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Assessing the Online Purchasing Behavior during the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study in the Kingdom of Bahrain

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Abstract: The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted consumer habits of buying and shopping. It is anticipated that online purchasing transactions are increased during the pandemic, since the consumers are urged to stay home and practice new normal behavior. This study examines the online purchasing transactions in the Kingdom of Bahrain during the pandemic. Particularly, the study investigates the impacts of product price, product availability, social media, product details, and easiness toward online purchasing decision during Covid-19 pandemic. Using hand-collected data from 200 respondents, the study discovers that all variables have significant impacts toward online purchasing behavior in the Kingdom of Bahrain during the pandemic age.

Keywords: Online Purchasing, Customer Behavior, Covid-19, Pandemic, and Bahrain.

Article History

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Introduction

The Coronavirus infection disease (Covid-19) outbreak was declared an emergency worldwide in January 2020 by the World Health Organization (WHO). Later, Covid-19 was declared as a worldwide pandemic in March 2020. With the vast spread of the coronavirus, other daily norms changed with changes in consumer buying behavior. The governments all around the word are taking strict actions in imposing the precautions that could hinder the spread of the deadly virus. Standard operating procedures (SOP) changed worldwide with the compulsion to maintain social distancing, quarantine, wearing masks and using hand sanitizers, and so on. These impositions by the government in the affected countries also changed the consumption patterns.

In March 2020, a lockdown was implemented throughout the world, which leads to the temporary closure of the businesses. The uncertainty prevailed amongst the business about the future. Even though the businesses are being reopened, they have strict rules of maintaining the SOP's enforcing people to maintain social distancing, narrowing the amount of people allowed on the premises, and wearing masks. Many countries in the world went into lockdown, forcing many businesses to temporarily shut down. Although government has gradually relaxing restrictions, but the future of many businesses is still uncertain. Even businesses that are currently reopening their operations have restrictions enforcing social distancing, the wearing of masks, and limits on how many customers can enter a space at one time. Nevertheless, when traditional shopping becomes difficult, or may even be scary, people are increasingly inclined to shop online. The fact that consumers were already embracing amazon and other online retailers with open arms made this transition considerably easier.

Although the Bahrain's government has consistently addressed the nation with reminders not to panic and with the assurance that there are sufficient daily necessities, especially food, the various postings about long queues and empty shelves in supermarkets continued to circulate on social media causing a reaction among Bahraini consumers, particularly in the early outbreak of Covid-19.

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This further lead to the shift of the consumers from physically going to the market to online purchasing, which is contact-free. The consumers were still using online markets like Amazon, but it rose considerably during the pandemic. Since people were familiar with its use, this shift was easier. This trend is also happened in the Kingdom of Bahrain amid the pandemic. The government had launched website mall.bh in April 2020 to allow shops or companies in Bahrain to continue their services via online platform during the Covid-19 pandemic. This initiative taken by government has received overwhelmed responses from the public.

The online shopping provides wide range of products any time and deliver worldwide. To some extent, the Covid-19 pandemic has increased the number of online shopping transactions all around the world, including Bahrain. Previous studies on costumer behavior studies during a pandemic had shown that an epidemic or pandemic outbreak can cause major disruption on production, investment and consumer expenditures (Jung et al., 2016). Therefore, understanding the pattern of online shopping behavior during pandemic age and what factors that influence costumer to do online buying transactions is crucial and necessitated. Considering the very recent state of this research, it is anticipated that the study will provide important implications and guidance for policymakers, as well as practitioners to understand online consumer behavior during Covid-19 pandemic.

However, to the best of author knowledge, little research has investigated how pandemic outbreak affects individual shopping behaviors and online transactions. Previous studies have generally focused on the total burden of epidemics on populations based on aggregate data and on macroeconomic perspective (Gubler, 2002; Jung et al., 2016). Thus, pursuant to aforementioned background, this research aims to understand the online consumer purchasing behavior in Bahrain during a pandemic crisis such as Covid-19 and to investigate the factors that potentially affect customer decision in online transactions.

Literature Review

There is a plethora of studies that examine the phenomenon of online consumer behavior. One of the topics in this field is the role of social media. The social media has aroused a lot of interest among researcher and academicians. As use of social media is increasing at phenomenal rate and companies showing tendencies of allocating increasing budget to social media to communicate and reach customers. The study of social media has been of a great importance to all the stakeholders. Forbes and Vespoli (2013) investigate consumers who made a purchase of an item based on the recommendation of a peer or contact via social media results indicate that consumers are buying either very inexpensive, or very expensive items, and are doing so based on recommendations from people they would not consider "opinion influencers or leaders".

In addition, results indicate a slow shift from more traditional forms of social media like Facebook to quicker types of social media like Twitter. Numerous respondents indicated their desire for information now, not even a day or two old, and this research indicates a shift towards that form of social media which is consistent with general themes of today's social media. Leerapong and Mardjo (2013) examine the factors that influence their online purchase decision through online social network, particularly Facebook. The customers ranked in order of importance relative advantage, trust, perceived risk, compatibility as the factors that encouraged or discouraged them from purchasing product through Facebook. Sharma and Rehman (2012) find that positive or negative information about a product or a brand available on the social media has significant overall influence on consumers purchase behavior. The customers spread positive word of mouth through social media.

Pietro and Pantano (2012) investigate to what extent social networks, as Facebook, influence consumer's purchasing decision. They find that enjoyment is a key determinant of social networks usage as tool for supporting the purchasing decision. They also suggest that consumer's usefulness perception of recommendations and suggestions on products on Facebook, consumers' enjoyment in the use of the social network Facebook for information searching on products and brands, and perceived ease of use of the provided tools influence consumers 'attitude in using the system as supporting tool for their purchasing decision. They also suggest a casual positive relationship between attitude of customers towards social media and behavioral intention. Social media has also influenced consumer behavior from information acquisition to post-purchase behavior such as dissatisfaction statements or behaviors (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Moreover, Themba and Mulala (2012) investigate the extent to which students at the University of Botswana engage in brand-related electronic word of mouth (eWOM) via social media and the effects of such engagement on their purchase decisions. They report that the level of engagement in brandrelated eWOM via social media is relatively low and engaging in brand-related eWOM generally and specifically opinion seeking significantly and positively influence purchase decisions. Most of the studies conducted report that the social media influences purchase decision of the users. However, there is a need to study whether the impact is likely to vary across different stages. This will help marketer to set their communication goals on social media strategically and plan the budget allocation on social media better.

Sulaiman et al. (2007) conducted an empirical research to discuss the trust model for E-commerce in Pakistan. The study aimed to investigate the role that trusts plays in online shopping in the Pakistani market. This research study used the trust model. Questionnaires were distributed amongst a sample of 250 respondents. The questionnaire was divided into two categories, the first section dealt with the respondent's views about E-commerce dealings whereas the second section aimed to collect the demographic information of the sample. One of the variables observed was the perceived trust worthiness of online vendors. The findings indicated that people who shopped online had a lower level of trust towards internet retailers' privacy controls. This is because consumers' profiles were often used by other parties for marketing purposes and once the consumers found this out, they developed mistrust towards E-vendors and this prevented them to make online transactions again. The study concluded that the factors affecting trustworthiness towards E-vendors included perceived security, competence, privacy, integrity and the propensity to trust.

Research Methodology

Sample and Data Collection

The population is the total amount of data from which a particular (sample) is selected for research purposes. The current study is conducted in The Kingdom of Bahrain. Therefore, the study population consists of all persons who live in Bahrain regardless of their nationality. The researcher in the current study has used simple random sampling technique and structured questionnaires to get feedback. A total of 200 respondents were participated in this study. The questionnaire for this research was responded to using the google form software and distributing among G-mail and What's App. Next, the distribution of sample according to various categories are shown in Table 1. The results in Table 1 show that the majority of the sample were males (112) with a percentage of 56.0% and (88) females with a percentage of 44.0% of the sample.

Table 1. Distribution of the Sample According to Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	112	56.0%
Female	88	44.0%
Total	200	100%

Table 2. Distribution of the Sample According to Profession

Profession	Frequency	Percent	
Government	122	61.0%	
Private	43	21.5%	
Self-Business	15	7.5%	
Students	12	6.0%	
Others	8	4.0%	
Total	200	100	

The results in Table 2 show that the highest percentage (61.0%) of the study sample working in Government. About (21.5%) working in Private. The results also show that (7.5%) of the study sample working in Self-Business.

Empirical Method

In order to achieve the objectives and to answer the research questions, the study will conduct a quantitative research method. Quantitative methods emphasize objective measurements and the statistical and numerical analysis of data collected through questionnaire surveys and statistical data using computational techniques such as regression analysis. The research instruments will be composed mainly of survey questionnaires and modified Likert scales.

These statistical tests will be conducted using the SPSS statistical software, which is a specialized software that facilitates the analysis of any research findings. This research will also use Pearson's correlation and linear regression. Linear regression is a linear approach to modelling the relationship between a scalar response (or dependent variable) and one or more explanatory variables (or independent variables). The case of one explanatory variable is called a simple linear regression. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) is used to assess online purchasing behavior during the Covid-19 pandemic when the respondents were grouped according to gender, age, educational level and income.

Findings and Analysis

Descriptive Results

Question: What are the possible sources of your online shopping?

The results in Table 3 show that the highest percentage of the sample said that the possible sources of your online shopping is "Social Media (FB, Instagram, WhatsApp)" with a percentage of (40.1%) of the study sample, whereas (31.0%) of the sample said that the possible sources of your online shopping is "Family/Friends" and (10.2%) of the sample said that the possible sources of your online shopping is "TV Advertisement". Also (9.1%) of the sample said that the possible source of your online shopping is "Website Advertisement".

Question: What are your reasons for choosing online shopping during the pandemic?

The results in Table 4 show that (64) respondents think that the reasons for choosing online shopping during the pandemic is "Safety" which represents (34.2%) of the study sample. The results also show that (45) respondents of the study sample think that the reasons for choosing online shopping during the pandemic is "Saves time/efficiency" which represents (24.1%) of the study sample and (41) respondents think that the reasons for choosing online shopping during the pandemic is "Comfortable/Easiness" which represents (21.9%) of the study sample.

Table 3. Frequencies and Percentages of the Sample Responses about the Possible Sources of Your Online Shopping

Number	Response	Frequency	Percentage	
1	Family / Friends	58	31.0%	
2	TV Advertisement	19	10.2%	
3	Website Advertisement	17	9.1%	
4	Social Media (FB, Instagram,	75	40.1%	
	WhatsApp)			
5	Others	18	9.6%	
	Total	187	100%	

Table 4. Frequencies and Percentages of the Sample Responses about the Reasons for Choosing Online Shopping during the Pandemic.

Number	Response	Frequency	Percentage	
1	Saves time/efficiency	45	24.1%	
2	Safety	64	34.2%	
3	Product comparison	27	14.4%	
4	Comfortable/Easiness	41	21.9%	
5	Others	10	5.3%	
	Total	187	100%	

Table 5. Frequencies and Percentages of the Sample Responses about the Preference Products/Services for Choosing Online Shopping during the Pandemic.

Number	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	Apparels	83	44.4%
2	Healthcare/Pharmaceuticals	21	11.2%
3	Electronic / Gadgets	24	12.8%
4	Foods & Beverages	33	17.6%
5	Books	7	3.7%
6	Others	19	10.2%
	Total	187	100%

Table 6. Frequencies and Percentages of the Sample Responses About The Preferred Mode Of Payment For Online Shopping During The Pandemic

Number	Response Frequency		Percentage	
1	Cash on Delivery (COD)	24	12.8%	
2	Benefit Pay	40	21.4%	
3	Debit Card	26	13.9%	
4	Credit Card	97	51.9%	
	Total	187	100%	

Question: What are your preference products/services for choosing online shopping during the pandemic?

The results in Table 5 show that the highest percentage of the sample said that the preference products/services for choosing online shopping during the pandemic is "Apparels" with a percentage of (44.4%) of the study sample, whereas (17.6%) of the sample said that the preference products/services for choosing online shopping during the pandemic is "Foods & Beverages" and (12.8%) of the sample said that the preference products/services for choosing online shopping during the pandemic is "Healthcare/Pharmaceuticals".

Question: What is your preferred mode of payment for online shopping during the pandemic?

The results in Table 6 show that the highest percentage of the sample said that the preferred mode of payment for online shopping during the pandemic is "Credit Card" with a percentage of (51.9%) of the study sample, whereas (21.4%) of the sample said that the preferred mode of payment for online shopping during the pandemic is "Benefit Pay" and (13.9%) of the sample said that the preferred mode of payment for online shopping during the pandemic is "Debit Card.

Multiple Linear Regression Results

H₁: Product price (PP) has a positive and significance influence toward online purchasing behavior during Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain.

Table 7. The Ability of the Product Price to Predict the Online Purchasing Behavior during Covid-19 Pandemic in Bahrain

Model	Un-standardize	ed Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	R		t	Sig.
	В	Std. Error	Beta	R	R Square	_	
(Constant)	2.573	0.22				11.684	0.001
Product price	0.416	0.056	0.481	0.481**	0.231	7.461	0.001

^{**} Significant in 0.01.

The results in Table 7 show that there are statistically significant positive relationships between the product price and the online purchasing behavior during Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain (R = 0.481, P = 0.01). Moreover, the results also show that the product price are able to statistically significant predict the online purchasing behavior during Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain. The product price are able

explain (23.1%) of the variance whereas the online purchasing behavior during Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain (R Square=0.231). Therefore, the hypothesis H₁ was accepted.

 H_2 : Product availability (PA) has a positive and significance influence toward online purchasing behavior during Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain.

Table 8. The Ability of the Product Availability to Predict the Online Purchasing Behavior during Covid-19 Pandemic in Bahrain.

Model	Un-standar	dized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	R		t	Sig.
	В	Std. Error	Beta	R	R Square		
(Constant)	1.866	0.247				7.543	0.001
Product availability	0.573	0.060	0.573	0.573**	0.328	9.501	0.001

^{**} Significant in 0.01.

The results in Table 8 shows that there are statistically significant positive relationships between the product availability and the online purchasing behavior during Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain (R = 0.573, P = 0.01). The results also shows that the product availability are able to statistically significant predict the online purchasing behavior during Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain. The product availability are able explain (32.8%) of the variance whereas the online purchasing behavior during Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain (R Square = 0.328). Therefore, the hypothesis H_2 was accepted.

H₃: Social media influence (SM) has a positive and significance influence toward online purchasing behavior during Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain.

Table 9. The Ability of the Social Media Influence to Predict the Online Purchasing Behavior during Covid-19 Pandemic in Bahrain

Model	Un-standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients R			t	Sig.
	В	Std. Error	Beta	R	R Square		
(Constant)	1.565	0.275				5.690	0.001
Social media influence	0.637	0.066	0.578	0.578**	0.334	9.632	0.001

^{**} Significant in 0.01.

The results in Table 9 shows that there are statistically significant positive relationships between the social media influence and the online purchasing behavior during Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain (R = 0.578, P = 0.01). The results in Table 9 also show that the social media influence are able to statistically significant predict the online purchasing behavior during Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain. The social media influence are able explain (33.4%) of the variance whereas the online purchasing behavior during Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain (R Square = 0.334). Therefore, the hypothesis H_3 was accepted.

H₄: Product details (PD) has a positive and significance influence toward online purchasing behavior during Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain.

Table 10. The Ability of the Product Details to Predict the Online Purchasing Behavior during Covid-19 Pandemic in Bahrain.

Model	Un-standa	rdized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	R	₹		Sig.
	В	Std. Error	Beta	R	R Square		
(Constant)	1.985	0.279				7.120	0.001
Product details	0.451	0.065	0.454	0.454**	0.207	6.902	0.001

^{**} Significant in 0.01.

The results in Table 10 show that there are statistically significant positive relationships between the product details and the online purchasing behavior during Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain (R = 0.454, P = 0.01). The results in Table 10 also shows that the product details are able to statistically significant predict the online purchasing behavior during Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain. The product details are able explain (20.7%) of the variance whereas the online purchasing behavior during Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain (R Square = 0.207). Therefore, the hypothesis H_4 was accepted.

H₅: Easiness & convenience (EC) has a positive and significance influence toward online purchasing behavior during Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain.

Table 11. The Ability Of The Easiness To Predict The Online Purchasing Behavior During Covid-19 Pandemic In Bahrain.

Model	Un-standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients R		t	Sig.	
	В	Std. Error	Beta	R	R Square		
(Constant)	0.981	0.209				4.687	0.001
Easiness	0.772	0.050	0.751	0.751**	0.564	15.479	0.001

^{**} Significant in 0.01.

The results in Table 11 shows that there are statistically significant positive relationships between the easiness and the online purchasing behavior during Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain (R = 0.751, P = 0.01). The results in Table 11 also show that the easiness are able to statistically significant predict the online purchasing behavior during Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain. The easiness are able explain (56.4%) of the variance whereas the online purchasing behavior during Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain (R Square = 0.564). Therefore, the hypothesis H_5 was accepted.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The current study found remarkable results can be summarized in the following points:

- 1. The highest percentage of the sample making online shopping transactions since Covid-19 outbreak, the highest percentage of the sample preferring online way of shopping transaction in the future. The results the highest percentage of the sample said that the possible sources of online shopping is social media. Most respondents think that the reasons for choosing online shopping during the pandemic is "safety" and second reasons for choosing online shopping during the pandemic is saves time/efficiency. The results showed that the highest percentage of the sample said that the preference products/services for choosing online shopping during the pandemic is "apparels", the highest percentage of the sample said that the preferred mode of payment for online shopping during the pandemic is "credit card, followed by benefit pay.
- 2. This study also found that there are statistically significant positive relationships between all variables (product price, product availability, social media influence, and easiness) and online purchasing behavior during Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain.

Recommendations

According to the study results and conclusions the study recommends the following to the policy makers:

- 1. Educating the public about consumer habits in buying and shopping, especially in light of the closure and social distancing caused by the spread Covid-19.
- 2. Familiarizing Bahraini community members with the safe sources of your online shopping.
- 3. Working on organizing online shopping transactions particularly through Social media platforms, by setting laws and instructions that control this process.

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