Alternatives</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Product</li> <li>Price</li> <li>Place</li> <li>Promotion</li> </ul>	To know what is the most important attributes in comparing one product to another
4.	How will you eliminate the product which result in choosing one product that you will buy?	Decision Rule	To know how interviewee choose <u>product</u> <u>they</u> finally purchase
5.	Do you only buy products that have been planned previously, or you will buy more? (Not only in the plan list)	<b>Purchase Decision</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planned Purchase</li> <li>Impulsive Purchase</li> </ul>	To know whether they plan before shopping or not and whether they will stick to the plan or not while shopping

**Source:** Primary Data Processed, 2023

## IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### A. Result

The results of interviews conducted with 16 participants shed light on their decision journey from problem recognition to final purchase. Participants articulated various stages in their decision-making process, reflecting a nuanced approach influenced by individual preferences and situational factors. Initially, participants identified needs or desires, often triggered by internal or external stimuli. This initial recognition prompted them to embark on an information search, utilizing diverse sources such as personal experiences, recommendations from peers, and online research. As they gathered information, participants engaged in evaluating alternatives, weighing factors like quality, price, and brand reputation. This evaluative process was dynamic, with participants often revisiting earlier stages based on new information or changing preferences. Ultimately, participants reached a purchase decision, guided by a combination of rational considerations and emotional inclinations. The interviews revealed a complex interplay of cognitive and affective factors shaping participants' decision journeys, highlighting the multifaceted nature of consumer behavior in the purchasing process.

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Table 2. Interview Answer

No	Question	Scope	Answer
1	<b>Preliminary Question</b>	Where do you usually go to buy personal care product?	<p>Most of the <u>interviewees</u> answer:  <i>"At Supermarket"</i></p> <p>The other interviewees answer:  <i>"For personal care product, me (or with my daughter) will go to store <u>speciality</u> for personal care product such as <u>Sociolla</u>, <u>Guardian</u> or online store at <u>Shopee</u> and <u>Tiktok</u>"</i></p>
2	<b>Problem Recognition</b>	What makes you aware that you need to buy basic food, snack and personal care product?	<p>Most of the <u>interviewees</u> answer:  <i>"When the personal care product <u>are</u> about to run out, because we can't wait until it really run out, especially for product such as shampoo, soap, face wash, anything that important".</i></p> <p>Some of the <u>interviewees</u> answer:  <i>"When we see interesting personal care product, sometimes makes us want to buy one even though the stock at home is still available"</i></p>
3	<b>Information Search</b>	Will you look for information before buying basic food, snack and personal care product?	<p>Most of the interviewee answers:  <i>"No, because i have already known what product and the brand that i want to buy. For product that has certain benefit, such as hair fall shampoo or face wash for dry skin, I <u>have</u> several options that i want to buy, or just I brand that we would always buy. For product that don't give any certain benefit such as tissue, cotton bud, hand soap, I <u>also</u> just go to the one I usually buy"</i></p> <p>If yes, where do you usually look for the information</p> <p>Some of the interviewees answer:  <i>"If I <u>need</u> to buy new product or change product which i seek for the benefit for my or body, I would see the review first on social media about brand options that I might buy."</i></p> <p>The other interviewees answer:  <i>"I would also ask recommendation from my friend or family about the product recommendation because I believe they will give me honest review"</i></p>
4	<b>Evaluation of Alternatives</b>	When you find several alternatives, what will be your consideration in terms of the product price, place and promotion?	<p>Most of the <u>interviewees</u> answer:  <i>"For product that give me certain benefit, product definitely is what I consider the most. We can randomly choose because if it doesn't fit with our body condition, it will give bad result"</i></p> <p>Some of the <u>interviewees</u> answer:  <i>"Price could be the next consideration for the product that we seek for the benefit. Because if it's good, I will routinely buy it and I have to make sure my monthly budget not significantly increasing. For product that only for cleanliness function, I look at the price from several brands that I know to know which one is cheaper or has better promotion"</i></p>
5	<b>Purchase Decision</b>	<u>Decision Rule &amp; Hierarchy of Effect</u> How will you eliminate the product which result in choosing one product that you will buy?	<p>Most of the <u>interviewees</u> answer:  <i>"I will just choose the one that I know already fit me. I won't change brand easily because I'm afraid it will not suitable with my body condition (hair, skin, etc). If I can't find it, I will just go to other store or online shop"</i></p> <p>Some of the interviewees that is from generation Y add that:  <i>"For some of the product, I already buy at store that has <u>speciality</u> in personal care product such as <u>sociolla</u>, <u>guardian</u>, <u>KKV</u>, <u>shopee</u> or <u>Tiktok</u>"</i></p> <p>Some of the interviewees that is from generation X add that:  <i>"My daughter also <u>don't</u> buy many personal care product on supermarket anymore. For family member who need certain treatment, they sometimes not buy product from supermarket. Me who consider already old, would prefer to buy personal care product (any benefit) sold in Supermarket because it will easier for me to buy, but we also make sure that the product give us good benefit"</i></p>

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Some of the other [interviewees](#) answer:

*“If I need to buy new product on supermarket, and it’s a product that give me certain benefit such as shampoo, I will search the best brand that is known for that particular benefit. Then, I will look at the price to decide which one is worth the price”*

Some of the other [interviewees](#) answer:

*“If I need to buy new product on supermarket, it usually a product for cleanliness function. I will look at the brand that I’m familiar with and also affordable”*

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## Planned & Impulsive

Do you only buy products that have been planned previously, or you will buy more? (Not only in the plan list)

Most of the [interviewees](#) answer:

*“Mostly plan, because we can’t change product easily and we would just buy what has run out at home. I personal care product can be used for a month or more. So, we’ll just buy what has been planned at home.”*

Some of the [interviewees](#) answer:

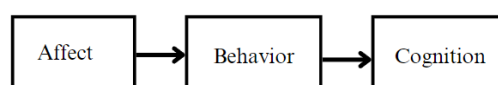
*“There’s time where we do the impulsive buying. But, it only for small product and it won’t harm our body such as face oil tissue, lip balm, sheet mask from famous brand”*

**Source:** Primary Data Processed, 2023

## B. Discussion

Based on the interview question and answer above, it can be concluded that:

- **Problem Recognition**  
Most of answers said that they will realize they need to buy personal care product because the stock are about to run (Internal Stimuli). While the other interviewees answers that they realize they need to buy because they find interesting personal care product on the internet such as social media (External Stimuli).
- **Information Search**  
From the interview result, turns out the personal care products are bought from 2 places, which are Supermarket where they visit for monthly shopping and store that has specialize in personal care product (Sociolla, Guardian, KKV, Shopee, Tiktok Shop). The explanation here will be for the personal care products bought at Supermarket. Most of the answers is experimental. Interviewees will buy products and brand they often buy, either because of the benefit that is suitable with their body or are used to buy that brands. Some of the answers is public source. When they want to change brand for any reason, they will look at review from social media. The other interviewees answers personal, which is asking friend that is believed to understand the product.
- **Evaluation of Alternatives**  
Most of the answers said that product is what they consider the most. For this case, especially product that give certain benefit to the body such as shampoo and face wash. Some of the answers consider the price as one of their consideration. For product that gives certain benefit, they have to make sure the price is worth the benefit given, because they will buy it in routine. The other reason is because for product that only give clean benefit, they will search for the most affordable one. The other answers from interviewees said that they consider the promotion as the main consideration for choosing the product. This only apply for product that give clean benefit (not special function such as hairfall for shampoo, etc). The one that has promotion will attract them the most
- **Purchase Decision**  
**Decision Rule & Hierarchy of Effect**  
For the decision rule, most of the answers is Brand Loyalty from heuristic decision rule. It’s because they already suitable with the product performance on their body (for product that gives specific benefit). Some of them prefer to change store if they couldn’t find the product they’re looking for. In decision of hierarchy, it considered as are experiential hierarchy.



**Figure 1. Experiential Hierarchy**

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The affect is the feeling from previous experience of using the product which result in a direct purchase without doing any further information search. Then, the most current knowledge and experience related about the product gained after using the product

Some of the answers is conjunctive rule, for product that only for cleanliness function, whether they just want to change because they're bored with the brand they usually use or the one they usually use are stock out, they will search product that they familiar with the brand and affordable. Those 2 attributes must be in the product they choose. Looking it from decision of hierarchy, it considered as low involvement Hierarchy.

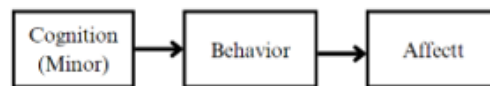


Figure 2. Low Involvement Hierarchy

The minor cognition is coming from simple assessment about the product attribute that result it buy the product without doing any comprehensive comparison between product or brief knowledge. The feeling about the product can be gained one the product has been used, to decide whether the product is good or not.

The other answers is luxicographic. This happens when they want to search product that is for certain benefit. They will look for the brand that is mostly known for that benefit. If they find several options, price will be used to compare one to another. Looking it from decision of hierarchy, it considered as Standard Learning Hierarchy.



Figure 3. Standard Learning Hierarchy

The cognition phase is when customer look for information about the best brand for certain benefit. Affect is when customer decide whether they like the product or not based on the assessment done in cognition phase. Once they're convinced with the product brand, purchase is conducted to try the product.

### CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion drawn from the research indicates a strong tendency towards brand loyalty as the predominant decision rule among consumers purchasing personal care products. This loyalty is primarily driven by their satisfaction with the product's performance, particularly for products that offer specific benefits. When their preferred products are unavailable, some consumers exhibit a willingness to switch stores. This behavior aligns with the experiential hierarchy of decision-making, where past experiences and satisfaction with a product lead directly to its repurchase without the need for further information search. In cases where the product is intended for basic cleanliness functions, a conjunctive decision rule is observed. Consumers tend to select products based on brand familiarity and affordability, indicating a low involvement hierarchy in decision-making. Their choices are made based on a simple assessment of the product's attributes, without extensive comparison between different options. The actual experience of using the product then informs their future purchasing decisions.

Additionally, a lexicographic decision rule is employed when consumers seek products for specific benefits. They tend to choose well-known brands for those benefits, comparing prices among available options, which reflects a standard learning hierarchy. The decision-making process starts with gathering information about the best brands for the desired benefit (cognition phase), followed by assessing whether they like the product (affect phase), and culminating in the purchase to try the product. This comprehensive analysis reveals varied decision-making patterns among consumers in the personal care product category, highlighting the influence of brand loyalty, product attributes, and specific benefits on their purchasing behavior. Based on several conclusion above, there are several recommendation for XYZ Supermarket:

- Stock a Variety of Trusted Brands: Given the strong inclination towards brand loyalty, especially for products offering specific benefits, supermarkets should ensure a consistent supply of popular and trusted brands. This will cater to the loyalty-driven segment of consumers and discourage them from switching stores due to unavailability.
- Focus on Product Performance and Quality: As consumer satisfaction with product performance drives loyalty, supermarkets should prioritize stocking high-quality personal care products. It's important to collaborate with suppliers known for their product efficacy, particularly those that offer unique benefits.

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- Effective In-Store and Online Communication: To cater to consumers employing a lexicographic decision rule, supermarkets should provide clear and accessible information about the benefits of different brands. This could include in-store displays, informative signage, and detailed product descriptions on online platforms.
- Market Research and Trend Analysis: Continuously monitor market trends and consumer behavior to stay ahead of changing preferences. This can involve regularly updating product ranges to include emerging brands or products with new benefits as identified by market research.

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