

The Role and Importance of Online Advertising in Shaping Malaysian Consumer Behaviour During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Online advertisements influence consumer decisions to purchase and use the knowledge and attitudes toward marketing. Internet advertising has become a key determinant in influencing consumer behaviour. This study examines the paradigm shift on Malaysian consumers' behaviours in relation to online purchases during the Covid-19 pandemic. Very limited research has been conducted on online advertising on consumer behaviour during a pandemic crisis because it can vary and have a complex trend. Prior studies in this area often centered on online advertisements' effect on consumer spending patterns. The aim of this study, based on literature reviews carried out on impact of internet advertising on consumer spending is also to introduce a new conceptual framework to the existing theory of consumer behavioural changes and the impact of COVID-19 pandemic that has become the stimulus to change the consumers' behaviour. This study employed Theory of Planned Behaviour as an underpinning theory to explain consumer behaviour during this pandemic. The study showed mass and social media inputs were influential in assessing the severity of the crisis and thereby impacting the shopping experience.

Keywords: Online advertising, internet, consumer behaviour, pandemic, Theory of Planned Behavior.

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction

The Internet has become a popular advertising platform with the rapid advancement in the Information Technology industry. It possesses greater flexibility and control over the advertising materials. The nature of information in online advertisements influences consumer decisions to purchase and use the knowledge and attitudes toward marketing. Whether it is information search, communication, entertainment, or shopping, the internet serves as an effective one stop channel in fulfilling consumers' needs. Online advertisements today have become a great potential in increasing customer's purchase intention with more access in gaining information on products and services that are featured. With the increasing development in technology, advertisers are shifting away from traditional advertisements from print ads, television ads, billboards, direct mails, door to door sales, and other non-digital advertising and marketing methods to internet advertising which has become a key determinant in influencing consumer behaviour.

Given the significant growth on internet advertising, this study examines the paradigm shift on Malaysian consumers' behaviours in relation to online purchases during the Covid-19 pandemic based on the available literature on consumers' behaviour throughout ordinary times and in times of a crisis. This study finds that the present literature on online consumer behaviour has been attracting the studies and interest of many academicians highlighting mainly on fundamental issues of marketing tools, e-marketing, and influencing the buying process in delivering attractive online presence to Internet users.

However, very limited research has been conducted on online advertising on consumer behaviour during a pandemic crisis because it can vary and have a complex trend. Generally, prior studies in this area often centred on online advertisements' effect on consumer spending patterns.

The rise in digital usage such as online learning, online shopping, and online payments has suddenly become a new normal with the Movement Control Order (MCO) in curtailing the spread of COVID-19. This has had a profound impact on Malaysian consumer habits and the economy. The pandemic and implementation of MCO lead to behavioural changes of consumers and changed the way businesses will operate in the future (Kodama, 2020).

The aim of this study is also to introduce a new conceptual framework to the existing theory of consumer behavioural changes and the impact of COVID-19 pandemic that has become the stimulus to change people behaviour.

This study employed Theory Planned Behaviour as an underpinning theory to explain consumer behaviour during this pandemic. The study showed that mass and social media inputs were influential in assessing the severity of the crisis and thereby impacting the shopping experience. Previous studies on behavioural studies during a pandemic had shown that a pandemic outbreak can cause major disruption on production, investment, and consumer expenditures (Jung et al., 2016). Therefore, understanding the strong effects of pandemics on purchasing behaviour of essential goods are crucial and would provide important implications and guidance for policy makers and practitioners aiming to counteract panic buying. Limited research has been explored on how pandemic outbreak affects individual shopping behaviours and consumption, especially in the Malaysian context.

1.2 Background to the study

The internet has grown tremendously to be a pivotal tool for communication, education and entertainment due to its unique interactivity and characteristics. In the business industry, the internet has transformed the way businesses are done (Ko et al., 2004). The emergence of the internet as an advertising medium allows retailers to offer a variety of products and services to consumers from around the world at any given point in time (Silk et al., 2001). With the rapid growth in the computer industry, companies have made the Internet a part of their advertising means to take advantage of the online technologies to advertise their products and services (Calisir, 2003). It is the most significant direct marketing channel for the global marketplace (Faber et al., 2004; Ko et al., 2004;)

The nature of information in online advertisements influences consumer decisions to purchase and use the knowledge and attitudes toward marketing. Online advertisements have given consumers more access in gaining information on products and services that are featured. Several factors contribute to consumers' attraction for online contents as they are the main consumers and contributors in deciding when, where, what, and how much commercial content they wish to view (Korgaonkar and Wolin, 2002). In searching for information online, consumers play an active role which influences their behaviour towards online advertisements and information (Smith, 2002).

The Internet has reduced the time and effort consumers spend on shopping because they have unlimited access to a wide range of products and services around the world (Ko et al., 2004). Golden (2011) argues that social media marketing uses pull techniques to attract customers on the availability and content of the product at first instance allowing customers to engage in them. Consumers' educational level has increased internet penetration in influencing the use of online advertising. As an efficient marketing communication tool, scholars are interested in understanding how to maximize the value of this communication platform (Rodgers and Thorson, 2000).

Over the last 20 years, the advertising industry has been going through some rapid changes in adopting new opportunities to increase the spectrum of digital advertisement. The rise of the Internet era has led to a divergence in the business industry and transformed the way businesses are done today. Businesses are spending more on online advertisement than ever before. The goal of advertisers is to make their ads more engaging. It's probably no surprise that the advertising industry has been at a tailspin for years as new technologies introduce shifts in consumer attention and alternative advertising platforms.

Consumers' attention is shifting away from traditional forms of media towards more digital forms. Trends in advertisement keep upgrading as newer technologies come to the fore making it more attractive to the consumers as it uses various ways to advertise ideas such as through different websites, social media, and pop-up advertising among others (Ankit, 2014).

CHAPTER 2

Theories/ Literature on Consumer Behaviour, Spending Patterns and Methodology

This study analyses recent scholarly research to provide valuable insights and evaluate key trends in consumer behaviour. Consumer behaviour is a complex area. Marketers try their best to gain knowledge of what influences consumers in their decision to purchase a product or service and their spending pattern. According to research on the consumer behaviour of internet users, internet and web advertising provided advertisers a way to make products globally recognised (Srivastava, 2012). Consumer purchasing behaviour tends to determine what exactly drives consumers when making buying decisions. According to John C. Mowen and Michael S. Minor (2001), consumer behaviour is the study of the exchange processes involved in acquiring, consuming and disposing of goods, services, experiences and ideas. Consumers' opinions vary according to circumstances; degree of severity, patterns of the shopping channels, whether online and offline have impact on consumer behaviour (Smith, 2009). It focuses on characteristics of individual consumers in identifying the behavioural elements of buying and a few theories have been postulated.

Behaviourists believe that human behaviours can change from stimulus and responses based on the theories developed by Thorndike, Pavlov and Skinner. Research on consumer behaviour attempts to understand the buyer decision-making process, purchasing motives and purchasing frequency (Schiffman, et al., 2012). Recent research in Bangalore has shown that 50% of their consumers spent time searching for information and purchasing products via online platforms (Shyam and Abirami, 2020). Many multi-dimensional approaches are being used to evaluate the factors that impact consumer behaviour such as the event, perception of risk, fear, and intent of behavioural changes. Thus, it can also be postulated that the purchasing behaviour will change during a pandemic like COVID-19.

Behavioural changes might include negative occurrences, panic changes to discretionary purchasing habits and investment decision making. Similar to the previous deadliest epidemics and pandemics, there are no broadly researched modern pandemics other than SARS, which was localised in its presentation. Research on COVID-19 will be formative for an understanding on human behaviour post pandemic and crisis research.

Sheth (2020) states that although consumer behaviour is habitual, it is contextual as well. The ad hoc natural disasters and pandemic like COVID-19 disrupts or changes consumer habits and behaviour. Although it is expected that habits or behaviours will return to normal, it is inevitable that some habits will vanish because the consumers have discovered an alternative that is more convenient, affordable, and accessible during the natural disaster period (Sheth, 2020). According to Sheth (2020), people might modify and generate new habits due to ad hoc natural disasters. For example, digital adoption such as online learning and online shopping. Modified habits are when the existing habits are modified by the new guidelines and regulations such as wearing face masks and keeping social distances.

Researchers became interested in exploring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to broaden the scope of consumer behaviour by adding a complementary empirical perspective to the current literature on how a pandemic affects purchasing behaviour, since it is a topic lacking in empirical research.

The aim of this study is to identify changes in Malaysian purchasing behaviour on essential household goods during COVID-19. The pandemic has caused consumers to have a high level of anxiety and panic that is shown in their shopping patterns. To understand this new buying pattern, various theories were examined. The literature review identified the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) as the most appropriate theory.

2.1 Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

TPB identifies three basic factors that affect an individual's intended behaviour including attitude, subject norms, and perceived behavioural control (Daellenbach, Parkinson, and Krisjanous, 2018). The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is used to explain the changes in consumer behaviour due to drastic changes that increase irrational buying with regards to fear. Consumers' decisions are influenced by social norms known as subjective norms in TPB (Ajzen, 1985).

Literature has defined shopping experience as an essential, enjoyable, personal, and social activity (Backstrom, 2011). Customer shopping experience emerges as a complex encounter between two following sets of factors: (1) spatial-material (including physical layouts, objects and atmospheric cues) and (2) social dynamics (including cultural, emotional, historical and cognitive aspects) (Ali, 2015). Shopping experience attributes which influence buying behaviour include enjoyment, convenience, and social interaction (Jarvenpaa and Todd, 1997). Past studies have confirmed that negative shopping experiences can lead to a stressful environment due to fears about daily consumption products, as well as purchasing patterns (Baker, Gentry, and Rittenburg, 2005). Yet, there is scarce literature on consumer experiences during a pandemic crisis.

Analysed previous studies on consumers buying behaviour have identified the following characteristics as influencing their purchasing patterns.

2.2 Lifestyle

Many researchers have focused on identifying the lifestyle of consumers to gain a holistic understanding of their buying process. Consumer lifestyle has become a very popular area in the decision-making process since it was introduced by Lazer (1963), referring to a characteristic mode of living. Consumers' reactions are favourable when goods and services in the market are aligned with patterns, value, and lifestyle. The standard of living has a significant impact on the consumers' mindset and its overall potential of purchasing (Cherian & Jacob, 2012). According to Hernández, Jiménez, and Martín (2010), lifestyle is based on the standard of living that explains the people's purchasing power.

Moreover, Young, Hwang, McDonald, and Oates (2010), presents a broad definition of lifestyle. According to them, lifestyle is based on people's thinking, beliefs, and attitude towards the society. These attitudes, mindsets, and beliefs put a significant impact on the decisions taken by people, whether these decisions are related to their personal life or professional life. Therefore, it is an important aspect for the marketing managers to analyse the lifestyle of the target consumer market, for successful product marketing that increases the likelihood of sales volumes.

2.3 Security

Security is one of the most essential internet shopping or e-commerce dimensions because e-shops are processing increasing amounts of information and data about their customers. The conveniences of online shopping are accompanied by security threats, such as identity theft and fraud (Tsiakis, 2012). Kim (2012) argues that internet shopping is characterised by risk and uncertainty for customers. Therefore, theories that explain human behaviour under conditions of risk and uncertainty can shed light on consumer behaviour in the context of Internet shopping. A lack of perceived security is a major reason why many potential consumers do not shop online; there are common perceptions of risks involved in transmitting sensitive information, such as credit card numbers, across the Internet (Chang and Chen, 2009). In view of the growing number of online purchases, Tsiakis (2012) states that consumers should understand online security and privacy risks. However, Shah et al. (2014) concluded that consumers' perceptions of overall security differ depending on their perceptions of specific confidentiality related factors, such as third-party seals or security/privacy statements.

2.4 Payment option

Previously, shopping in a store and paying in cash was a common method of commerce that today, shopping through the Internet and relying on electronic payment cards has become a distinctive feature of this era in a way that is - and radically - the behaviour of consumers around the world. Payment option is always the number one concern of individuals who are shopping online. One of the important drivers that contributed to the spread of the concept of payment through the Internet was coupled with electronic commerce, which has evolved and has become opportunities for consumers to obtain their needs without the need to move from one place to another. Therefore, consumers are content with sitting at home and requesting services, and goods through electronic payment and the use of various bank payment cards (Dakduk et al, 2017).

Mathras et al (2015) emphasized that there is a clear change in the shopping habits of individuals, with the spread of Smart and Internet-based mobile devices in all their features, which has led to the explosion of electronic commerce and the high level of electronic payment by individuals.

Consumers experience financial risk that some amount of money could be lost while purchasing or making a product work properly from an online purchase. Certain age groups are more concerned with their security and

privacy of their bank account information. Millennials are more likely to be less concerned than older generations who behave more skeptical in making online purchases. Previous research has revealed that one of the main concerns of consumers making purchases online is fear of payment method - credit card deception (Adnan, 2014; Abrar, Naveed, & Ramay, 2017; Saprikis, Chouliara, & Vlachopoulou, 2010). Payment option has raised a threat affecting consumer behaviour (Barnes, Bauer, Neumann, & Huber, 2007; Haider & Nasir, 2016). According to Bitner and Zeithaml (2003), financial risk often occurs in the first phase of online shopping; right after the customer makes an online order. The fears and dismay of the Corona pandemic led to changes in consumption patterns as the restrictions imposed on citizens since March 2020 obliged the conditions of movement and shopping in a limited geographical area. This prompted consumers to purchase their needs from the Internet using electronic payment methods such as credit and debit cards, which led to an increase in the sales of many stores that offered online shopping services during the first five months of 2020 by a very high rate (Jiang and Chen, 2016).

2.5 Panic Buying

Research conducted by Yuen et al. (2020), established that consumers exhibited panic when they purchase unusually large quantities of products and necessities in anticipation of, during, or after a disaster. Fear of the unknown is reflected in panic purchase behaviours as consumers channel their lack of knowledge about crisis into behaviours perceived as comforting, providing security, or to alleviate stress (Elmore 2017). As panic continues to grow, consumer reasoning is often outweighed by feelings of anxiety, rather than being made with reasonable cognitive conclusions (Loewenstein et al. 2001). During times of uncertainty, consumer behaviour theories demonstrate how individuals attempt to gain a sense of control through product acquisition and panic buying (Ballantine 2013; Yuen et al. 2020). Never has there been mass panic buying on an international scale as experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although research into panic buying has been minimal, the current pandemic provides a unique opportunity to study panic-buying behaviour and variation of its severity.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Since COVID-19 is a new pandemic, scarcity of theory related to the pandemic is expected. Methodologies used in this study are relevant literature research focusing on the impact of online advertising, consumer spending and behavioural changes, and presentation of panic buying arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. Literature reviews were utilised to understand the role of the internet in influencing altered patterns of consumer discretionary spending especially in technological advances, and how different events caused consumer behaviour to change.

CHAPTER 4

Factors contributing to the role and importance of internet advertising in consumer behaviour

Malaysia has entered a new era of globalisation in the 21st century. The growth of internet usage is encouraging some changes in the behaviour of consumers' purchasing process and it has become one of the most significant communication channels in the world (Casalã, Flaviã;n, & Guinalãu, 2007). According to Masoud (2013), the internet opened new windows for online shopping business (B2C) business-to-consumer where individuals benefit from using internet technology to purchase and sell products electronically.

Businesses using the Internet gained a new dimension of communication with the other businesses and organizations (Tekin, İnce, Etliođlu, Koyuncuođlu, & Tekin, 2018). Online advertising offered many opportunities to increase the purchasing behaviour proficiency and improve product material availability. It has enormous potential as it reduces the costs of product and service delivery and extends geographical boundaries in bringing buyers and sellers together.

Many different factors can influence the outcomes of purchasing decisions. Some of these factors are specific to the buying situation such as price, product, value, accessibility and convenience which influence consumers' behavioural intention. Consumer behaviour is an important and constant decision-making process of searching, purchasing, using, evaluating, and disposing of products and services (Valaskova et al., 2015). Everyone is influenced by different internal and external factors which form the consumer behaviour. Consumers are

considered the cornerstone of marketing and usually purchase products and services based on their “feel” or “think” process.

4.1 Price

One of the main significant factors for consumers in purchasing decisions and engagement with advertising is price. Price is the monetary payout of the consumer and is the cost of purchasing; it is important since pricing strategy has been implemented over the internet. Consumers pay deep attention and consideration on price when they decide to purchase the product. A study conducted by Munusamy and Hoo (2008), found that pricing strategy had a significant influence on customer motives and consumers’ buying decisions.

4.2 Product

Consumers are able to find all kinds of products which are only available online from all over the world. When consumers see an online advertisement, it attracts their attention and interest in that particular product. Consequently, a product's characteristic is attributed to its branding, labelling, service, and packaging which is essential at the initial stages. During this stage, a well-structured and attractive online advertisement of a product and service plays an important role in a consumer's purchase decision (Koo et al., 2008). Consumers also pay great attention to the prestige of a product and the degree of familiarity. Many consumers prefer to engage with products that require low price, risk, and purchase involvement. They prefer a reasonable price during their purchases. Therefore, it is important for businesses to set prices based on consumer affordability, expectation, and satisfaction received from products and services.

4.3 Convenience and timing saving

Online purchase has grown in popularity mainly because consumers find it very convenient and easy to shop at the comfort of their homes and offices. More consumers are forced to shop online to stay safe, they will inevitably habituate searching and buying products online. Online retailers accept orders twenty-four hours a day while consumers who wish to shop at traditional stores have to visit the store during normal business hours. Research states that 61 percent chose to shop online because consumers can shop after-hours, when the traditional stores are closed to avoid crowds and waiting lines (The Tech Faq, 2008). Consumers are no longer limited to products offered by local retailers because the vast majority of online retailers offer shipping to many different locations. This has attracted more consumers worldwide to continue to purchase online for non-health reasons such as convenience, time savings and wider product ranges. This change in the lifestyle of today's consumer is the demand of the hour with more delivery options, shifting more to value based purchasing, retailer strategy and communication.

CHAPTER 5

Effect of Online Advertising on Shaping Consumer Behaviour

Shift in consumer spending patterns pre- and post-pandemic

The deadly infectious disease called the novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) emerged from China bringing the whole world to its knees interrupting the country’s economy, digital technology, business travels, education, and other activities. The Covid-19 outbreak has quickly reverberated through every corner of the world—taking many lives and this is still ongoing till date. Various measures were taken around the world since the COVID-19 is not a normal crisis, to control the spread of disease which included complete and partial lockdowns. The Government of Malaysia also enforced a Movement Control Order (MCO) from March 18, 2020, to break the chain of Covid-19. According to Mehta (2020), most elements in the economy were intricately interrelated with public health measures and lockdown, which resulted in economic instabilities hinting towards change in market dynamics.

Prior to COVID-19, consumers who already liked browsing the Internet and doing almost everything online – online purchases, using virtual communications, working from home, and prefer social distancing, feel comfortable and secure with their behaviour. This means that COVID-19 does not have a significant impact that changes their behaviour.

5.1 Digital Transformation Post Pandemic

COVID-19 has accelerated digital transformation for both customers and businesses. Pre-pandemic transformations were mostly driven by customer-centric needs and a desire for more efficient and flexible processes, but the post-pandemic digital transformation journeys are different.

This study traces the process of internet advertising that has undergone during the period of Covid-19. Malaysians have a more intimate interaction with technology than ever before as a result of this pandemic. A survey conducted by Malaysia's Statistics Department found that in the first phase of the country's partial lockdown or Movement Control Order (MCO) with almost the entire population being homebound, greater consumption in the usage of internet advertising resulted from this (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2020). People were required by law to restrict their physical movement. In this regard consumer purchasing behaviour underwent significant changes. Among the changes included situations where the consumers were left with little or no choice in their direct purchases as they were replaced by online purchases. The shutdown of physical stores led consumers to rethink their shopping habits.

COVID-19 and the subsequent social distancing measures have propelled consumers to behave and think differently. Overnight, consumers have become more careful with how they spend their money, where they spend their money, and the platforms they use to make their daily purchases and transactions.

Economic initiatives were vital in kick-starting consumer spending to keep the wheels of the nation's economy spinning. According to PricewaterhouseCoopers (2020), Malaysia's GDP contracted by 17.1%, in the second quarter of 2020, the lowest growth in Malaysia since the fourth quarter of 1998 during the Asian Financial Crisis – an indication that consumer behaviour has changed significantly over the past few months. Before the outbreak, almost half of the respondents (46%) said that they were expecting to spend more in the next 12 months. Things took a different turn in the survey conducted after COVID-19 started as 18% of respondents reported a decrease in income and an increase in overall household bills (PwC, 2020).

Isolation has led people to embrace technology more than ever. The way people are spending their leisure time is also becoming more dependent on technology. This adaptation of technology is anticipated to continue post-Covid as well. Social media has increased the online purchasing behaviour therefore many businesses and consumers are engaged because it facilitates making optimal buying decisions (Alalwan, 2018; Alalwan et al., 2019; Baker Qureshi et al., 2019). Shaw (2020) found that food home deliveries increased when food chains allowed only take out options and there were strict punishments for social gathering at social events.

In view of the MCO physical restrictions consumers in general preferred to make purchases online. This resulted in shopping outlets having to focus their sales of products and services on the internet. These shopping took an aggressive way of online advertising via social media. There was a sudden and dramatic shift with more consumers trafficking towards digital channels. The profound impact of the pandemic on consumer shopping habits has increased the urgency for retailers to expand their digital presence.

The emphasis was on providing consumers with elaborate and detailed information which led consumers to adapt and be more familiar with internet usage, and switch over from traditional ways of direct purchases from outlets. In addition to pressures of business operational sustainability, retailers also had to deal with changes in consumption patterns as consumers gave more focus to staples, wellness, and technology products.

The pandemic is moving consumers online faster than consumer goods. It also shows how businesses are introducing long-lasting changes to consumer behaviour and digital adoption. People now order items over the internet from the convenience of their own home, which has given rise to the increased need for inventory management and computerized vending machines to accommodate larger orders. At present, the use of social media has increased because people can collect helpful information on Facebook, WhatsApp, and other social media platforms. There is limited literature available regarding how consumers' panic behaviour can be increased due to the advent and rise of social media platforms.

Studies suggest that the behaviour of consumers in Malaysia influences e-commerce demand. Customers' purchasing behaviour can be attributed to the lack of availability of products and services in stores, making customers depend on e-commerce platforms for their shopping. A survey by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020), found that average household spending fell from RM6,137 to RM2,813 (a drop of 54%). This can be attributed to the pandemic creating uncertainty about job security and income as well as a lack of options to spend disposable income.

E-commerce has been predominant during the COVID-19 pandemic, and retailers have put much effort into building, improving, and promoting their online stores. Some small retailers that did not manage online stores before the shutdown developed temporary solutions to sell their products online, e.g., by posting products on social media sites and by offering product pick-up or delivery services.

It was reported that Amazon needs to hire more warehouses and workers to speed up the increased deliveries of orders during this pandemic (Hamilton, 2020). Lazada also experienced a spike in bulk buying and large orders through its grocery service (Abdullah, 2020). With its ride-hailing business suffering, Grab redeployed more than 100,000 drivers in six markets to deliver food and essential supplies (IAIS, 2020). Grab added new offerings for at-home purchases by accelerating the launch of GrabMart, an on-demand delivery service that connects offline retailers to consumers, focusing on essential goods.

Shopping became a new experience. Entering a supermarket was only possible with a face mask. Purchasing behaviour was controlled with various standard operating procedures put in place. MySejahtera mobile application, temperature scanners, and hand sanitisers were set up in front of the entrance of shopping outlets and cash registers. Consumers had to scan the MySejahtera code from their mobile device, take temperature, and regularly disinfect their hands, before entering the outlet while ensuring a one-meter distance from each individual. Supermarkets were advised to mark the grounds to assist consumers to keep a distance of 2 meters and decided to have exclusive opening hours for those above 60 years old and people in risk groups.

CHAPTER 6

Managerial Implications

This research paper has examined the Malaysian consumer purchasing behaviour characteristics during the first phase of the MCO due to COVID-19. The second objective was to investigate the direct and indirect, or mediators' relationship between crisis magnitude to purchasing behaviour through shopping experience and fears (FoMO).

The results of a study by Ratnasingam et al. (2021) on the impact of online advertising emphasized that there is indeed a strong relationship between mass media and social media among consumers on the crisis magnitude of COVID-19 in Malaysia. Crisis magnitude and shopping experience had a negative relationship, and it was significant. A negative hypothesis relationship means that crisis magnitude does not influence shopping experience. This finding is similar to previous studies, whereby crisis magnitude may evoke fear and provoke negative perceptions of shopping experiences (Larson and Shin, 2018).

The concept of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) is relevant and significant in the context of this study, as shopping experience has a positive relationship to FoMO, and FoMO also significantly influenced purchasing behaviour of household essential goods during the first phase of MCO period in the battle to curb the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia. The origins of fear are predominately heightened by social media resulting in a chain effect of purchasing behaviour.

Previous studies on consumer behaviour during a crisis explored the relationships between variables, but in this current study the researchers have integrated TPB and perceived risk in the form of crisis magnitude. The implication of this study is that fear plays a more prominent role, and social media can elicit a high feeling of fear among consumers and subsequently alter their purchasing behaviour. It is essential for organisations and managers to utilise digital and social media platforms in a time of crisis, to attract consumers and further create an impact on their purchasing behaviour.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a critical impact on Malaysian consumer behaviours as a rise in uncertainty led to irregular and irrational consumer activity. One major impact driven by panic buying was the sudden increases in demand for particular products, causing price inflation due to shortages. Consumer behaviour during the COVID-19 period has demonstrated a shift in consumption of basic needs and non-durable items.

Analysis of online advertising surrounding consumer access to media websites suggests that mass-media attracted significant attention during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The increasing trend of the Internet usage by Malaysians before the pandemic might have contributed a lot in the acceptance and behavioural changes of Malaysian consumers. During the pandemic, despite consumers being tech-savvy by buying online, consumer decision making was further exacerbated by periods of government-enforced self-isolation for as well as broader

city- or country-wide periods of social distancing where people were largely restricted to their homes, which resulted in a tremendous increase in digital platforms. Hence, as regular consumer movements, capabilities, and purchases were restricted, they transformed their behaviour to adopt the new norm of embracing digital or online transformation. Organisational managers are recommended to take full advantage of their digital capabilities during such unprecedented times to remain competitive.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusions and Implications

According to the findings, social media advertisements have greatly influenced consumers' purchasing behaviour. Significant works of literature have examined consumers' purchasing behaviour. However, limitations arose when it came to the understanding of consumers' purchasing behaviour during a relatively new and an ongoing pandemic- Covid 19. This paper has attempted to fill the gaps via literature research, and by looking into the changes of the new norms amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The present study concluded that it is essential for organisations and managers to adapt to digital platforms in a time of crisis, to attract consumers and further create an impact on their purchasing behaviour. The study also helps us to understand the impact of online advertisement characteristics in shaping the consumer attitude towards products and services offered through online. There are other critical dimensions that the present study had focused on namely, Theory of Planned Behavior, and panic buying to analyse Malaysian consumers purchasing behaviour. In conclusion, this paper has explored the conceptual theories to provide a preliminary understanding of consumer behaviours, spending patterns, and decision-making, and how they relate to the current Coronavirus pandemic.

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