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# The Decision Factors in Online Food Delivery Services Selection amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

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**Abstract** – An infectious disease known as Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has caused a worldwide health disaster. This issue also significantly impacted the world economy, including Malaysia. The government encourages business operators to shift to online business services to control the spread of the COVID-19 virus. This has caused most businesses, especially the food industry, to change their strategy by operating their company on online platforms. This research investigated the decision factors in online food delivery service selection, specifically amidst the COVID-19 outbreak in Malaysia. To achieve the study's objective; descriptive analysis, reliability analysis, correlation analysis and multiple linear regression analysis were applied. Safety, time, convenience and price value were the four factors examined. The result discovered that safety, time and price value significantly influence the selection of online food delivery services amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia. Among those variables, time was the strongest explanatory factor. The findings of this study may assist the food distribution companies in Malaysia to improve and enhance their service quality to cater to various consumers' preferences.

**Keywords:** Safety, Time, Convenience, Price Value, Online Food Delivery Services, COVID-19.

## 1. Introduction

The spread of COVID-19 worldwide has badly impacted the world economy, including Malaysia. The Malaysian government enforced the Movement Control Order (MCO) on 18th March 2020 to curb the spread of COVID-19. The government had to take more precautions by implementing many regulations and rules that restrict businesses from operating in the usual way. Most small companies had to close down their business operations to prevent the virus's spread while complying with the SOPs provided by the government (Uthramaputhran et al., 2022). The lockdown announcement significantly impacted the restaurants and cafés around the country, with strict regulations prohibiting customers from dining in. Therefore, food industry operators have tried to understand how

to utilize online and digital alternatives to prevent economic losses. As a result, online food delivery services have experienced rapid growth since the MCO enforcement in Malaysia.

Malaysia has various food distribution companies that provide food delivery services online. The first food delivery company actively introduced in Malaysia is Food Panda (Siti Umairah & Nor Farhana, 2021). Besides that, Malaysia also has Grab Food, Honest Bee, Dah Makan, Delivery Eat, Running Man Delivery, Food Time, Mammam Delivery, and Tapau Food. The rapid growth of food distribution companies has brought improvements to lifestyles and society in online food delivery services. This would result in different customers' preferences in online food delivery purchases. A study has been done by Siti Umairah and Nor Farhana (2021) on the factors influencing students' selections towards online food delivery. However, their respondent only considered one subject or group: students. Moreover, their study did not cater to the trend of students' selection during the COVID-19 outbreak. Hence, this study aims to investigate the decision factors in online food delivery service selection, specifically amidst the COVID-19 outbreak in Malaysia. Furthermore, this study also examined the influence of safety, time, convenience and price value on the selection of online food delivery services amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1. Theory of Planned Behaviour*

This study employs Ajzen's (1985) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Ajzen was the one who initially proposed the improvement of the foresight capacity of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). The TPB is a socio-psychological model that claims a person's actual behaviour in performing a particular deed is precisely guided (Yazdanpanah et al., 2015). This theory uses diverse constructs that foretell the perceived behaviour control (Wall et al., 2021). The core idea behind TPB is that a person's behavioural intentions are the most accurate indicator of how they would behave in social settings. Hence, this theory is appropriate to apply in this study for the purpose of selection of online food delivery services.

### *2.2. Online Food Delivery Service*

Similar to many other industries, the food industry is currently affected by the systems' vast development to provide better services in terms of food selection, ordering and delivery (Siti Umairah & Nor Farhana, 2021). There are two types of online food delivery services which are platform-to-consumer delivery and delivery from the restaurant directly to the customer. Pigatto et al. (2017) defined online food delivery service as one of the business platforms that provides several services such as ordering, payment, and process monitoring services. However, this online food delivery service is not responsible for food preparation, such as food taste or quality. Meanwhile, Botta et al. (2016) stated that online food delivery services are web-based services where customers make their orders, and the food is delivered to them to their doorsteps. It is the mechanism where the food order is placed over the Internet and delivered at the designated location to the customer. Correa et al. (2019) added that an online food delivery service is a process that takes online orders from consumers on a system and passes those orders to a production unit of cafés or

restaurants, followed by delivery workers collecting the orders, and delivering them to the consumer's destination.

### 2.3. Safety

The Coronavirus has reorganized the economic environment, requiring significant consumers' modifications and developing new behaviour during lockdown and quarantine. Consumers were not encouraged to buy food and beverages at restaurants and cafes during the outbreak. This was due to the impact of an invisible COVID-19 virus, which had forced communities to stay home since it would compromise their safety. Online service purchasing helped the government to curb the spread of COVID-19 infection due to reduced human-to-human contact (Fam et al., 2020). Consumers were also asked to take safety measures such as avoiding personal contact by paying for food in advance electronically, sterilizing packages and bags, and washing their hands (Uthramaputhran et al., 2022). The online food delivery service has been classified by the Ministry of Transport as p-hailing and issued instructions to avert the spread of COVID-19 amidst the MCO. Nonetheless, they may be at significant risk of infection due to many consumers the online food delivery service riders meet daily (Norsida Ahmad, 2020). Hence, the first hypothesis is proposed as below:

*H1: Safety influences the selection of online food delivery services amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic.*

### 2.4. Time

Time is crucial in retaining and delighting consumers in the e-commerce philosophy (Zulkarnain, Ahasanul & Selim, 2015). Gupta (2019) stated that online food delivery service is designed for those who do not have time to go to restaurants. Siti Umairah and Nor Farhana (2021) also added that the online food delivery service is exemplary for those who do not have time to go to the restaurant. Chang, Cheung and Lai's (2005) findings indicated that consumers' time-saving function and time awareness are positively associated with using and accepting online services. Sultan and Uddin (2011) added that many consumers agree that online purchases take less time than direct shopping because they do not have to commute. Based on the discussion, the second hypothesis is formed as below:

*H2: Time influences the selection of online food delivery services amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic.*

### 2.5. Convenience

Initially, in the marketing theory, the idea of convenience entails product categorization. Convenient products save consumers' effort while purchasing and owning a product (Pham et al., 2018). In this study, convenience can be defined as a consumer having the capability to control the situations, which refers to easiness to use online food delivery services. Gupta (2019) said that anyone with a smartphone could order and receive food at their convenience, anytime and anywhere. Seiders et al. (2005) described convenience in the context of online food delivery service as the perceived time, value and effort necessary to make the online food delivery service work. Lee, Lee and Jeon (2017) suggested that the

convenience of online food ordering in E-Commerce contributes to consumer happiness and technology adoption. Thus, the third hypothesis is stated as below:

*H3: Convenience influences the selection of online food delivery services amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic.*

### 2.6. Price Value

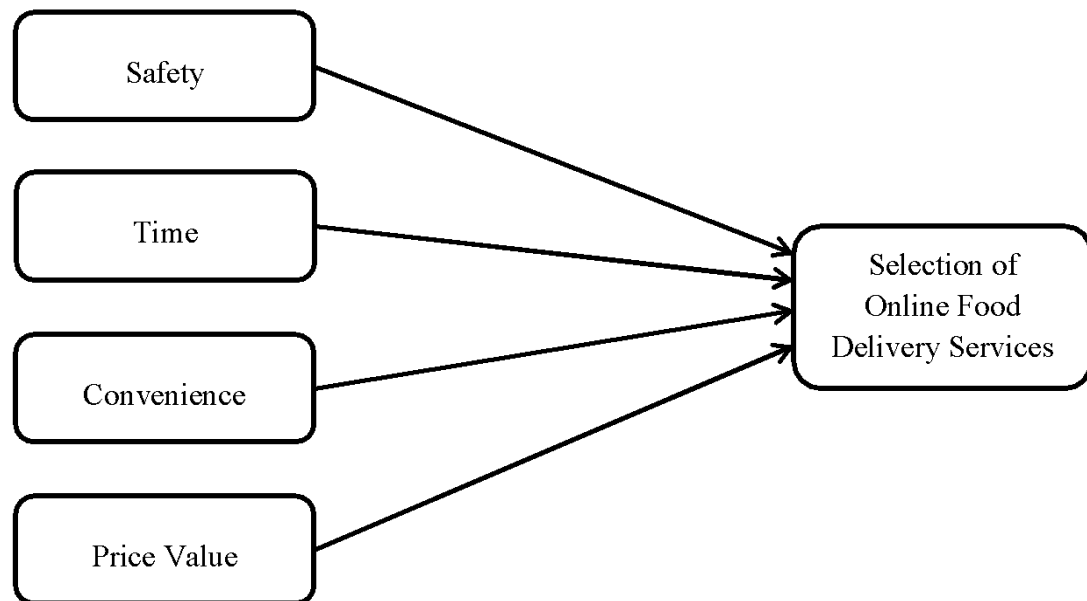
Dodds, Monroe and Grewal (1991) defined price value as the consumer's cognitive exchange between the perceived benefits of a food delivery application and its financial cost. In this study, price value can be defined as reducing price, special discounts, sales, promotions and loyalty points systems that may give consumers a lower food price. According to Gupta (2019), online food delivery service offers effort saving for customers. This has encouraged more users to order their favourite meals through online food delivery services. Research done by Hosseini et al. (2020) discovered that price during promotions positively affects impulsive purchasing. Customers will be attracted to any offering at a better price during promotions or sales. Hence customers will spend their money on those sales. Therefore, the final hypothesis is presented as follows:

*H4: Price value influences the selection of online food delivery services amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic.*

### 2.7. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 below presents the conceptual framework for the decision factors in online food delivery services selection amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic:

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**



## 3. Methodology of Study

### *3.1. Research Approach and Study Design*

A quantitative research approach was used to study the decision factors in online food delivery services selection amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia. This approach helps to determine the relationship between independent variables (safety, time, convenience and price value) and dependent variable (selection of online food delivery services). This approach was chosen based on the objectives of the study to analyse the results numerically.

### *3.2. Population and Sample Size*

Bougie and Sekaran (2019) defined population as the entire group of people, events, or things of interest that the researcher wishes to investigate. Bell, Bryman and Harley (2022) agreed that sampling was an appropriate and sufficient alternative if the research population was large in size. The study sample for this research was the customers who had experience using online food delivery services amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia. To the authors' knowledge, no reported number of customers who had experience using online food delivery services amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia. Hence, a non-probability convenience sampling was employed in this research. According to Hair et al. (1998), the standard sample size rule for the unknown population is at least five times more than the items to be analysed. Thus, this study needs at least 100 respondents (5 x 20 items). Nevertheless, 126 questionnaires were distributed instead of 100 questionnaires. Hence, 126 samples were obtained for this study. The questionnaires were distributed through an online Google Forms survey.

### *3.3. Research Instrument*

A questionnaire is the primary instrument used to collect data from the respondents. The questionnaires in this study were adopted from previous research that demonstrated high reliability and validity. It has three sections. Section A, the first section of the questionnaire comprises six questions about the respondents' demographic characteristics. On the other hand, section B comprises four parts; safety, time, convenience and price value. Finally, section C is related to the online food delivery service selection. The entire set of questionnaires in Sections B and C was measured using a 7-point Likert Scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

### *3.4. Procedure for Data Collection and Analysis*

The data obtained from the questionnaire was analysed by using the IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. Four types of analysis have been applied to accomplish the objectives of the study. The analyses are descriptive, reliability, correlation and multiple linear regression. Descriptive analysis was utilized to study the respondents' demographic profiles. It is a raw data transformation into a form that will make it easy to understand (Zikmund, 2003). In measuring the reliability analysis, the value of Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was calculated to identify the dependability, which then described the internal items' consistency or average correlation. Next, correlation analysis classifies the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables (Hair et al., 2019). To generate significant data for this study, Analysis of Multiple Linear Regression was applied

to forecast the value of a variable (dependent variable) based on the values of more than one variable (independent variables). This study's equation model of Multiple Linear Regression was as follows:

$$\text{Selection of Online Food Delivery Service during COVID - 19 Pandemic} = \hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_1 \text{Safety}$$

#### 4. Findings and Discussions

##### 4.1. Respondents' Demographic Profile

The detail respondents' demographic profile is presented in Table 1 below. Among the 126 respondents, 50.8% were male, and 49.2% were female. Furthermore, more than half of the respondents were 18 to 31 years old (68.2%), followed by 32 to 45 years old (27.0%), and 46 years old and above (4.8%). Additionally, the majority of the respondents were Malay (91.3%), while Chinese 4.0%, Indian 3.2%, and the remaining were from other races 1.5%. Moreover, most respondents' income levels were less than RM1500 (50.7%), followed by between RM1501 and RM3000 (42.9%), between RM3001 and RM4500 (4.8%) and only 1.6% earned more than RM4500. Meanwhile, most of the respondents prefer to use Food Panda (57.8%) as an online food delivery service, followed by Grab Food (28.9%), Tapau Food (4.9%), Honest Bee (3.4%), Dah Makan (2.0%), Delivery Eat (1.0%), Running Man Delivery (1.0%), Food Time (0.5%) and Mammam Delivery (0.5%). Finally, the highest frequency of using online food delivery service was once a month (53.2%), followed by two to four times per week (23.8%), once a week (15.1%) and more than four times per week (7.9%).

Table 1: Respondents' Profile

Demographic Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage %
<b>Gender</b>	Male	64	50.8
	Female	62	49.2
<b>Age</b>	18 to 31 years old	86	68.2
	32 to 45 years old	34	27.0
	46 years old and above	6	4.8
<b>Race</b>	Malay	115	91.3
	Chinese	5	4.0
	Indian	4	3.2
	Others	2	1.5
<b>Income Level</b>	Less than RM1500	64	50.7
	Between RM1501 and RM3000	54	42.9
	Between RM3001 and RM4500	6	4.8
	RM4500 and above	2	1.6
<b>Online food delivery service preference</b>	Food Panda	118	57.8
	Grab Food	59	28.9
	Honest Bee	7	3.4
	Dah Makan	4	2.0
	Delivery Eat	2	1.0

	Running Man Delivery	2	1.0
	Food Time	1	0.5
	Mammam Delivery	1	0.5
	Tapau Food	10	4.9
<b>Frequency using online food delivery service</b>	Once a month	67	53.2
	Once a week	19	15.1
	2 to 4 times per week	30	23.8
	More than four times per week	10	7.9

#### 4.2. Reliability Analysis

The Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient values are presented in Table 2 below. Those values represent the questionnaire's reliability. According to the table below, the value of Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for all variables were greater than 0.9, indicating excellent value.

Table 2: Analysis of Reliability

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Online Food Delivery Services Selection	5	0.955
Safety	5	0.964
Time	5	0.951
Convenience	5	0.959
Price Value	5	0.956

#### 4.3. Correlation Analysis

Table 3 below presents Pearson's Correlation Analysis. The p-value of 0.000 for safety, time, convenience and price value is less than the significant level of 0.01. This value indicates that there are significant relationships between dependent variable and independent variables. Meanwhile, Pearson's Correlation values were 0.792 (safety), 0.822 (time), 0.783 (convenience) and 0.759 (price value), meaning that the relationship is highly positive and significant.

Table 3: Analysis of Pearson's Correlation

		Online Food Delivery Service Selection
<b>Safety</b>	Pearson Correlation	0.792**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	126
<b>Time</b>	Pearson Correlation	0.822**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	126
<b>Convenience</b>	Pearson Correlation	0.783**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	126
<b>Price Value</b>	Pearson Correlation	0.759**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	126

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

#### 4.4. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression models were used to test the hypotheses in the subsequent analysis stage. The results of multiple linear regression analysis are presented in Tables 4 and 5.

*Table 4: Multiple Linear Regression Summary*

<b>R</b>	<b>R Square</b>	<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	<b>Std. error of the estimate</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
0.982 <sup>a</sup>	0.795	0.788	0.48179	20.148	0.000 <sup>b</sup>

*a. Predictors: (Constant), Safety, Time, Convenience and Price Value*

*b. Dependent Variable: Selection of online food delivery service*

Table 4 shows the result of the multiple regression coefficient (R) value which is 0.982. This value indicates safety, time, convenience and price value have a very strong positive relationship with the online food delivery service selection. The coefficient of determination (R Square) value is 0.795. It means that safety, time, convenience and price value explain 79.5% of the total variance in selecting online food delivery services. The remaining 20.5% were explained by other factors. From Table 4, the p-value is 0.000, which is lower than the significant level of 0.05. This means that one of the independent variables (safety, time, convenience and price value) can be used to model the online food delivery services selection.

*Table 5: Coefficients<sup>a</sup> Summary*

<b>Model</b>	<b>Unstandardized Coefficients</b>		<b>Standardized Coefficients</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Beta</b>		
(Constant)	1.426	0.475		3.809	0.006
Safety	0.347	0.085	0.296	4.084	0.000
Time	0.385	0.080	0.382	4.792	0.000
Convenience	-0.008	0.097	-0.007	-0.081	0.936
Price Value	0.342	0.061	0.331	5.580	0.000

*a. Dependent Variable: Selection of online food delivery service*

The coefficients summary of this study was presented in Table 5 above. The model only maintained the variables if the p-value was less than 0.05. Therefore, safety, time and price value significantly influence the selection of online food delivery services. However, convenience did not significantly influence the selection of online food delivery services. Based on the standardized beta coefficients' absolute value, the strongest explanatory variable to forecast the online food delivery services selection was time, followed by price value and safety. The equation model of Multiple Linear Regression for this study was as follows:

$$\text{Selection of Online Food Delivery Service during COVID - 19 Pandemic} = 1.426 + 0.347S$$



*Table 6: Hypotheses testing results summary*

	<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Result</b>
H1	Safety influences the selection of online food delivery services amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic.	Accepted
H2	Time influences the selection of online food delivery services amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic.	Accepted
H3	Convenience influences the selection of online food delivery services amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic.	Rejected
H4	Price value influences the selection of online food delivery services amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic.	Accepted

Table 6 above summarizes the hypotheses testing results examined in this study. Multiple analyses have been applied to all independent variables to check whether the results are aligned with the existing literature. The first hypothesis, safety influences the selection of online food delivery services supported by the research study by Fam et al. (2020). Moreover, the finding revealed that time also influences the online food delivery services selection, which aligned with the previous research by Siti Umairah and Nor Farhana (2021). However, the hypothesis that convenience has an influence on the selection of online food delivery services was rejected. Shamsi, Khan and Khan (2023) stated that although online services do not have a queue, the online checkout process for the completion of the purchase could be more demanding and problematic. Most consumers avert purchasing online services due to complicated payment methods. Finally, price value has an influence on the selection of online food delivery services, supporting the finding of Gupta (2019).

## **5. Conclusions**

There is no top secret that food industry businesses have been affected badly by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many food industries managed to stay afloat by shifting their businesses online following the enforcement of MCO. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the decision factors in online food delivery services selection amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia. In line with this, 126 respondents participated in this study through an online Google Forms survey. Descriptive, reliability, correlation and multiple linear regression analyses were used to accomplish the study's objective. Safety, time, convenience and price value were the factors to be considered. This study discovered that safety, time, and price value significantly influence the online food delivery services selection amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia. Among those factors, the strongest explanatory factor was time. Meanwhile, convenience did not significantly influences online food delivery services selection. As a final word, the objectives of this study were achieved. The findings of this study may assist the food distribution companies in Malaysia in enhancing and improving their services quality to cater to various consumers' preferences. Finally, this study will help other researchers who want to study this topic further.

## 6. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The number of respondents for this study is 126. To enhance the quality of the data collection, the number should be added for further research. Furthermore, this study only focused on the selection of online food delivery services, specifically amidst the COVID-19 outbreak in Malaysia. Hence, future research should be conducted focusing on the post-COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, this study is lack of the capability to generalise the results to other populations since non-probability convenience sampling was applied. Thus, to achieve generalisability, future research could use probability sampling. Finally, future research may be conducted on the same issues in other industries.

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