Navigating the New Normal: How COVID-19 Reshaped Consumer Shopping Trends and Preferences

[1]Sharareh Shahidi-Hamedani, [2]Normaziah Che Musa, [3]Faarhana Binti Che Arshad, [4]Angela Anak Serei, [5]Nur Syahliza Md Ngadnan

[1,2,3,4,5]UNITAR International University, Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia.
Corresponding Author Email: normaziah@unitar.my

Abstract
The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered significant shifts in consumer purchase behavior, prompting the need for a comprehensive understanding of the evolving landscape to inform effective business strategies and policy responses. Using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), this study aims to examine the various ways that the pandemic has affected consumer buying patterns, lifestyle modifications, shopping preferences, and technological improvements. The approach applied in this study was a convenience sampling technique with 385 respondents, utilizing partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). The finding reveals substantial movements toward online shopping, propelled by concerns about health and safety, convenience, and technological advancements. However, traditional in-store experiences maintain relevance for certain consumer segments, highlighting the complexity of shopping preferences in the post-pandemic era. Future research should delve deeper into the role of social media in shaping purchasing decisions. By improving our understanding of post-pandemic consumer behavior, stakeholders can better anticipate trends, stimulate innovation, and foster resilience amidst ongoing uncertainty.
Keywords: Consumer Purchase Behaviour, Shopping Preferences, Spending Habits, Lifestyle Changes, Technological Advancement

Introduction
The COVID-19 pandemic has not only brought about unprecedented challenges but has also catalyzed significant transformations in various aspects of life, including consumer behaviour. The pandemic has reshaped in terms of shopping preferences, spending habits, lifestyles, and technological advancements; consequently, online sales skyrocketed as a result of the epidemic. Customers turned to internet shopping, as physical store visits were more

restricted and many were struggling financially, which led to an increase in online sales (Gu et al., 2021).

As of January 2023, Malaysia had 33.03 million internet users, highlighting the growing digital landscape. During the peak of the pandemic in 2021, Malaysians spent an average of over 9 hours and 17 minutes online daily, with 75% visiting e-commerce platforms and 45% making purchases (Commission Factory, 2023). This shift underscores the significant role that digital technologies and consumer preferences play in reshaping the future of shopping behavior. Studying these dynamics is critical not only for academic understanding but also for businesses to remain competitive in an ever-evolving marketplace (Nodirovna, 2024). By examining the intersection of shopping preferences, spending habits, lifestyle changes, and technological advancements, this research provides valuable insights for both policymakers and businesses. It highlights the need to adapt to changing consumer behaviors and leverage technology to enhance consumer engagement and satisfaction, ultimately driving growth in the digital economy (Sagar, 2024).

As the world grappled with the effects of prolonged lockdown and social distancing measures, online shopping emerged as a lifeline for many, driven by necessity and safety concerns. This surge in online shopping has prompted businesses to adapt their strategies to meet the growing demand for digital shopping experiences. However, the impact of the pandemic extends beyond mere changes in shopping habits; it has fundamentally altered lifestyle patterns and accelerated technological advancements. To comprehend these changes and their implications, this research uses the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to address the psychological and behavioural aspects guiding individuals' actions and their acceptance of technology. Moreover, the pandemic has underscored the importance of sustainable resource management and efficient resource utilization, aligning with Malaysia's efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 12 by 2030 (*GOAL 12*, n.d.). Thus, understanding consumer behaviour in the wake of the pandemic not only fosters business resilience but also contributes to long-term sustainability goals.

According to Deloitte eight out of ten consumers will favor online purchasing following the pandemic (Akrur Barua, n.d.). While myriads of research have been done on factors impacting consumer behaviour in general (Tien et al., 2021); there is still a lack of research on changes in shopping preferences, shopping habits, lifestyle, and technological advancement in consumer behaviour in Malaysia, thus this study aims to fill this gap and provide insights that are essential for businesses to strategize effectively in the post-pandemic era.

This paper focuses on the impact of shopping preferences, spending habits, lifestyle changes, and technological advancements on consumer behavior. Specifically, it aims to examine how changes in these areas collectively influence consumer purchase behavior in Malaysia following the COVID-19 pandemic. It also begs the question: how do shopping preferences, spending habits, lifestyle changes, and technological advancements influence changes in consumer behavior?

Literature Review

Theoretical foundation

To explore the impact of shopping preferences, spending habits, lifestyle changes, and technological advancements on consumer behavior, this study employs the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). TPB explains how shopping preferences and spending habits are shaped by attitudes and perceived control, while lifestyle changes influence subjective norms. TAM helps analyze how perceptions of technological advancements affect attitudes and intentions, influencing shopping preferences and spending habits. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive understanding of how these factors impact consumer behavior in the post-COVID-19 era.

Consumer Purchase Behavior

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered consumer purchase behavior, leading to pronounced shifts in shopping habits across the globe(Monica, 2024). As lockdowns and social distancing measures were enforced, consumers increasingly turned to online shopping platforms for their convenience and value (Zeqiri et al., 2023). This surge in e-commerce activity accelerated pre-existing trends toward digital purchasing channels, prompting businesses to enhance their online presence and logistics capabilities to meet heightened demand (Mohamed Noor et al., 2024). As restrictions eased in some regions, a hybrid shopping model emerged where consumers combined online browsing with in-store visits, often for more experiential or higher-value purchases (Bohoyo, 2023). Overall, the pandemic reshaped how consumers shop and influenced their priorities, emphasizing convenience, safety, and value in purchasing decisions (Musa et al., 2022).

Shopping Preferences and Consumer Purchase Behaviour

The relationship between online shopping preferences and online consumer purchase behavior is a critical area of study in marketing and consumer behavior research (Pal & Kumari, 2023a) Shopping preferences, which include favored product types, preferred shopping methods (online or in-store), and brand loyalty, play a significant role in shaping consumer purchase behavior (Solomon, 2019). For instance, the rise of e-commerce has transformed consumer expectations, emphasizing convenience, variety, and competitive pricing (Jancheski, 2023). These preferences lead to shifts in purchase behavior, such as increased frequency of online purchases and reduced patronage of physical stores (Yokoyama et al., 2023). Other findings revealed that convenience, time-saving, website features, and security influence customers' intentions to shop online (Kasuma et al., 2020).

However, some studies have found that certain customers still prefer not to shop online as their primary method of purchasing. This reluctance can be attributed to the 'privacy risk', 'lack of feel-and-touch associated with online purchases', 'psychological risk', 'social risk', and 'feeling that e-vendors are pretending to care about buyers' welfare' (Rasty et al., 2020), and concerns about counterfeit or imitation items (MSU Today, 2023). Other possible reasons include failed delivery, receiving defective products, discrepancies with the order (Kasuma et al., 2020), and doubts about the reliability and credibility of e-retailers (Adwan et al., 2020). Thus, these inconsistencies in results create a gap in current research. Addressing this gap is essential as it offers valuable insights into future market trends and consumer expectations,

allowing businesses to stay ahead of the curve (Sheth, 2020). Therefore, based on the above argument, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: There is a significant relationship between changes in shopping preferences and pandemic consumer purchase behaviour

Spending Habits and Consumer Purchase Behaviour
The relationship between spending habits and consumer purchase behavior is a pivotal subject in understanding market dynamics. Spending habits, encompassing how frequently consumers make purchases, the types of products they prioritize, and their overall budget allocation, significantly impact consumer purchase behavior (Šostar & Ristanović, 2023). A study by Pal and Kumari (2023b), two years after the COVID-19 pandemic, revealed that consumer spending habits in Patna City, Bihar, India, have shifted towards online shopping, with most respondents making monthly purchases, primarily of electronic gadgets and clothing. They find the process convenient, secure, and more affordable than offline shopping, with good product quality options. Another study found the marketing mix significantly influenced purchase behaviour, mediated by consumer spending habits (Qaiser et al., 2023).

However, a study on Malaysian youth spending patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic found inconsistent results, whereby, expenditures on food and transportation significantly influenced the spending pattern during COVID-19, whereas, entertainment expenditures showed no significant relationship with the overall spending pattern (Ismail et al., 2022). Thus, the gap is crucial to address because it provides deeper insights into how the COVID-19 pandemic reshapes consumer priorities and spending patterns, informing businesses and policymakers about sustainable strategies for economic resilience and recovery (Tao et al., 2022). Studying this relationship is vital for companies as it aids in forecasting market trends and adjusting marketing strategies to align with evolving consumer behavior. It also helps develop targeted products and services that meet current consumer needs, enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty (Nurhilalia & Saleh, 2024). Thus, ongoing research in this domain enriches theoretical knowledge and provides practical applications for navigating changing market conditions. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: There is a significant relationship between changes in spending habits and consumer purchase behaviour

Lifestyle Changes and Consumer Purchase Behaviour
The relationship between lifestyle changes and consumer purchase behavior is crucial for analyzing market trends. Lifestyle changes, such as increased health awareness, a focus on essential goods, greater emphasis on hygiene, and the need to save money, significantly impact consumer purchasing behavior (Mehta et al., 2020). For example, the growing emphasis on healthy living has led to increased demand for health and wellness food (Ali & Ali, 2020). Similarly, the rise of remote work has transformed consumer behavior and driven higher sales of home office supplies and technology while reducing expenditures on professional attire and commuting (Beno, 2021). These lifestyle changes impact not only the types of products consumers purchase but also the frequency and methods of their buying,

such as the shift towards online shopping for convenience, ease of use, and instant gratification during the COVID-19 pandemic (Longo, 2024).

Despite widespread awareness of the importance of a healthy lifestyle, a study involving 3,533 Italians found that 46.1% of the population reported not having changed their habits or lifestyles. Additionally, no significant differences were observed between the percentage of people who engaged in physical activities and those who did not during the COVID-19 lockdown(Di Renzo et al., 2020). Given the inconsistencies in the relationship between lifestyle changes and consumer behavior, it is essential to address this gap. Doing so will offer businesses valuable insights into sustainable consumer trends, enabling them to adjust their strategies to meet evolving demands and preferences. (Das et al., 2022). Thus, ongoing research in this domain not only contributes to academic knowledge but also offers practical solutions for businesses navigating an evolving consumer landscape. Hence, the above discussion leads to the following hypothesis.

H3: There is a significant relationship between changes in lifestyle and consumer purchase behaviour.

Technological Advancement and Consumer Purchase Behaviour
The relationship between technological advancement and changes in consumer purchase behavior is a critical area of consumer behavior research. Technological advancements have dramatically reshaped how consumers make purchasing decisions (Kumar et al., 2021). People will increasingly spend on fitness wearables and other wellness products and services through online platforms (Callaghan et al., 2021). Moreover, these technologies enhance convenience, provide personalized shopping experiences, and offer a wider range of product choices, thereby influencing consumer behavior (Tao et al., 2022). For example, the rise of mobile shopping apps and social media commerce has made it easier for consumers to shop anytime and anywhere, leading to increased impulse purchases and higher overall spending (Jancheski, 2023).

Meanwhile, artificial intelligence and data analytics allow for highly personalized marketing strategies, which can significantly affect consumer preferences and buying patterns (Haleem et al., 2022). However, although immediate effects have been examined, the broader implications of these technologies on future purchasing trends across various industries, product types, geographic locations, and levels of consumer trust remain largely unexplored (Suherlan & Okombo, 2023). In addition, while several studies highlighted the growing significance of technology in consumer behavior, few have quantitatively demonstrated how these factors affect consumer intentions (Paro et al., 2021). Understanding these dynamics enables businesses to leverage new technologies to meet evolving consumer needs and preferences, enhance customer engagement, develop effective digital marketing strategies, and innovate their product offerings to help them remain competitive in a rapidly changing technological landscape. (Longo, 2024).

Consequently, continued research in this field not only enriches academic understanding but also offers practical insights for managing technological advancements in the market. With the above argument, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: There is a significant relationship between technological advancements and consumer purchase behaviour.

Building on the existing literature, this study establishes a new research framework, as illustrated in Figure 1.
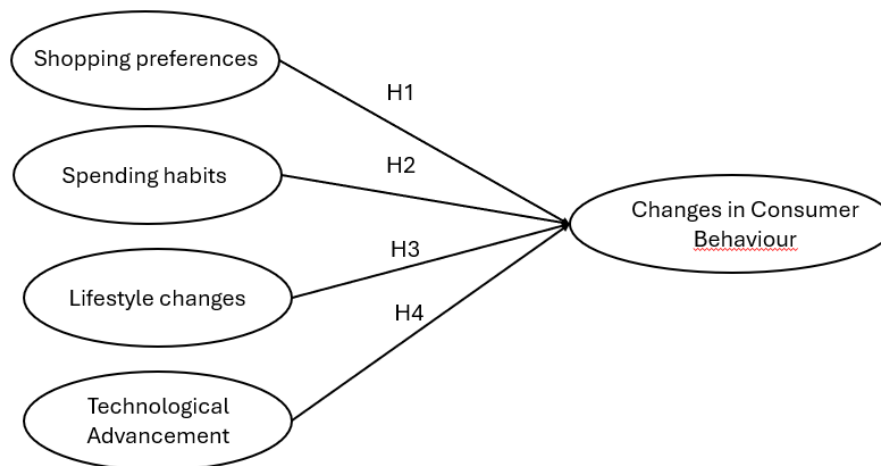

Figure 1. The research model

Research Method

Data Collection and Sampling

This study employed a quantitative approach for data collection by using a structured survey questionnaire administered to consumers in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. Respondents were selected through the non-probability "convenience sampling" technique due to the accessibility of the respondents and the time constraint from the Klang Valley region. The unit of analysis focuses on consumers from diverse demographic backgrounds who have experienced the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Klang Valley region, chosen as the target area due to its high concentration of consumer activity. We received 400 complete questionnaires, of which 382 were deemed suitable for analysis. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaires were distributed online via email, and social media, e.g., WhatsApp, and Facebook.

The Results

Characteristics of Respondent

This study tested the hypotheses using Smart-PLS software, The data were analyzed using both structural and measurement models. According to the data presented in Table I, the majority of the respondents are female (57.4%), with the highest proportion of participants between the ages of 26 and 35 with 37.7%, followed by the lowest frequency of 7 (1%) for those over 55. Furthermore, approximately 88% of the respondents are employed, and most of the respondents have income levels ranging between RM2,000 and RM5,000 (57.9%).

Table I
Demographic Profile of The Respondents

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	164	42.6
	Female	221	57.4
	Total	**385**	**100**
Age	Below 25	33	8.6
	26 - 35	145	37.7
	36 - 45	142	36.9
	46 - 55	58	15.1
	Above 55	7	1.8
	Total	**385**	**100.0**
Employed Status	Employed	342	88.8
	Unemployed	11	2.9
	Student	27	7.0
	Retired	5	1.3
	Total	**385**	**100.0**
Income Level	Below RM2,000	34	8.8
	RM2,001 - RM5,000	223	57.9
	RM5,001 - RM10,000	121	31.4
	Above RM10,000	7	1.8
	Total	**385**	**100.0**

Reliability and Validity (Measurement Model)

	CB	LC	SH	SP	TA
CB					
LC	0.786				
SH	0.859	0.822			
SP	0.802	0.764	0.860		
TA	0.740	0.851	0.739	0.697	

Discriminant validity is shown in Table II. To test discriminant validity, there are two criteria included in this analysis which are Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) and cross loading method. HTMT value is below 0.90 (Gold et. al, 2001) showing that discriminant validity was successfully achieved. Based on this analysis in this study, overall, the HTMT values are below 0.9. The second criterion for measuring discriminant validity was assessed using the cross-loading method. Each indicator within a specific construct must have a higher outer loading value on its corresponding construct compared to its loadings on other constructs. Table III shows that the cross-loading values of the 6 indicators for SP, SH, LC, TA, and CB were higher on their respective constructs than on any other variables, thereby confirming that the indicators achieved discriminant validity.

Table II

Discriminant Validity

	CB	LC	SH	SP	TA
CB1	0.757	0.628	0.634	0.618	0.550
CB2	0.805	0.691	0.655	0.645	0.621
CB4	0.763	0.561	0.682	0.598	0.560
CB5	0.767	0.612	0.634	0.635	0.589
CB6	0.823	0.651	0.718	0.637	0.609
CB7	0.788	0.559	0.712	0.646	0.553
LC2	0.642	0.815	0.642	0.598	0.720
LC3	0.618	0.785	0.651	0.626	0.677
LC4	0.597	0.758	0.654	0.614	0.660
LC5	0.657	0.835	0.698	0.595	0.644
LC6	0.603	0.767	0.607	0.601	0.670
SH1	0.601	0.663	0.700	0.649	0.664
SH2	0.659	0.682	0.768	0.628	0.641
SH4	0.667	0.645	0.777	0.709	0.582
SH5	0.663	0.555	0.772	0.640	0.465
SH6	0.644	0.555	0.751	0.615	0.431
SP3	0.657	0.636	0.694	0.818	0.649
SP5	0.617	0.568	0.669	0.768	0.504
SP6	0.613	0.591	0.657	0.763	0.488
TA4	0.651	0.702	0.623	0.640	0.880
TA5	0.615	0.716	0.632	0.563	0.831
TA6	0.616	0.747	0.617	0.578	0.832

The composite reliability of all constructs ranges from 0.87 to 0.90, which is above the recommended threshold value of 0.7. Thus, the results show that the items used to represent the constructs have satisfactory internal consistency. The lowest AVE values for all constructs are higher than 0.569, exceeding the threshold value (>0.5). All items loaded significantly (>0.7)

Table III
Cross-loading values

| Construct	Item	Factor Loading	Composite reliability	Cronbach Alpha	AVE	Decision
Shopping Preference	SP3	0.818	0.828	0.827	0.614	Accepted
	SP5	0.768				
	SP6	0.763				
Shopping Habits	SH1	0.701	0.869	0.868	0.569	Accepted
	SH2	0.768				
	SH4	0.777				
	SH5	0.772				
	SH6	0.751				
Lifestyle Changes	LC2	0.816	0.895	0.894	0.628	Accepted
	LC3	0.785				
	LC4	0.758				
	LC5	0.834				
	LC6	0.766				
Technological Advancement	TA3	0.832	0.885	0.885	0.719	Accepted
	TA4	0.860				
	TA5	0.812				
	TA6	0.812				
Consumer Behaviour	CB1	0.759	0.906	0.905	0.615	Accepted
	CB2	0.815				
	CB4	0.765				
	CB5	0.773				
	CB6	0.809				
	CB7	0.783				

Hypothesis Testing (Structural Model)
PLS V4.0 was used to test the research hypotheses. As a first step, the preliminary analysis was done, and hypothesis testing was then evaluated by analyzing the path coefficient, t-statistics, and p-value. The model incorporates the four independent variables, namely shopping preference, shopping habits, lifestyle changes, and technological advancement, and their effect on changes in consumer behavior is evaluated (Table IV). The findings from the analysis show H1 is rejected, β= 0.187, p-value=0.251, and t-value was 0.673, indicating that the result is not significant even at the 10% level; therefore, there is a non-significant relationship between shopping preference and consumer purchase behavior. H2 is supported, as the hypothesis examining the relationship between shopping habits and consumer behavior, based on the result, the path coefficient was β= 0.500, while a p-value of 0.052 and t-value of1.628 , suggesting that shopping habits have a marginally significant relationship with consumer purchase behavior. The findings from the analysis for lifestyle changes show β=0.102, p-value= 0.277, t-value= 0.591; thus, H3 is rejected and that there is not significant relationship between lifestyle changes and consumer purchase behavior.

Finally, H4 is supported with β=0.155, p-value= 0.094, and t-value was 1.314, showing that the technological advancement has a significant correlation with changes in purchase behavior at the 10% level.

Table IV
Path coefficients, R² values, and Hypothesis Tests for Consumer Purchase Behaviour

Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Coefficient	T-value	P-value	R^2	Hypothesis decision
H1	SP-> CB	0.187	0.673	0.251		Not Significant
H2	SH-> CB	0.500	1.628	0.052*	0.774	Significant
H3	LC-> CB	0.102	0.591	0.277		Not Significant
H4	TA-> CB	0.155	1.314	0.094*		Significant
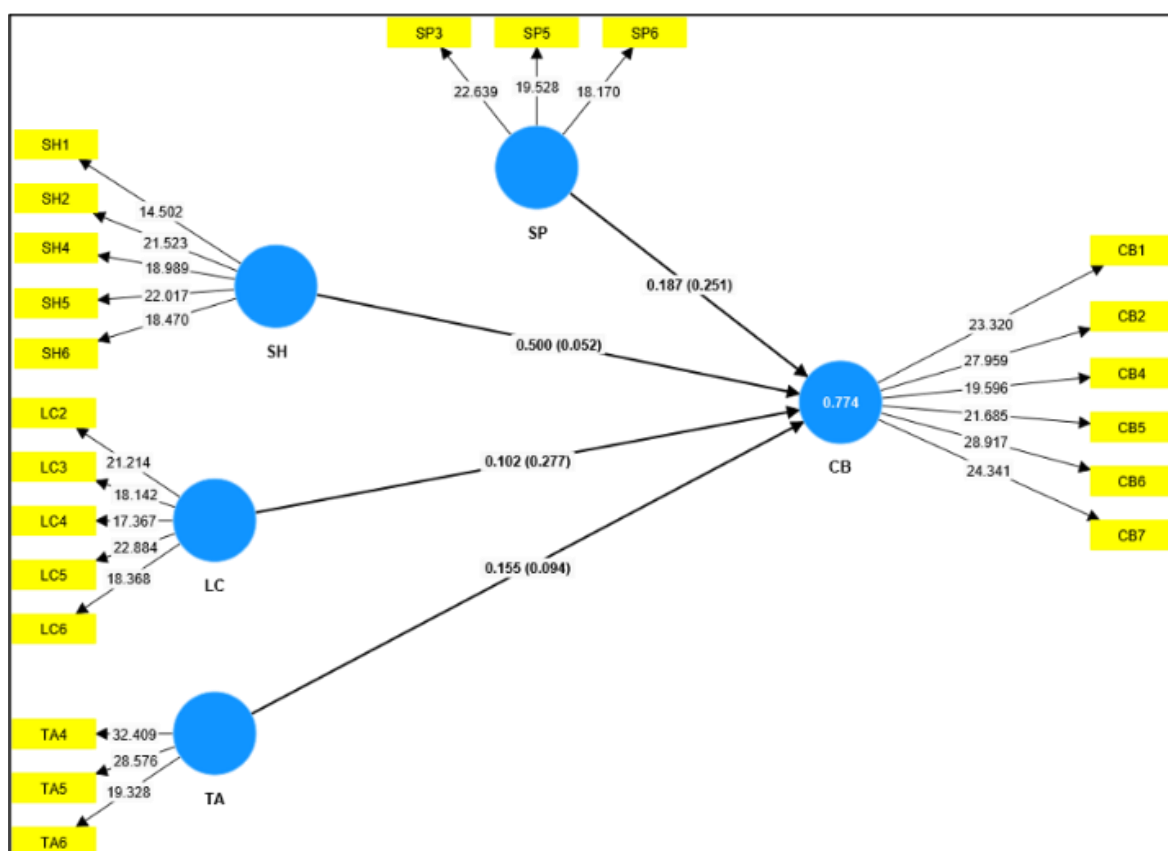
Conclusion
The COVID-19 pandemic has caused seismic shifts in consumer behaviour across the Klang Valley region of Malaysia, reshaping shopping preferences (Matyus et al., 2023), spending habits (Qaiser et al., 2023), technological adoption (Rangaswamy et al., 2022), and lifestyle changes (Ahmad et al., 2022). The findings offer insights into how businesses and policymakers can adapt to the post-pandemic consumer landscape. One of the most significant findings of the study is the notable shift in spending habits and technological advancement in influencing consumer behavior post-COVID-19.

Spending habits shape consumer behavior by influencing purchasing decisions, brand loyalty, and financial priorities("Consumer Buying Behavior: How Have Spending Habits Changed in 2024?," 2024). While there has been a shift towards health-conscious and home-centric lifestyles during the pandemic ("Consumer Trends 2024," 2024), the study suggests that these changes may not have a significant or lasting impact on consumer behaviour. Safety concerns and the convenience e-commerce offers have driven this transition, prompting consumers to opt for contactless payment methods (Ingaldi & Brožova, 2020). This shift necessitates businesses to adapt their strategies, focusing on enhancing digital interfaces and optimizing online customer experiences to meet evolving consumer preferences. Moreover, the pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital technologies, such as e-commerce platforms and fitness apps (Angosto et al., 2023).

Consumers increasingly rely on technology for various aspects of their lives, including shopping, communication, and entertainment (Vassev, 2021). This transformation underscores the need for businesses to anticipate future shifts in technology usage and consumer expectations, aligning their offerings with these trends to remain competitive in the digital marketplace.

This research also highlights the moderate influence of technological advancements on consumer behaviour. Rapid technological adoption during the pandemic has changed customer expectations and decision-making processes, shaping how consumers interact with businesses and make purchasing decisions (Yousaf et al., 2021). Businesses must adapt to these changes by integrating new technologies that align with consumer preferences and enhance the overall customer experience. Understanding external factors influencing consumer behaviour is crucial for businesses and policymakers to navigate the post-pandemic era successfully. Insights from the study can inform more effective strategies for businesses to adapt to evolving consumer trends, while policymakers can use these findings to develop policies that support businesses in this transition (Cirera et al., 2021). For example, policymakers may consider incentivizing the adoption of digital technologies and supporting local businesses to stimulate economic growth in the post-pandemic landscape.

The study provides valuable insights into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumer behaviour in the Klang Valley region of Malaysia. By understanding these changes and their implications, businesses and policymakers can better navigate the post-pandemic consumer landscape, driving economic recovery and fostering sustainable growth.

Limitations and Future Research
This study, which examines changes in consumer behavior post-COVID-19 in Malaysia using TPB and TAM theories, has several limitations. The findings may not be generalizable beyond the cultural and economic context of Malaysia, potentially limiting their applicability to other regions. Additionally, the study might not capture long-term behavioral shifts as the pandemic's impact continues to evolve. The TPB and TAM theories employed may also fall short of addressing the full complexity of emerging consumer behaviors influenced by ongoing global changes.

To address these limitations, future research could benefit from expanding the scope of analysis to include additional variables such as socio-economic factors, including occupation, employment status, family earning status, and health awareness. Investigating other influences like responsible and self-care behaviors, intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, social media influence, and economic uncertainty would provide a more comprehensive understanding of evolving consumer behaviors. These enhancements could offer deeper insights into businesses and policymakers navigating the post-pandemic landscape.

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