# Malaysian Young Consumers' Purchase Intention Through Social Media Platform During Global Pandemic

**Yeow JianAi[1], Cheah Chew Sze[1], Yeo Sook Fern[1], Cheang Yu Wan[1]**
[1]Faculty of Business, Multimedia University Melaka, Malaysia

## Abstract

Many accidents happened in the year 2020, such as bushfires, crashes, and the deathly pandemic of Covid-19. The year 2020 was undoubtedly going down in history as one of the worst years ever. Till now, in the year 2021, many countries are still under restriction control, and some countries are imposing a total lockdown. In June 2021, Malaysia was facing the third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic triggering a nationwide lockdown and limiting interstate travel. In July 2021, Malaysia's daily Covid-19 cases had exceeded more than 10,000 and brought up a total of 1 million cases, with a population of approximately 32-33 million. Many businesses were affected badly during the pandemic. Some big corporations were forced to shut down their productions, causing huge numbers of unemployment in the country due to layoff and contract termination. Some businesses have started to implement electronic business (e- business) and utilize social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram for advertisements to attract more buyers, especially young consumers. The purchasing power of youth consumers is relatively high in Malaysia, and this study aims to identify the causes of young consumer purchase intention using social media during the global pandemic. This study helps the local businesses to sustain their business adapt to the new norms. There are five main variables being tested in this study, and the variables were being validated using. The independent variables included in this study are perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, performance expectancy, interactivity, and intention to express empathy. Quantitative data analysis was done and concluded that perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and interactivity have a significant relationship with young consumer purchase intention using social media. Interestingly, performance expectancy and intention to express empathy have no significant relationship with young consumer purchase intention during the pandemic. This study helps to create awareness for the local businesses to focus on more interactive types of marketing, making the social media platform easy to use and providing more useful information to their customers.

**Keywords**: *social media; young consumer; purchase intention; global pandemic*

## INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 outbreaks once again hit Malaysia, and the spike of new infections cases started to trigger worry among the local businesses. According to a local newspaper dated 22nd June 2021, 30 per cent of retails in malls have been closed down during the third wave of the pandemic, and more than 300,000 workers lost their jobs. Many experts in the retails predicted that more prominent local and international retail brands will be closing down by the end of the year, and it affects more layoffs among the employees. The closure of international retails will significantly affect the countries' economic performance. Additionally, the retail supply chain will be deeply affected, causing problems in attaining the consumers' demand in the future. Many companies and retailers were facing serious financial losses during this period. Without giving up, some local companies started to act innovatively by having more promotions, engaging with online delivery, Livestream selling, and several other social media advertisements. At present, with the popularity of the Internet, 689.7 million people around the world use Instagram, and it represents 26.4% of social network users in 2018 (Chang, Hsu, Hsu, & Sung, 2019). Furthermore, in Malaysia, more than

27 million Facebook users in March 2021, and this figure accommodated more than 80% of Malaysia's total population. Therefore, this situation points out that the inspiration of mobile community networks is growing, especially during the pandemic and lockdown moment. According to Statista (2020), on average, Malaysians spend 9.17 hours on the internet and 3.01 hours on social media per day, especially the younger generation aged 16-29 years old. These young consumers are known as digital natives, and they are well-versed in buying online using any digital gadget or device (Lad et al., 2020). Based on Alalwan et al. (2017), firms could apply different marketing practices such as branding, customer relationship management, e-WOM, and advertising by using social media platforms to attract these young consumers. With that, most of the well-known retailers' brands or even local businesses have started to use social media platforms for their advertising of their products and services. According to Alalwan (2018), customers are more likely to interact with social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Google+, and Snapchat than physical stores. Furthermore, during this pandemic, consumers prefer home delivery and cashless payment to reduce physical contact. These platforms become a new place where businesses, entrepreneurs, citizens, and even governments can interact commercially with each other. To consider if a social network site (SNS) advertisement is effective or not, especially during the global pandemic season, a study on identifying the causes of young consumer intention to purchase is important as most of past literature reviews were carried out before the global pandemic.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

The term purchase intention acts as a conscious plan of an individual effort to buy a particular product or service (Weismueller, Harrigan, Wang & Soutar, 2020). Many young consumers that spend most of their time browsing online will eventually be attracted to the pop-up advertisement or the e- banner. The social media can track the consumer's browsing online history when they move from site to site after clicking a link. This will eventually create an intention among the youth to purchase via social media platforms, and local businesses or entrepreneurs need to take the opportunities to advertise their products or services. The trend of intention to purchase online has become a norm, especially during the global pandemic. According to Barreto (2013), there will be rapid growth in online advertising spending compared to traditional marketing. Many retailers or SMEs were forced to go online or shut down during the global pandemic. To sustain, the retailers or the SMEs must consider several new ways of marketing to attach the consumer, especially the millennials or the young consumers. Social media also provide opportunities for companies to interact, participate with potential consumers, build relationships with potential consumers and encourage intimacy with consumers (Mersey, Malthouse & Calder, 2010). Among all of the U.S internet users, the use of Facebook is about 70%, while Twitter and Instagram were 35% and 24%, respectively (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Lately, the growth of TikTok is also accumulating more than 1 billion users in the year 2020. The revenue that Facebook earns from advertising is high. According to Statista (2019), Facebook had 4 million active advertisers, and it earned about $17.4 billion from advertising in July, August, and September of 2019. For Instagram and Twitter, it predicts to generate $6.8 billion and $1.62 billion respectively by the end of 2020 through advertising revenue (Statista, 2019). These statistics prove that social media advertising is beneficial for those retails and SMEs.

In various research fields such as entrepreneurial behavior, health-related behavior, online purchase behavior, or ethical decision-making, the behavioral intention has been found to be a direct predictor of actual behavior (Rausch & Kopplin, 2021). Several factors had been studied

before the pandemic using a theoretical model from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), and also Interactive Advertising Model (IAM). Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) believes that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness represents the main factor that affects people's purchase intention via technology devices (Kim, Baek, Kim & Yoo, 2016). The model has always found that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are the biggest reasons for success (Pentina, Pullins & Wilkinson, 2014). With that, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness appear to be the most research variables for intention to purchase.

According to Assemi et al. (2018), perceived ease of use helps to improve a person's feeling more comfortable and easier in using a particular technology (Davis, 1989). It does not require high technical skill or knowledge in operating the devices. The technology acceptance model theoretically illustrates the impact of ease of use on personal intentions to continue using the technology over its influence on personal attitudes or satisfaction with the technology (Davis, 1989; Hsieh & Wang, 2007). Perceive ease of use is conducted as an independent variable in this research because it can provide an accurate outcome in this research. Clicking an advertisement from social media platform just requires a single step. The user will automatically direct to the chatbox or personal message with auto-reply from the business page or individual page. Furthermore, during this pandemic, Malaysia is under Movement Control Order (MCO), and customers are not able to purchase directly from the malls or retail shops. The only choice that is available is online purchase via websites and social media platforms. Lin & Kim (2016) mentioned that there is a positive correlation exist between perceived ease of use and consumer purchase intention, and therefore the first hypothesis is:

H1: There is a significant relationship between perceived ease of use and young consumer purchase intention through social media.

Many consumers feel and perceive that social media platform is useful communication channel, and it helps to connect them with others. During this pandemic, many people started to watch Livestream from social media platforms just to get awareness on new product launching, new product descriptions, and demonstrations. Therefore, the term perceived usefulness is also a factor that impacts young consumer purchase intention towards social media advertising. Perceived usefulness is an additional key indicator of a person's attitude and willingness to continue using social software technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Wolf & Seebauer, 2014). Davis (1989) stated that perceived usefulness indicates the degree to which the individual believes that using a specific technology can improve his/her expected routine or output. Based on the technology acceptance model (TAM), the perceived usefulness of technology touches an individual's intention to continue to use the item, and it will impact on person's attitude or level of satisfaction towards the technology. Therefore, perceived usefulness should include in this research, and for the second hypothesis, perceived usefulness of social media is a positive predictor of purchase intention toward a product, which with the result of $p<0.001$ in Lin & Kim's research (2016). Thus, the following hypothesis is conducted:

H2: There is a significant relationship between perceived usefulness and young consumer purchase intention through social media.

For performance expectancy, Chang et al. (2015) support the role of usefulness as a factor similar to performance expectancy on customer favorites such as intention and shared intention. According to Alalwan et al. (2017), in the online area, it is generally believed that if individuals think that the new system is more productive, beneficial, and can save their time and energy, they will be more involved and adopt the new system. Chang et al. (2015) stated that if people think targeted advertisement is more useful and valuable, they are more likely to be attracted. Hence, this research will investigate the relationship between performance expectancy and young consumer purchase intention towards social media advertising. From the literature review, Biemans et al. (2005) believe that performance expectancy is a strong forecaster of behavioral intention. According to Loureiro et al. (2018), performance expectancy has a significant indirect impact on consumer trust, which drives consumer purchase intention. As such, the following hypothesis is formed:

H3: There is a significant relationship between performance expectancy and young consumer purchase intention through social media.

Moreover, interactivity will also affect consumer purchase intention. Interactivity is one of the most serious and vital features related to online areas and social media platforms (Alalwan, 2018). Interactivity has greatly changed the nature of the communication route and the exchange of information among parties in the online area (Sundar et al., 2014). Some of the researchers discussed interactivity as a communication process between people, and some defined it as interaction with technical devices (Alalwan, 2018). According to Wang et al. (2013), Interactivity similarly plays a vital part in modeling customers' online buying behavior. According to Chen, Hsu & Lin (2010), customers are unlikely to trust the safety of the particular online shopping website if the target website is less interaction. It can be considered that the degree of interaction in social media advertising may affect customers' willingness to obtain products displayed in social media advertising. So, this research will examine whether there is a relationship between interactivity and young consumer purchase intention towards social media advertisement. According to Alalwan (2018), Interactivity has the highest value of purchase intention coefficient, since p<0.000. According to Jung et al. (2011), an advertisement with higher entertainment value, such as game ads, has positively influenced the purchase intention compared to lower entertainment value ads. Thus, the hypothesis is conducted:

H4: There is a significant relationship between interactivity and young consumer purchase intention through social media.

The last one is the intention to express empathy. According to (Escalas & Stern, 2003), when the user involuntarily merges with the emotions of others, empathy is generated from the user's perspective. Empathy is well-defined as the user's ability to perceive and cognize the feelings and personality of others who have been advertised on social networks and the ability to visualize others' thoughts or feelings about the advertisement (Lee & Hong, 2016). Hence, the relationship

between intention to express empathy and young consumer purchase intention towards social media advertising will be investigated in this research. According to Lee et al. (2016), the author stated that there is a positive relationship between intention to express empathy and purchase intention, which the result show p<0.001. Therefore, the final hypothesis had been formed:

H5: There is a significant relationship between intention to express empathy and young consumer purchase intention through social media.
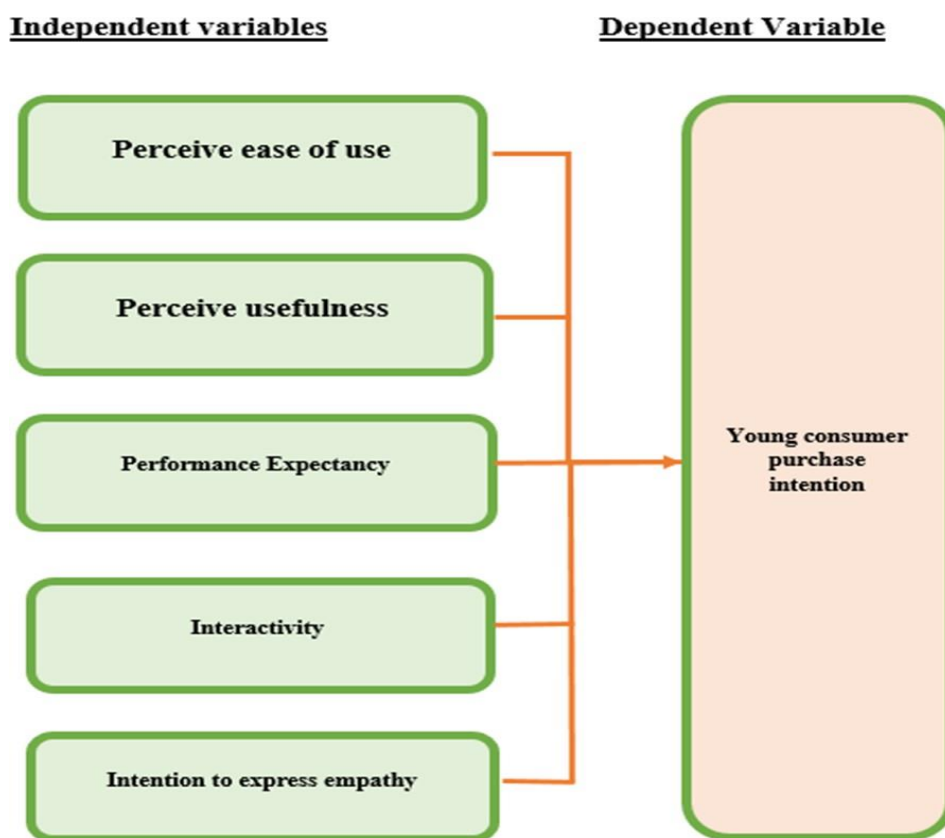
**RESEARCH METHOD**



Figure 1. Research Framework

In this study, the dependent variable will be young consumer purchase intention. The independent variables for this study are perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, performance expectancy, interactivity, and intention to express empathy. This study used quantitative data analysis to test the research framework. Throughout the study, both the primary and secondary data were used for the purpose of obtaining reliable and accurate results. For the primary data, it will be the distribution of questionnaires to students who are undergraduate and postgraduate students. By using purposive sampling, more than 300 sets of questionnaires had been distributed as, according to G-power analysis, a minimum set of 138 for 5 predictors. Since Malaysia is under

Movement Control Order (MCO), the questionnaire was distributed by using Google Form and managed to collect 150 sets. The response rate is 50% after several reminders had been made.

The data collected has been analyzed by using SPSS software. According to Hanafi & Fadilah (2017), with respect to correlation analysis objectives and regression, the SPSS statistical software could easily perform the Pearson's Correlation tests and the multiple linear regression test. Therefore, SPSS statistical software is considered as an optimal statistical tool for performing these two statistical analyses for this study. The data analysis methods are descriptive analysis, reliability analysis, and multiple linear regression. Multiple linear regression is used to define how strongly the independent variables affect the dependent variable. The purpose is to let the researchers understand the impact of all the independent variables on the dependent variable. Therefore, it becomes an important aspect to conclude the result of the research and which independent variables proposed have a significant relationship with youth consumers' purchase intention during the pandemic time in Malaysia.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This data is collected from a questionnaire that was distributed through Google Form between April 2021-July 2021. During these periods, Malaysia was under the third wave of the global pandemic, and in June 2021, a total lockdown known as the Full Movement Control Order (FMCO) was imposed in Malaysia. In this survey, there are 77 female respondents and 73 male respondents. Among these respondents, 39 of them are below 21 years old, 89 of the age between 21 and 25, 22 of them are between 26 and 30 years old. Since this study focus on the young consumer, Kolwalska (2012) mentioned that there are many definitions of young people, but we can basically say that a young person is someone between 15 to 24 years of age or individuals at age below 30 years old. This group is the most independent group of all young consumers.

In the reliability test, the result shows that young consumer purchase has Cronbach's alpha value of 0.964. For independent variables, perceived ease of use has Cronbach's alpha value of 0.961, perceived usefulness has Cronbach's alpha value of 0.955, performance expectancy has Cronbach's alpha value of 0.945, Interactivity has Cronbach's alpha value of 0.951, and intention to express empathy has Cronbach's alpha value of 0.956. As we can see, all variables have Cronbach's alpha value of more than 0.9. Therefore, we can conclude that every variable has excellent internal consistency reliability.

Table 1. Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0.798 a | 0.637 | 0.39306 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Empathy, Inter, Peou, Pe, Pu

| | Coefficients | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1  (Constant) | 0.084 | 0.144 | | 0.580 | 0.563 |
| Perceived Ease of use | 0.186 | 0.085 | 0.194 | 2.185 | **0.031** |
| Perceived Usefulness | 0.410 | 0.106 | 0.407 | 3.873 | **0.000** |
| Performance expectancy | 0.087 | 0.106 | 0.085 | 0.812 | 0.418 |
| Interactivity | 0.221 | 0.080 | 0.210 | 2.758 | **0.007** |
| Empathy | 0.061 | 0.073 | 0.063 | 0.839 | 0.403 |

a. Dependent Variable: Intention

Based on the multiple linear regression analysis, the R Square value is 0.637, which means 63.7% of the dependent variable has been explained by the independent variables. Among these five variables, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and interactivity are strongly supported with a p-value less than 0.05. Performance expectancy and empathy have no significant relationship with young consumer purchase intention. Performance expectancy has no significant relationship with young consumer purchase intention. For empathy, social media are a channel of communication and platform for posting and comments, which involve very low physical interactions. With that, it can't show much empathy compared with physical interaction or emotional marketing techniques. This result is inconsistent with the past research conducted by Alalwan (2018). There is a possibility that young consumer makes impulse purchase more frequently. During the pandemic, many social media was blasted with advertisements and Livestreams, promotions, and e-vouchers. Young consumers could be attracted with all the digital marketing and did not foresee in advance the performance expectancy of the items, which resulted in impulse purchases. Impulsive purchase is an extraordinarily special mode of human consumption (Zhang et al., 2014), and it happens commonly among young millennials. Add on, some digital marketing via social media does not portray any empathy and still lacks body language or facial expression. It is quite difficult to emphasize empathy through media. Therefore, performance expectation and empathy might not be the key variables for young consumers in mankind's decision to purchase. Additionally, according to Kowalska (2012), young consumers rarely look online for information about products, but mainly to visit them in order to make a purchase, compare prices, and ask opinions from others. Therefore, performance expectancy variables and empathy are not significant in this study.

**CONCLUSION**

In a nutshell, this study focused on young consumer purchase intention. This is because young consumers love to have interaction using social media, and they are the digital native generation. This research can be the reference for retailers or SMEs to consider more perceived usefulness information such as knowledge sharing through social media, free webinars, free training, and seminars for the youth. The young consumers are mostly very curious learners. During

the pandemic, many 'lockdown trends' were introduced via social media in Malaysia to encourage everyone to stay at home. The first of many lockdown trends is the 'Dalgona coffee', sharing a recipe that makes consumers feel it is very useful and dramatically increases online sales for coffee and creamers. Add on, perceived ease of use, such as convenience, live stream, and delivery on time, are the important factors to consider among the businesses. The youth that uses social media also seeking more interactivities such as questions and answers session, Livestream, reels, youtube video, and virtual competition will help to increase youth purchase intention through social media. Instead of spending more money on traditional marketing, businesses can consider using social media platforms for advertisement. In addition, network users can also gain benefits by referring to this research. They can understand more about the use of social media advertising, and this can increase their trust toward social media advertisement and gain confidence to purchase from the online platform. This study focused on young consumers, and future researchers can study more about other group ages of consumer purchase intention such as the Gen Z, baby boomers, and generation X. The result obtained cannot be used as references for other groups' age of consumers. Lastly, future researchers can also study how demographics can affect consumer purchase intention. This is because there are other factors that will affect consumer intention; for instance, future researchers can study how different gender intention to purchase through social media advertising.

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