

# THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CONSUMERS' PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR IN MALAYSIAN RESTAURANTS

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## ABSTRACT

Over the years, the dynamic advancement of technology has shaped the food and beverage industry in Malaysia. Today, the huge shift in the industry has resulted in consumers seeking readily accessible information. As such, various platforms, mostly social media, have influenced consumers' pre-purchase opinions before purchasing. Nevertheless, limited studies have been conducted in Malaysia, focusing on consumers' purchasing behaviour, specifically in the food and beverage industry in Malaysia. Thus, this study examines the impacts of social media on consumers' purchasing behaviour in Malaysian restaurants. Therefore, this study has incorporated recently proposed factors including E-WOM, social media and online community marketing, higher accessibility of information, and online ordering system, which stimulate the consumers' purchasing behaviour in Malaysia. This study utilised the critical review process of secondary sources to identify the determinants and measurements used in the surveying instrument. Purposive sampling was applied to select the restaurants, whereas the non-convenience random sampling technique was employed to collect data from 270 consumers over three months. Later, PLS-SEM was used to analyse the data. The results proved that the electronic word of mouth (E-WOM), social media advertisement and online ordering system significantly determined consumers' purchasing behaviour. However, highly accessible information via social media does not have a positive implication on consumers' purchasing behaviour. The study is contributing much to the food and beverage industry.

Keywords: Malaysia, Technology, Consumer Purchasing Behaviour, Restaurant Sector, Social Media, Digital Marketing.

JEL Classification: M37

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Creative minds and innovative technology predominantly consume the world. Marketers are continually strategising ways to convey their messages and convince consumers into buying their products and services. With the inception of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, specialists have anticipated that the internet would bridge the gap between consumers and marketing organisations (Hamel & Sampler, 1998; Sotelo, 2017). Researchers such as Ward et al. have anticipated that at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the internet and smart media would be the leading shopping platforms for consumers (1998). In a similar vein, De Kare-Silver

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(2000) asserted that innovation would ultimately run with the consumers to visit stores. As a result, it would be simple for individuals to buy their needs without setting off the original spots of the products.

Business organisations believe that electronic media can help promote their services and physical goods, which will eventually profit them. Weaver et al. (2017) and Porter (2001) posited that companies have to rely on technology to survive the business sector. The latest trends of marketing include digital marketing, which comprises of mobile - smart marketing, social networking sites, mobile applications, and mobile website (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2016). Subrahmanyam et al. (2008), in their research, claimed that people frequently communicate with each other on social networking sites and mobile applications. Additionally, Ostrow (2009) asserted that the use of social networking sites is increasing daily. On the other hand, Statista (2018) confirmed that Facebook has allegedly housed 207 billion accounts, whereas Twitter had 330 million followers by the end of the third quarter in 2017.

In the field of business, these social sites are essential to determine consumers' purchasing behaviour. Hence, Jones concluded that individuals use social media sites to convey their insights and purplish data on the brands they purchase and the administration they utilise (2010). Buyers use them to prescribe a brand or showcase associations with companions and supporters. Therefore, the relationship between technology and consumers' purchasing behaviour is today's top trending topics (Groß, 2015; Horner & Swarbrooke, 2016). D'Silva et al. (2011) asserted that this relationship could affect marketers as well as consumers. For example, marketers can build a personal connection with the consumers, whereas consumers will get daily updates on products or services. The internet, social media and mobile applications have adverse or positive impacts on the food and beverage industry and its consumers. Consumers believe that marketers focus on both the quality and quantity of advertising and its strength to attract consumers into the food and beverage industry.

Moreover, consumers are continually seeking information via word-of-mouth marketing or social networking sites that can supply them with pre-purchase suggestions before purchasing (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008; Mauri & Minazzi, 2013; Zhang et al., 2017). As for the restaurateurs, revolutionising the marketing strategy can make or break the brand entirely. Although there are benefits to digital marketing, risks are often involved, especially when the majority of the food and beverage suppliers try to transform uncertainty into an advantage for them (Mori et al., 2005).

Klang Valley is centred in Kuala Lumpur and connected to several cities and towns in the state of Selangor, Malaysia. Klang Valley has a massive number of migrants from other states within Malaysia and foreign workers predominantly from Indonesia, India, and Nepal. The population in Klang Valley was 7.25 million in the fourth quarter of 2017 and is expected to increase to a total of 10 million by 2020 and 20 million in 2030 with an annual growth rate of 1.7% (Department of Statistics, 2017). The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commissions stated that there are 19.2 million internet users in Malaysia, and 15.6 million of them are active Facebook users. Therefore almost 64% of the national population has somewhat been ingrained in the world of social media (2014). There have been studies conducted on brand equity, brand loyalty, brand preferences, brand leadership and the customer experience in the restaurant industry within Malaysia and worldwide, Bolotaeva and Cata (2010), Safko (2012), Wollan, Smith, and Zhou (2010), Li and Shiu (2012), Mhlanga and Tichaawa (2017), Hanaysha (2016).

Nevertheless, the relationship or influence of technology, specifically social media advertising on Malaysians' purchasing behaviour has not been explored extensively. Several studies have focused on the influence of social media on customers' experience and purchasing behaviour in the restaurant sector. However, the international context of the previous research

might not be suitable for the Malaysian restaurant industry. Studies conducted by Saffo (2012) and Wollan, Smith, and Zhou (2010) highlighted that the relationship between social media and customer experiences should be examined within the boundaries of cultural and geographical context. It should not be generalised to other countries. This is because the rate of social media network usage varies from one country to the other. Therefore, the type of social media network in a particular country influences the customers' experience and purchasing behaviour differently in comparison to other countries (Li & Shiu, 2012).

As mentioned earlier, almost 64% of the total population are active social media users in the study area. It is very substantial to have online reviews for the tourism industry on the primary website as well as on another type of platforms that require managerial attention for proper brand management (Saura, Palos-Sanchez & Reyes-Menendez, 2017). Nowadays, online review sites and social media websites have become an essential source of information for consumers and exert a strong influence on consumer purchase behaviour and decision making (Reyes-Menendez, Saura & Filipe, 2019). Therefore, the current research aims to understand the effects of technology on consumers' purchasing behaviour in the Malaysian restaurant industry. Also, it was essential to carry forward this research in Malaysian context to understand the impacts of social media on local consumers to follow the trend in the restaurant industry. We believe the proposed conceptual framework of current research is very identical and will contribute enormously and will help to improve to the supply side of the restaurants' industry. The upcoming sections of the paper will comprise of literature review with its proposed hypothesis, methods used for sample selection and data collection will be discussed. The next section will include data analysis and results that will be examined in detail. Finally, the paper ends with a discussion of research findings, an avenue for future research and concluding remarks.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Consumer Purchasing Behaviour Journey**

Marketers have linked consumers' multiple purchasing approaches to the higher use of social media. To curb this issue, marketers have changed their strategies and introduced, E-WOM, a practical, accurately deliberate information transmitter, which can influence consumers' purchasing behaviour and determined to keep them satisfied (Court et al., 2009; Okumus & Bilgihan, 2014; Monica, John & Maria, 2017). Sheenan posited that consumers today prefer to scout around and familiarise themselves with the produces before purchasing them. (2010). Therefore, technology is the best mechanism to influence consumers' purchasing behaviour (Court et al., 2009).

The technology includes social media and e-commerce. Social media is an online market where a brand image connects the buyers and sellers. Vollmer & Precourt (2008) stated that social media should always be resourceful and proactively influence consumers' perception of choosing a brand. As such, social media marketing is a convenient and straightforward marketing tool, which helps providers to reach out to consumers during purchasing decisions (Sheenan, 2010). Awareness is necessary for the process of consumers' decision-making. It allows consumers to examine the gap between their desires and the type of information obtained (Reid & Bojanic, 2009; Lee et al., 2016). Besides that, consumers need to be familiar with the products and services to measure their purchasing behaviour. (Peppard & Butler, 1998). At present digital/ social media marketing is playing a critical role in consumer purchasing behaviour journey. Saura, Reyes-Menendez and Palos-Sanchez (2019) explored digital marketing strategies based on promotions for Black Friday 2018 in Spain. Research confirms that companies should generate exclusive promotions based on limited time

horizons and companies should avoid activities generate uncertainty and negative feelings in customers who, in turn, speak negatively of companies and share their negative experiences with the digital community by publishing negative content. Such negative feedback affects the digital reputation of companies and generates negative perceptions of their offers and discounts, thus reducing the profitability of its shares.

## **2.2 Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM)**

Steve Jurvetson and Tim Draper introduced the term viral marketing in 1997 (Knight, 1999: 110-111) “Viral marketing can be understood as a communication and distribution concept that relies on customers to transmit digital products via electronic mail to other potential customers in their social sphere and to animate these contacts to also transmit the products”. Pastore (2000) mentioned that it is the same as E-WOM, but Modzelewski (2000) disagreed and confirmed viral marketing is entirely different from E-WOM. Shirky (2000) then claimed that people would soon view viral marketing as E-WOM advertising. Additionally, he said that the concept would focus on attracting consumers via honest communication. Researchers also concluded that viral marketing connects with consumers, establishes consumer relationships, and influences consumers to buy the range of products (Helm, 2000; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Leskovec et al., 2007; De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008; Court et al., 2009). eWOM is the most important source of information that drives consumer purchase behaviour in the hospitality and tourism services sectors. eWOM is personified message in online reviews that customers write for others. The words in online reviews could be negative or positive, depends on the experience that these specific customers have with purchased products or services (Reyes-Menendez, Saura & Filipe, 2019). Therefore, to gain a better understanding of the impact of eWOM on different social platforms and its effect on the decision making and behaviour of hotel consumers, reviews on online travel sites and social networking sites should be taken into account. Therefore, taking into consideration Shirky’s views, this paper will view viral marketing as a natural form of communication between consumers. This paper will further look at the impacts of viral marketing on consumers’ purchasing behaviour.

**H1.** E-WOM has a positive effect on consumers’ purchasing behaviour in the restaurant sector.

## **2.3 Social Media and Online Community Marketing**

Social media is an unconventional web-based application in the field of online marketing. (Yang et al., 2008). Companies employ social media to develop online communities and create new business designs that include novel product marketing channels (Chung & Buhalis, 2008; Ulusu, 2010). This will ultimately address problems with time and place limitations to mould strong relationships with consumers (Bolotaeva & Cata, 2010). Literature supports that social media is a powerful tool, which can be used by restaurants for marketing and publicity to reach out to a vast number of crowd and influence customers’ experience and purchasing behaviour. Social media is necessary for effective marketing as it will induce a perceived favourable image, which results in perceived customer value (Hanaysha, 2016). However, Mhlanga and Tichaawa (2017) mentioned that the influence of social media on customers’ experiences could be different based on their gender, age, food and beverage, service and atmosphere. New marketing channels create online communities that allow marketers to collect information about consumers, deduce consumers’ needs and priorities based on their experiences of community usage and gain direct responses from consumers (Sigala, 2003).

Additionally, marketers can attain high levels of customisation by observing the contents posted by community members. It will help provide marketers with an understanding of consumers' needs. As a result, they will be able to develop ground-breaking products and services for consumers. It allows marketers to promote their start-up businesses to targeted consumers (Chung & Buhalis, 2008; Rezaei, Ali, Amin & Jayashree, 2016).

Online communities are suitable mediums for building a close-knit relationship with consumers. Zott et al. (2000) elaborated as the stickiness of a platform and its ability to appeal to consumers and retain them. Which is done by developing consumer value such as incentives for loyalty, customised products and services and trust (Zott et al., 2000). In general, social media marketing is a proactive platform that can connect with present consumers and draw new consumers. It is performing a substantial role in influencing consumers' purchasing behaviour (Sigala, 2003; Chung & Buhalis, 2008; Bolotaeva & Cata, 2010). Saura, Reyes-Menendez and Palos-Sanchez (2019) confirmed in their research that digital platforms has been confirmed routes to transfer the message from brands to their customers. Also, these digital platforms help suppliers to get the customers purchasing behaviour information which can results into improving the supplier - customer relationships.

**H2.** Advertising on social media has a positive effect on consumers' purchasing behaviour in the restaurant industry.

#### **2.4 Higher Accessibility of Information**

WOM has created an essential information transfer; however, the real impact of information obtained varies from one person to the other as a result of recipients' views and experiences (Liou, 2018). The internalisation phase of knowledge transfer is inclusive of information sharing and receiving. Therefore, explicit information was converted into internalised knowledge and meaning (Nonaka, 1994). Additionally, previous studies had focused on the quality of information and source credibility (Davy, 2006; Hong, 2006; Xu et al., 2006; Cheung & Lee, 2007). The quality of information is evaluated based on the accessibility of the data, its content, accuracy, format, and timeliness (Liu & Lopez, 2016). Social media consists of numerous online information-sharing platforms, such as social networking sites. Therefore, social media plays a vital role in creating an impact on consumers' purchasing behaviour in the field of marketing and advertising (Gilly et al., 1998; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017).

**H3.** High accessibility of information via social media has a positive implication on consumers' purchasing behaviour in the restaurant sector.

#### **2.5 Traditional vs Digital Marketing**

Online platforms nowadays are necessary to create and maintain a strong bond between marketers and consumers (Court et al., 2009). Internet usage and E-WOM have increased steadily, and therefore, consumers can seek online peer-advice via social networking sites. E-WOM will eventually promote marketing via multi-level information sharing to influence consumers' purchasing behaviour (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Court et al., 2009; Fauser et al., 2011). With the development of modern technology, marketers have to switch their focus from a traditional marketing strategy to both conventional and digital marketing to attract consumers from various perspectives (Court et al., 2009; Okumus, 2013). It will then influence consumers to digress from the 4Ps (product, price, place, and promotion) of traditional marketing and head towards digital marketing, which emphasises on knowledge

acquisition, interactivity, connectivity, brand research and feedback review (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017).

## **2.6 Mobile Sites and Mobile Applications**

The functions of a mobile-based online service are similar to computer-based online service. Nevertheless, mobile service stores' unique features that make it from computer-based service (Mozeik et al., 2009). The mobile technology is highly portable and has better coverage compared to desktops computers because it operates on wireless internet (Kim et al., 2007). Mobile technology is universal and therefore grants users internet access and the ability to interact with the system anytime and anywhere (Tojib & Tsarenko, 2012). Wang et al. (2015) maintained that mobile technologies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century could satiate users' impulsive and entertainment needs, help with making arrangements despite time-constraints and are more portable and efficient. By the year 2014, the number of mobile phone users in China was over 600 million, and this number is multiplying (China Mobile Application, 2015).

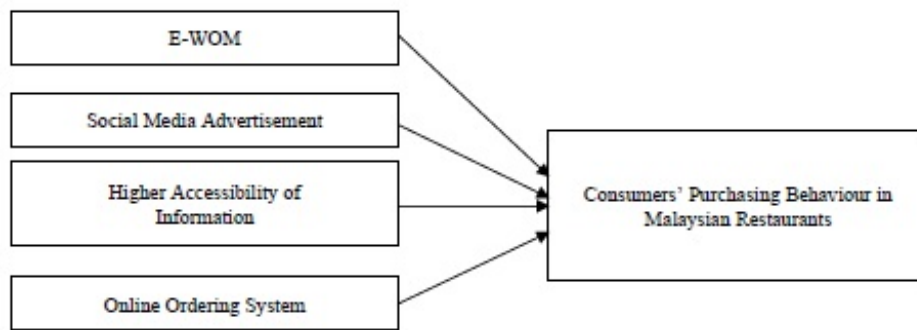
Moreover, data usage statistics state that more than 50% of the mobile data was spent on shopping, social media, and video websites. It is, therefore, evident that Chinese consumers' online activities have shifted from computer-based-platforms to mobile-based platforms. That being said, mobile apps have invaded the content of the mobile internet (China Mobile Application, 2015). Mobile apps with restaurant search utilise online-to-offline (O2O) business model (Liu & Xu, 2014). The O2O model helps business operators develop business opportunities via the internet by transforming offline services online (Du & Tang, 2014). Hence, the online ordering system is engineered to aid customers when they need to purchase or make transactions at their convenience during or off opening hours. The services provided by marketers give consumers the liberty to choose, buy or pay via the internet with specific apps on their mobile phones (Barutcu, 2007).

## **2.7 Online Ordering System**

In the restaurant sector, the online ordering system is rapidly expanding among consumers and restaurants due to its visible benefits. Consumers order online because it is more comfortable, more convenient and fast (Kimes & Laque, 2011). As a result, restaurants will be able to increase profit and avoid errors. Besides that, online ordering has helped improved management capacity, boost productivity, develop transactional marketing and customer relationship management (Kimes & Laque, 2011; Kimes, 2011). Nevertheless, restaurants do face issues with a rise in cost, decline in service quality, and plausible commoditisation. Studies revealed that the ordering process should be accurate, convenient and clear-cut. In the absence of the internet or mobile app, consumers chose to make a call to order online (Park & Kim, 2003; Flanagin et al., 2014; Metzger & Flanagin, 2015).

**H4.** The availability of the online ordering system has a positive effect on consumers' purchasing behaviour in the restaurant sector.

Figure 1. Research Framework



Source: Own Elaboration

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The quantitative research method was adopted to test the hypothesis. As such, a comprehensive questionnaire made up of three sections was used to examine information such as E-WOM, social media advertisement, higher accessibility of information, online ordering system and consumer purchasing behaviour. Part one of the questionnaire consisted of screening questions that were designed to ensure respondents had the experience of using social media to check out restaurant menus and advertisements. Moreover, the items also measured the amount of time spent by consumers on social media daily. Therefore, the participants in this study were experienced consumers who frequently used social media to survey restaurants virtually before visiting them. Section two captured participants' demographic data such as gender, age, monthly income, education, and nationality. The final section of the questionnaire was created to determine consumers' views on the primary constructs of the study. Thirty-three items were measured via a Five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Additionally, the consumers' purchase behaviour (four items) was adopted from four independent variables and E-WOM (five items) was adopted from Word-of-mouth Marketing Association (2008). Besides that, fourteen items regarding social media advertisements were extracted from Lee (2013); Madni (2013) and the higher accessibility of information (seven items) were adopted from Rein et al. (2005). Finally, three items about the online ordering system were selected based on Kimes and Laque (2011); Kimes (2011).

Next, the purposive sampling technique was used to approach five different fast-casual dining restaurants or cafes in Klang Valley, Malaysia. They were Humble Beginnings Café, Wondermilk, Epiphany Coffee & Tabacco, Mukha Café and JC's Pancakes. Three hundred questionnaires were distributed to consumers who had visited the restaurants between March and April 2019 via the non-probability convenience sampling technique. With a response rate of 90%, 270 were returned, completed and found to be useful.

### 4. DATA ANALYSIS

#### 4.1 Demographic Breakdown of the Respondents

The majority of the participants were male (56.3%) in the current study. About 27.4% of the respondents were between 26 and 30 years old, whereas 24.1% of them were between 20 and 25 years old. Table 1 exhibits the monthly income of the participants. A total of 60.4% of the participants obtained RM3001 to RM4000 per month. On the other hand, 23% of them received a salary between RM4001 and RM5000. Besides that, 44.1% had graduated

with a diploma, 31.5% with a degree and only 13.3% with postgraduate degrees. Survey questionnaires were distributed among the permanent residents or those who have resided in Malaysia for more than six months. Further, the result found out that there were 75.2% of them were Malaysians, followed by Koreans (8.5%), Chinese (7.8%), Taiwanese (5.9%) and Singaporeans (2.6%).

**Table 1. Demographics of the Participants (n= 270)**

	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	152	56.3
Female	118	43.7
<b>Age</b>		
20 - 25	65	24.1
26 - 30	74	27.4
31 – 35	31	11.5
36 – 40	52	19.3
41 and above	48	17.8
<b>Monthly Income (RM)</b>		
Less than 3,000	18	6.7
3,001- 4,000	163	60.4
4,001- 5,000	62	23.0
5,001 or above	27	10.0
<b>Education</b>		
Diploma	119	44.1
Undergraduate (Degree)	85	31.5
Postgraduate (Masters/ PhD)	36	13.3
Others	30	11.1
<b>Nationality</b>		
Malaysia	203	75.2
China	21	7.8
Singapore	7	2.6
Taiwan	16	5.9
Korea	23	8.5

Source: Output from SPSS

#### **4.2 Technology and Time Spent**

A total of 94.8% of the participants used social media to review the restaurants’ menu items, and almost 69% of them agreed that social media invoked them to visit those restaurants. Based on the survey, 59% of the participants said that the advertisements on mass media were uninspiring due to the invasion of technology in their daily lives. As such, Facebook was one of the most used platforms by the majority of the participants (72.6%) daily. Additionally, most of them (81.1%) spent about 10 hours or more on social media per week.



**Table 2. General Questions about Technology and Time Spent**

	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
<b>Do you use social media to review the restaurant’s menu items?</b>		
Yes	256	94.8
No	14	5.2
<b>Does social media trigger you to visit a particular restaurant?</b>		
Yes	187	69.3
No	83	30.7
<b>Do you find advertisements on mass media are still attractive?</b>		
Yes	111	41.1
No	159	58.9
<b>Which of the following social media sites are you using daily?</b>		
Social Networking Sites (e.g. Facebook)	196	72.6
Microblogging (e.g. Twitter)	15	5.6
Blogs/ Forums	23	8.5
Social Bookmarking Sites/ Social News (e.g. Reddit, Digg)	20	7.4
Photo & Video Sharing Sites (e.g. Flickr, Youtube)	16	5.9
<b>Time (approx.) spent on social media sites per week</b>		
0 hour	0	0.0
1-3 hours	6	2.2
4-6 hours	3	1.1
7-9 hours	42	15.6
10 hours or more	219	81.1

Source: Output from SPSS

### 4.3 Descriptive Analysis

Results of current research revealed that the participants had high perceptions (Mean  $\geq 4.0$ ) for buzz marketing, which employs entertainment or news to develop WOM. Additionally, they were also into community marketing, where a circle of people supports user groups, fan clubs, and discussion forums. Finally, the participants had strong impressions of referral programmes too. These programmes provided satisfied consumers with a platform to spread the word via a wide range of instruments. All in all, the mediums above had vastly influenced consumers’ purchasing behaviour. Moreover, consumers were able to seek products and services’ information via social media. Additionally, consumers’ initial preferences changed after browsing for pertinent details. Most likely, their attitude and perception towards a restaurant would have changed after reading the positive reviews and articles online. Social media has evidently, paved the way for new products, services, and brands to lure customers, in comparison to mass media advertisements, reviews and blog posts. Therefore, social media is proved to be a more credible space for marketing compared to mass media. With the expansion of social media, consumers can get specific information on an extensive menu, especially food (halal or diet-specific) and beverages offered at a restaurant. Furthermore, the feedback from previous customers, such as reviews, ratings, and comments on social media would influence first-timers’ purchasing behaviour. Additionally, social media substantially brings together groups of consumers and encourages them to communicate with each other, and with the restaurants about availability, reservation and the ordering system.

Nevertheless, participants had average perceptions (Mean  $\geq 3.0$ ) when it comes to the impact of technology on consumers' purchasing behaviour, and their prejudgement of products or services before use. In comparison to the mass media, the consumers had moderate responses with regards to information accessibility, the sharing of information (WOM), and peer-reviews on social media. Moreover, social media can help consumers locate restaurants, promotions, and advertisements that they find appealing. As such, social media and E-WOM had influenced consumers' purchasing behaviour and decision-making abilities. Thirdly, participants exhibited low perceptions (Mean  $< 3.0$ ) towards a series of items such as the ability to seek consistent information, that gelled with their first-hand purchasing preferences. Besides that, consumers also developed low perceptions against social media's influence to try new restaurants and information regarding the ingredients and cooking process. Low views were also recorded when participants were asked about the usefulness of social media and whether it causes difficulties in the process of decision-making. Besides that, restaurants that used technology provided consumers with a novel dining experience.

#### 4.4 Measurement Model

The measurement model employed in the present study had initially examined the standardised construct loadings, which resulted above the recommended value of 0.60 (Chin et al., 2008). The degree of each construct's indicator to its latent construct proved that the reliability of the construct was above 0.708. On the other hand, the extracted average variance or the overall extent of variation, which was observed among the indicators and were accounted for the latent construct were above 0.50. It was above the critical limit which signalled the reliability and validity of the measurement model (Table 3). The next stage was to assess the validity of the discriminant, in which the extent of one variable is not the reflection of other variables, which was indicated by the low correlation between the constructs. Table 4 demonstrates Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio's (HTMT) criteria due to recent criticism on Alarcón, Sánchez and De Olavide's (2015) criterion because they did not reliably detect discriminant validity compared to the HTMT ratio (Henseler et al., 2016). The results further indicate that the obtained values are above the critical limit of HTMT 0.85 and below than an HTMT of 0.90. Hence, the HTMT ratio values are between 0.85 and 0.90.

**Table 3. Indicator Validity and Reliability**

Items	Loadings
<b>E-WOM (AVE = 0.561; Composite Reliability = 0.879)</b>	
Buzz marketing (Using entertainment or news to create WOM) influences consumer purchase decision.	0.814
Viral marketing (messages designed to be passed along, often electronically or by email) influences consumer purchase decision.	0.780
Community marketing (forming or supporting such communities as user groups, fan clubs, and discussion forums) influences consumer purchase decision.	0.735
Conversation Creation (things such as emails, promotions, entertainment or anything that is designed to create WOM) influences consumer purchase decision.	0.627
Referral Programs (giving satisfied customers the change to spread the word with different tools) influences consumer purchase decision.	0.796
<b>Higher Accessibility of Information (AVE = 0.572; Composite Reliability = 0.867)</b>	
Do you think that with the social media sites, you are able to seek out products/services information initiatively (actively)?	0.710
Do you have prejudgement (positive/negative) towards a particular product and/or service before an actual consumption?	0.684

Do you tend to seek out information that is consistent with your initial opinion/preference for a purchase?	0.698
Do you agree that information searching is easier via social media compared to mass media (e.g. TV, radio, newspaper, and so on)?	0.819
Do you change your initial preference after searching relevant information via social media sites?	0.712
Are you likely to change your attitude towards a certain restaurant after you have read positive comments/reviews/online articles etc. about it?	0.679
Are you likely to share comments/reviews/blog posts/related articles etc. to peers or friends via social media after a visit to the restaurant?	0.718
<b>Social Media Advertisement (AVE = 0.669; Composite Reliability = 0.863)</b>	
Do you search for related information on social media before a purchase?	0.659
Do you agree that, for instance, advertisements/blog posts/ FB pages/user reviews on social media influence you to try new brands/products/services?	0.712
Do you agree that social media has provided more effective platforms for new products/services/brands to draw consumers' attention than mass media channels?	0.665
Do you agree that advertisements/ reviews/ blog posts etc. have higher credibility than advertisements/editorials/ other marketing means on mass media?	0.661
Do you rely on information available on social media if you have uncertainties regarding a purchase?	0.743
It is easy to access the restaurant interactive menu through social media.	0.856
The information (e.g. ingredients, cooking process, etc.) through social media is very useful.	0.673
The visual appearance of an interactive menu in social media is attractive.	0.612
The social media make it easier to check menu variety (e.g. healthy menu, halal menu, etc.) offered in the restaurant.	0.714
The beverage (e.g. hot drinks, cocktails, mocktails, etc.) feature in the social media is very useful.	0.801
The social media interactive menu attracts me to try the restaurant.	0.631
Do you agree that feedbacks (reviews/comments/posts and so on) on social media affect your purchase?	0.652
Do you agree that social media provides an effective and powerful platform for consumers to communicate with each other and with the companies?	0.784
Do you think that social media makes your decision making more complex?	0.659
<b>Online Ordering System (AVE = 0.576; Composite Reliability = 0.897)</b>	
Social media help me to order online.	0.775
The restaurant online system helps me to locate the restaurant.	0.766
The social media helps to check the reservation availability for online booking.	0.753
<b>Consumer Purchasing Behaviour (AVE = 0.623; Composite Reliability = 0.867)</b>	
The interactive promotion of the restaurant through the social media influences consumer purchase decision.	0.853
Food promotion reminder through the social media influence consumer purchase decision.	0.603
Advertising appeal of restaurant promotions through the technology influence consumer purchase decision.	0.784
Restaurant using technology gives a new dining experience to consumer.	0.645

Note: Critical Values: AVE = 0.50; Indicator Loadings = 0.60

Source: Output from PLS - SEM

Table 4. Discriminant Validity

Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)						
E-WOM						
H_AI	0.864					
SMA	0.899	0.869				
OOS	0.853	0.887	0.903			
CPB	0.868	0.899	0.878	0.866		

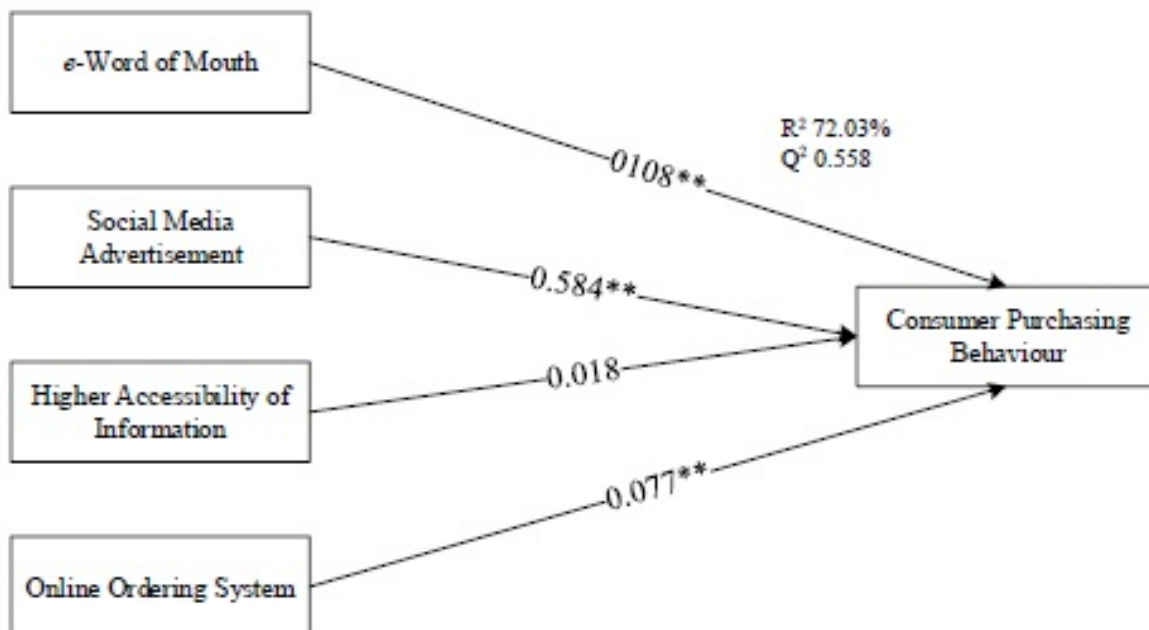
\*\*Values on the diagonal (bolded) are square root of AVE while the off-diagonals are correlations. The shaded boxes is the standard procedure for reporting HTMT ratio. E-WOM - electronic word-of-mouth; H\_AI - Higher Accessibility of Information; SMA – Social Media Advertising; OOS - Online Ordering System; CPB - Consumer Purchasing Behaviour.

Source: Output from PLS - SEM

### 4.5 Structural Model

A bootstrapping procedure with 4999 iterations and 270 cases were used to examine the importance of the path coefficient values (Chin et al., 2008; Hair et al., 2017) of the structural model and its tested hypotheses. Moreover, critical limits of *t*-value statistics, (Hair et al., 2017) 1.96 (5% of significance level) and 2.57 (1% of significance level) were used to measure the path-coefficient values. According to the recommendation of Henseler et al. (2016), the standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) value was applied to the model fit’s criterion. The recommended value of 0.08 or less would be sufficient for the PLS path analysis model. As for the present study, an SRMR = 0.058 was noticed. The value signified acceptance of the model fit.

Figure 2. Results of the Assessment of the Structural Model



Source: Elaboration form PLS - SEM

Table 5. Path Coefficients

Hypotheses	<i>beta</i>	<i>t-values</i>	Decision	<i>f-Square</i>
<i>Direct Effects (bootstrapping results)</i>				
H1: e-WOM → Consumer Purchasing Behaviour	0.108	2.720**	Supported	0.555
H2: Social Media Advertising → Consumer Purchasing Behaviour	0.584	3.248**	Supported	0.820
H3: Higher Accessibility of Information → Consumer Purchasing Behaviour	0.018	0.266	Rejected	0.107
H4: Online Ordering System → Consumer Purchasing Behaviour	0.077	3.937**	Supported	0.799

Notes: Critical t-values. \*1.96 ( $p < 0.05$ ); \*\*2.57 ( $p < 0.01$ ).

Source: Own Elaboration

Table 5 shows the structural model path coefficient values of *f*-square denoting each construct's side effect. Consumer Purchasing Behaviour was the dependent variable. E-WOM, Higher Accessibility of Information, Social Media Advertisement and Online Ordering System were the independent variables. The path-coefficient b-values were used to test the hypotheses, whereas t-values confirmed the significance level of the proposed hypotheses. There were zero auto-correlation since the Durbin-Watson value was 1.94, and the variance inflations factor was below 3. This proved an absence of multicollinearity problems. Additionally, the 'Higher Accessibility of Information ( $\beta=0.018$ )' did not have a positive effect on 'Consumer Purchasing Behaviour' in the restaurant sector. As a result, the proposed H3 hypotheses were rejected. However, the 'E-WOM ( $\beta=0.108$ )', 'Social Media Advertisement ( $\beta=0.584$ )' and 'Online Ordering System ( $\beta=0.007$ )' had positive effects on 'Consumer Purchasing Behaviour' and therefore hypotheses H1, H2 and H4 were accepted. Moreover, all the independent variables jointly signalled a variance value ( $R^2$ ) of 72% for the 'Consumer Purchasing Behaviour'. It is an acceptable value. Henseler et al. (2016) reckoned the application of standardised root mean square (SRMR) as the appropriate model fit criterion. The suggested value of SRMR is 0.08 or less for a good model fit. Hence the current structural model has achieved SRMR = 0.0608, signifying an acceptable model fit.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Significant works of literature have examined consumers' purchasing behaviour in the restaurant sector worldwide. Nonetheless, limitations rose when it came to the understanding of the e-consumers' purchasing behaviour in Malaysian restaurants. Therefore, this paper has attempted to fill the gaps via an analysis based on the developed conceptual model. Additionally, antecedents such as the E-Word of Mouth, Social Media advertisement, Higher accessibility of information and Online ordering system were used to measure consumers' purchasing behaviour in the Malaysian restaurant sector.

Consumers continuously interacted via multiple objects that were related to their surrounding environment. According to the findings, social media advertisements had greatly influenced (58.4%) consumers' purchasing behaviour. Similar studies have recorded the positive impact of social media advertisements too. (Al-Dhuhli, Mukhanini & Ismael, 2013; Rasool, 2015). There had been a noticeable shift in consumers' purchasing behaviour as a result of an upsurge in social media's efficiency. Lee (2013) asserted that it is difficult to generalise due to the differences in demographic factors. However, the current study showed that the majority of Malaysians were Millennials. About 24.1% were under the age group of 20-25years and 27.4% between 26 and 30years of age compared to Gen X and Y.

The present study also coincides with Mhlanga and Tichaawa's claims that the influence of social media on customers' experiences and purchasing behaviour could be different because of their gender and age group. Therefore, these results suggested that the segmentation of millennials would be more successful in satisfying e-consumers' purchasing behaviour on social media in the field of Malaysian restaurants. Consequently, Yasin and David assert that consumers' method of interaction had been changing simultaneously with the advancement of technology. Some methods have, therefore disrupted the diverse availability of information sources because of their high-quality content and presentation (Yasin & David, 2014).

Furthermore, a wide variety of prices ultimately confuses the consumers' access to information on the information cloud. Sensing the global trends of competition, E-WOM has also been considered as one of the major influential factors among consumers' purchasing behaviour. Due to the rapid technological advancement and the multiple platforms in social media, potential consumers can easily be targeted with their initial knowledge about the brand and the product (Tran, 2014). E-WOM messages have received plaudits from previous users and have had shown positive repercussions on consumers' purchasing behaviour during the decision-making process (Dudovski, 2013). This is because the Malaysian restaurant industry attracts tourists locally and globally as such social media plays a pivotal role in uplifting these restaurants. After all, social media reviews and recommendations very much influence tourists before purchasing. The findings of this paper support Court et al. (2009) and Sheenan's (2010) assertions, that modern consumers are often influenced by technology when it comes to searching for information before making purchase decisions.

Additionally, consumers build trust in E-MOW via reviews and recommendations shared by friends and renowned people on social media. Moreover, the rapid expansion of the internet and the programmatic enhancements of marketed products by the restaurants had modified the way consumers receive information and exhibit an increase in numbers quickly. Because consumers expect highly informative and accessible information, business marketers are placing more efforts on technology-based intuitive information, rather than conventional processing information.

This study also highlighted the impact of social media's high accessibility rate on consumers' purchasing behaviour in Malaysian restaurants. These findings oppose the conclusions made by previous studies (Gilly et al., 1998; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017). Such a contrasting difference may be a result of the customers' culture and ethnicity, levels of trust, previous dining experiences or other experiences based on social media information. Some customers might have realised that the images of the restaurant atmosphere and the appearance of the menu items posted on social media differed from their actual dining-in experience. Besides that, there would also be counterfeit promotion information shared on social media.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The present study concluded that it is essential to adopt a technological platform in the field of hospitality to attract consumers and further create an impact on their purchasing behaviour. Due to the recent development of Information and Communication Technology, consumers are ready to accept the technological advancement and integration of modern technological innovations in the restaurant industry to race against a busy competitive world. Although new sets of factors may arise and will be adopted by consumers in the future, the internet will always be the pilot of their daily lives. The findings on managerial contributions revealed that a significant number of Malaysians are often influenced to visit restaurants that have social networking sites such as Facebook. Therefore, in comparison to

mass media, social networking sites are more useful for new products, services or brands to draw consumers' Moreover, the current study also revealed that social networking sites have higher credibility compared to advertisements and other marketing means on mass media.

Additionally, consumers take into consideration recommendations of friends (E-WOM) before visiting a particular restaurant or purchasing an order online Besides that, restaurants that use multiple channels for marketing lead to confusion because of un-updated information or complete absence of information. It will eventually lead to flip-flopping opinions when it comes to choosing a particular restaurant. It cannot be denied that consumers also pay heed to the views of others without actually visiting the promotional channels used by restaurants. So, the marketing strategies designed by restaurants should cater to consumers from all walks of life. Restaurants should also highlight a product's unique features and revamp the online ordering environment to increase consumers' purchasing intentions.

Therefore, the topics identified and proposed conceptual model in current research makes a significant theoretical contribution in the research filed. The model will be very useful for academic scholars, restaurateurs, policymakers, and practitioners. In conclusion, this paper has explored the conceptual development of e-consumers' purchasing behaviour and decision-making in the context of Malaysian restaurants. The analysis proved that e-marketing is still growing fast compared to traditional marketing. This paper also shows a better understanding of e-consumers purchasing behaviours in the Malaysian context.

Although the results of the current study had shed light on several important issues, some limitations need to be considered for future research. Firstly, the data was collected from five restaurants only and were tested based on the convenience sampling method, which may have produced generalised results. Additionally, this study mainly focused on four dimensions such as E-WOM, higher accessibility of information, social media marketing, and online ordering system to analyse consumers' purchasing behaviour. Nonetheless, there are other critical dimensions that the present study had disregarded, for example, pricing, location and service quality. Moreover, the present research merely focused on consumers' point of view. Future research may examine these factors from restaurateurs' point of view to gain a better understanding of the suppliers' perspective in Malaysian restaurants. Lastly, future research may want to include emotional factors such as personal touch, perceived excitement and enjoyment to look after consumers' purchasing behaviour in the restaurant industry.

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