

How We Survive The Covid-19 Pandemic? Perspectives of Food Hawkers' Businesses Performances

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Abstract

Malaysia is one of the many countries affected by COVID-19, socially and economically. One of the sectors most affected was the food hawkers. Thus, this study measured the food hawker business thriving efforts during the pandemic. Specifically, the study's objectives are to determine the Impact of a movement control order on food hawker businesses' performances and determine the moderating effect of digitalization on food hawker businesses' performances. Two hundred and twenty-two (222) data were collected from food hawkers in Selangor, Kedah, and Terengganu between February and March 2021. At the time, Malaysia was under movement control order (MCO) 2.0. Thus, data were collected online via google form and distributed to businesses through the Whatsapp application. The data were then analyzed using SPSS v24 for descriptive analysis and multiple regression relationships. It was found that there is a relationship between MCO and food hawker business with a standard beta coefficient of 0.836. Digitalization strongly impacts food hawker businesses with a 0.886 standard beta coefficient. Even though food businesses were severely affected during MCO, the digitalization movement impacted sustaining the businesses.

Keywords: COVID-19, Street Food Hawkers, Digitalization, Business Performance

Introduction

The economy was severely affected during the movement control order due to COVID-19. However, food hawkers' business appears to expand more due to the pandemic (Bezerra, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an inevitable surge in the use of digital technologies due to social distancing norms and nationwide lockdowns. At the same time, people and organizations worldwide have had to adjust to new ways of work and life (De et al., 2020). Many were forced to work from home, while others may even be laid out of a job due to the pandemic (International Labour Organization-Organization for Economic Cooperation and

Development (ILO-OECD), 2020). Some people turned to the food business when they lost their job after the outbreak spread globally. They started their business to sell foods and beverages to the community since it is one way to support them financially throughout the pandemic (Bezerra, 2020).

According to Abrahale et al (2019), The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations defined the term 'street food' as 'ready-to-eat foods and beverages prepared and/or sold by vendors and hawkers, especially on the streets and other similar places' (Food and Agriculture Organization, 1989). In Malaysia, hawkers' stalls are usually located by the roadside. The consumers can access the sites easily, such as along the main road or near occupied buildings, neighborhoods, schools, and public areas. The development of the hawker business agglomeration center follows a unique pattern. Initially, a pioneer hawker will set up a business at a particular location on a takeaway basis (Raflis et al., 2016). Later, many other hawkers will follow suit, and suddenly the location becomes a street full of many hawker businesses.

Street vendors or hawkers are found worldwide and carry wares on their persons or use carts or mobile stalls (Hays-Mitchell, 1994). Their distribution reflects customer traffic; some are centralized in officially designated market areas or unofficial semi-permanent sites. Food is commonly sold in this area (Dunnett, 2003) and has been labeled street food (Tinker, 1997). The activity is greatest in less developed regions (Yasmeen, 2001). Cooked food hawking is characterized by a small unit size (Tinker, 2003) and ease of business entry due to low start-up and operating costs (Henderson et al., 2012).

Although street food has been in the food service system, its development has tremendously grown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In Malaysia, many people who are affected by COVID-19 have turned to the food business as a way to sustain survival. This has brought about a different level of competition between hawkers and the surviving plight. Due to the movement control order, the street food business continues to thrive (Cheema, 2020). No one was allowed to move about, dining-in was restricted, and consumers were frightened for their safety; thus, food businesses were challenged to maintain their businesses innovatively.

One of the initiatives done by the government was to encourage small businesses including food business to use digital platform. Although, there are some measures taken by food business to reach their customer such as having a delivery service (Chai & Yat, 2019) and packed food for all meals sold, and food catered to on-site location, digitalization has brought another dimension in food hawkers mode of maintaining sales by the food hawkers.

Literature Review

Background

Gastrointestinal and respiratory tract infections are often caused by coronaviruses and are inherently classified into four main types: gamma-coronavirus, delta-coronavirus, beta-coronavirus, and alpha-coronavirus (Fong et al., 2020). COVID-19 is transmitted by dust particles and fomites when the infector and the infected person are close to unsafe contact. The symptoms of COVID-19 typically manifest as fever, dry cough, and fatigue. Some infected individuals may have minor signs such as headaches, muscle pain, runny nose, sore throat, or diarrhea. Severe pneumonia, organ failure, acute respiratory tract infection, and septic shock

can lead to death in some COVID-19 patients (Huang et al., 2020). However, some infected people do not develop any symptoms and are called asymptomatic carriers. The elderly, children, pregnant women, and individuals with chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, heart attacks, and kidney and liver diseases are the people who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. Thus, the only precautionary measure was to avoid contact between people to reduce the risk of infection. This has brought about other risks. Social distancing has caused anxiety and depression in some communities, such as among the elderly and children. Additionally, the movement control order instated to curb people from going out and congregating further caused disadvantages to the economy. The food hawkers' businesses included.

Food Hawker Business

The word 'street foods' refers to a broad range of ready-to-eat foods and beverages sold and sometimes prepared in public places, particularly on the streets or roadside. Street food vendors may be located outside or under a roof easily accessible from the street. Rapid urbanization has stimulated growth in street food vendors in many cities worldwide. Movement from rural areas to city centers has created a daily need for many working people to eat outside the home (Allain, n.d). The demand for relatively cheap, ready-to-eat food has increased as people have less time to prepare meals. Ready-to-eat food is foods that have been prepared so they can be consumed as is, without any additional cooking (Billings-Smith, 2018).

According to Kumar (2015), the first distribution of street food, small fried fish, was sold on the streets of ancient Greece. Street food was commonly eaten by poor city dwellers of ancient Rome, whose homes had no ovens or hearths. In ancient China, street food was commonly catered to the poor; wealthy residents would send servants to buy street food and bring food back to their masters to dine in their homes. Street vendors offer hot-fresh, lip-filling snacks with absolute value for money. These foods are popular because they are readily available at half the price or even less than any restaurant food.

Movement Control Order

COVID-19 was first found in Malaysia on 25 January 2020 among three Chinese people who entered Malaysia via Singapore on 23 January 2020 (Pung et al., 2020). On 4 February 2020, the first local infection of COVID-19 was reported, and the number of individuals infected remained below 25 until 1 March, when the number of cases increased and multifold into the pandemic. The pandemic forced Malaysia into the first Movement Control Order, which started in March 2020 (Immigration Department of Malaysia, 2020).

The steps began with the restriction of entry into Malaysia of selective foreign nationals, as well as self-quarantine of Malaysian and non-Malaysian citizens returning from the hotspots of COVID-19, and resulted in the passing and enforcement of the Movement Control Order (MCO) (McKinsey & Company, 2020). The MCO, also called a partial lockdown, reflects a significant move taken to control the COVID-19 pandemic by the Malaysian government. It bans mass demonstrations and meetings at all locations worldwide, including religious services, and requires the closure of all business premises except producers, retailers, distributors, and food outlets, similar to a cordon sanitaire (Kumar et al. 2020; McKinsey & Company, 2020). The order enhances travel restrictions, with fines required for all overseas

traveling Malaysians and continued medical screening and 14-day returning Malaysians quarantine. Furthermore, all foreign visitors are barred from entering Malaysia.

While concerns about the efficacy of the MCO were created at the early stage of its implementation as mass movements continued, strict enforcement and increased awareness of the impacts of COVID-19 have brought substantial improvements in compliance, which has been considered the key reason behind the decrease since mid-April in new COVID-19 cases. In March 2022, COVID-19 cases in Malaysia slowly decreased, and it is moving into the endemic phase. However, people are still encouraged to maintain a 1-meter physical distance in public areas. Restrictions are still imposed, and although the business has opened as usual, some customers still prefer to dine at their homes. Thus, businesses have to be innovative to reach the customer.

Digitalization

Many domains of social life are restructured around digital communication and media infrastructures. Brennen and Kreiss (2016) based their definition of digitalization on social life – in other words, how people interact. As such interactions move away from analog technologies (snail mail, telephone calls) to digital ones (Email, chat, social media), both work and leisure domains become digitalized.

According to De et al (2020), digital payments and digital currencies are likely to have a key role in the post-pandemic situation. As digital payments are contactless, they are encouraged by governments and will likely see a surge. Also, online delivery services were encouraging customers to make payments through digital payment systems like credit or debit cards or mobile payments, with mandates by the government (Bhandari, 2020). This is likely to result in a surge in digital payment usage, leading to work on the diffusion of digital payment technology.

The COVID-19 outbreak, however, has accelerated and demonstrated that digitalization is key for businesses to thrive. According to Malek et al (2021), businesses would have to be better, faster, and cheaper and continue to deliver an overall good customer experience to retain their clients. Tong and Gong (2020) stated that online non-food shopping increased by 53%, online grocery shopping increased by 144%, and online food delivery by 61%. On the first day of the MCO alone, food delivery platforms such as GrabFood and FoodPanda witnessed a 30% increase in orders (STAR online, 2020).

Businesses have interpreted digitalization as a means to fulfill customers' needs more effectively, adapt to changes in the sector, and increase their competitive advantage. Moreover, the effects of digitalization were anticipated for a company's value chain and value network. Digitalization leads to changes or new products and services, and digitalization also leads to new business relations. Furthermore, digitalization influenced the company's internal structures by reinforcing interdisciplinary collaborations (Rachinger et al., 2019). Thus, digitalization is inevitable for food businesses to survive during the pandemic and post-COVID-19.

There is an impact between movement control orders (MCO) and the food hawker businesses' performances

No dine-ins were allowed during the Movement Control Order (MCO). According to Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, all restaurants and hawker stalls in MCO states were only allowed to operate for takeaways. In contrast, states under the Conditional MCO and Recovery MCO can be operated based on existing standard operating procedures (SOPs) (Povera & Harun, 2021). However, in February, the regulations during the movement control order were relieved as Senior Minister (Security Cluster) Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob stated more than two persons are allowed per table for dining in states where the Movement Control Order (MCO) is imposed. Malaysian Indian Restaurant Owners Association (Primas) Deputy President C. Krishnan also appealed to the government to allow manual check-in and app-based registration to enter eateries (Babulal, 2021).

Later, as more people were vaccinated, Malaysia exercised Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO/PKPB) and Recovery MCO (RMCO/PKPP) with more extended SOPs. In light of this, the National Security Council (MKN) has released the updated version, i.e., food delivery services are allowed to operate from 6 am to midnight. Businesses, the economy, and industry are also allowed to operate as determined by the government, such as Ramadan bazaars could operate between 3.00 pm to 8.00 pm, in compliance with SOPs and supervision of the authorities and RELA/PBT members. Aidilfitri bazaars are allowed with extended hours of between 10.00 am to 2.00 am (previously midnight), in compliance with the Ramadan Bazaar and Aidilfitri Bazaar SOPs. While, restaurants, shops/food stalls, food trucks, roadside hawkers, street hawkers, food courts/hawker centers, roadside food stalls/kiosks, grocery stores, and convenience stores are allowed to operate between 6.00 am to midnight, in compliance with the food sector's SOPs. As for restaurants and eateries, they are allowed to operate on a dine-in basis (with a one-meter distance between customers, according to table size), takeaway, delivery, or drive-throughs in compliance with the food sector's SOPs. Hours of operation will be from 6.00 am to midnight (subject to license conditions). Therefore, the restrictions on dining-in, a limited number of customer per table, non-allowable for the unvaccinated customer to dine in, physical distancing, and shorter time in business operation has influence the performance of the food business, especially the food hawkers. Thus, the hypotheses are stipulated

H_{1a} : There is a relationship between new standard operating procedures (SOPs) for dining towards food hawker businesses' performances

H_{1b} : There is a relationship between restrictions numbers of customers per table with food hawker businesses' performances

H_{1c} : There is a relationship between movement control order (MCO) with food hawker businesses' performances

Digitalization moderates the Impact between movement control order (MCO) and the food hawker businesses' performances

COVID-19 influenced people's routines. Corporate sectors and government offices had closed down to curb the spread of the pandemic. Companies have been vulnerable to major changes and have switched to an online and digital platforms. Although the influence of digital transformation has been extensively studied on efficiency and corporate culture, there has been relatively little exposure to how COVID-19 has affected consumers and the culture of consumption. On the contrary, managers frequently take a wait-and-see approach to the sales effect of COVID-19 (Kim, 2020).

Consumers live through the pandemic, and even after the situation eases, certain modifications could be long-lasting. It is often uncertain whether and how many customers will return after the pandemic passes. Consumers live through the pandemic, and some changes might be long-lasting even after the situation eases. The new normal would be the common routine when the pandemic turns endemic.

According to Kim (2020), the pandemic has become an accelerator to the structural changes in consumption and digital transformation in the marketplace. Digitalization offers a new source of value to food businesses (Kim, 2020). Tong and Gong's (2020) study showed that online non-food shopping increased by 53%, while online grocery shopping increased by 144%, and online food delivery by 61%. While food delivery still showed a trajectory post - MCO 1.0 (Nathan, 2020).

With the assistance of emerging technology, businesses can better seize opportunities in a crisis environment. Digitalization has provided a new opportunity in the COVID-19 outbreak (Nambisan et al., 2019). Digitalization is expected to have a cross-cutting effect in each field and to promote the creation of new digital products and services based on the versatility concept. There are substantial motives for the food delivery business to have a delivery application in 2021 besides growing the business during this outbreak. According to Ashley (2021), the five core reasons the food delivery business needs customized mobile apps are that it can increase the demand for delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic, the food delivery arena has the potential to flourish in the future, increase convenience and transparency for both application user and merchandise, it also increases the returning visitors, and it is easily targeting the right audience and remain connected with them. People are apprehensive about health and need assurance that the restaurant meal they get delivered is safe to consume, and this is the way to help provide a safe restaurant delivery service.

The government has made recommendations for food and beverage businesses in 2021: contactless ordering, contactless payment, delivery, takeaway instead of dine-in, and lastly, keeping social distancing during the outbreak. The MCO, CMCO, and RMCO SOPs in Malaysia will continue to change and evolve depending on the number of COVID-19 cases, so citizens should always stay prepared. These are the two elements that every F&B business could offer, such as contactless payment and ordering for both walk-in and dine-in customers or using food delivery (Thum, 2021).

In this new normal, the government's focus on the digital economy is crucial as it penetrates all sectors of the economy, and going digital is the way to remain relevant. The Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint sets out big targets to achieve by 2025: creating 500,000 jobs, 875,000 MSMEs to adopt e-commerce, and digitalizing government services. Digital economies rely on a well-connected infrastructure. In addition to relatively high Internet penetration in the country, a strong transport, logistic, and supply chain network, security, and a resilient economy are also needed. The imminent focus on accelerating a 5G network will allow these benefits to be accrued and expanded. Moving forward, establishing the Digital Investment Office to coordinate and facilitate all digital investments in Malaysia is a promising step to attract high-quality investments in the digital economy. Nationwide, hundreds of

thousands of drivers, delivery partners, and merchants are earning income on the Grab platform (Abdullah, 2021).

According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal (2021), as of the closing date of the Wage Subsidy Programme (PSU) 1.0 on 26 February 2021, a total of 322,177 employers and 2.64 million registered employees had been facilitated through this program under PRIHATIN and PENJANA, two of Malaysia government agencies.

Then, to assist workers who have lost their jobs, the Employment Insurance System under Social Security Organisation (SOCSO) provided RM85.96 million in financial assistance, which includes the increase of Job Seeker Allowance as announced in the Budget 2021 to over 18,000 workers who had lost their jobs as of 14 March 2021. Besides, as of 15 March 2021, a total of 2,586 health employees had been hired to strengthen the public health system to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, including Science Officers, Diagnostic Radiologists, Medical Laboratory Technologists, Assistant Environmental Health Officers, Assistant Medical Officers, and Nurses as well as 3,591 contract health workers were appointed to meet immediate staff needs following the rise in COVID-19 cases.

Thus, with a continuous resumption of economic activity coupled with various assistance of the government's initiatives to ease the burden of people, businesses, and the economy, these might lead to the recovery of the labor market to be back on track and thus strengthen the labor market momentum. Thus, another hypothesis is stipulated;

H_{2a} : There is a positive relationship between digitalization and food hawker businesses' performances

H_{2b} : There is a positive relationship between the online platform and food hawker businesses' performances

H_{2c} : There is a relationship between government initiatives for digitalization and food hawker businesses' performances

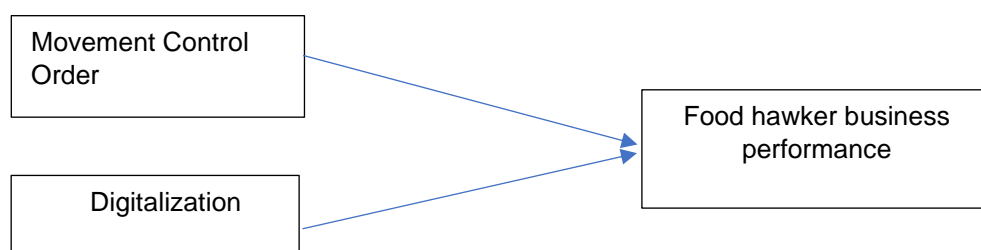


Figure 1: Proposed Research Model

Methodology

This research employed a diagnostic research design, where the study evaluated the effect of MCO or the restrictions stated during the MCO and digitalization affects the business performance of the food businesses. This research gathered quantitative data using predetermined questions through survey questionnaires. Questionnaires were developed with adopted and adapted questions based on several studies. It contained close-ended questions whereby the respondents chose the answers that best represented their opinions. It is also to help the respondents to make a quick decision in answering all questions. As stated by Fauvelle (2019), a closed-ended question offers, as its name suggests, a limited number of

answers. Questionnaires were distributed via WhatsApp group, and respondents were encouraged to share the link with other food business operators to add more respondents. All items were framed on a 5-point Likert scale.

The target population of this study is the food hawker business operators in the local district. Due to unavailable data on the exact number of food businesses in the local population during COVID-19, this study follows Roscoe (1975), which stated that a sample of between 30 to 500 is deemed sufficient to represent the unknown population in most behavioral studies. Thus, a target sampling of 250 was deemed sufficient to answer the research objectives.

The information was gathered from primary sources., a pilot study was conducted comprising 30 hawkers, and depending on the feedback, some items were modified to check the understanding and clarity of questions and improve the questions. Data were collected by distributing the questionnaire to the respondents between March and April 2021. Later, at the end of April, researchers used the Whatsapp application to distribute the questionnaire to several food businesses. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (version 23) for descriptive analysis and regression.

Result and Findings

All two hundred and twenty-two (222) data collected were deemed usable for this study. The demographic background of the respondents is stated in Table 1.

The Demographic background of the Respondent

The background of the respondents is described in Table 1 below. A total of 222 respondents participated in the survey, 51.8 percent are female, and 48.2 percent are male. From the researcher's personal experience, female food hawkers are more open and willing to spare their time in answering the survey questionnaire, and there were also more female food hawkers than male food hawkers. Next, the largest age group of the respondents is those between 25 to 31 years old. It is 48.2 percent of the total respondents, and they are the second young age group. The food hawkers are mostly from the Y generation and Z generation. The highest respondent is from the Malay race, 93.7 percent of the total respondent. The next highest group is the Chinese, contributing to 2.7 percent of the total respondents. In contrast, Indian food hawkers are tied with the other races, which is 1.8 percent.

Most food hawkers are doing business as part-time jobs (53%). This could happen due to the pandemic, where most workers work from home, and some are retrenched. Full-time hawkers comprised 46.9 percent of the respondents. The highest monthly business revenue was less than RM1, 000, contributing to about 33.8 percent of the total respondents. It makes sense since most of the food hawker is doing it as part-time hawking, and it shows that they are new to this food stall business and do not have a regular customer yet. The second leading income bracket was between RM 1,501 to RM3, 000 monthly business revenue, followed by RM 1,001 to RM 1,500.

Most food hawkers hold a degree as the highest level of education (35.1 %). The second highest group has *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*, equivalent to a high school diploma, 32.4 percent of the total respondent. And third highest is *Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia/ Diploma*, which is

27.9 percent of total respondents. Most people switched to being food hawkers as a part-time job after finishing their school or studies or between semesters before continuing their studies. Next is the *Sijil Rendah Pelajaran* or *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* (PMR), contributing to 2.70 percent of the total respondent. Table 1 also shows that Selangor has the highest number of respondents, with 59.0 % of the total respondents, followed by other states, which contribute 26.5 percent of the total respondents. Most of them operated a food business (63.5%).

Table 1

Demographic profile of respondents (n=222)

Item	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	107	51.80%
	Female	115	48.20%
Age	18 – 24	58	26.1%
	25 – 31	107	48.2%
	32 – 38	28	12.6%
	39 – 45	17	7.7%
	46 and above	12	5.4%
Race	Malay	208	93.7%
	Chinese	6	2.7%
	Indian	4	1.8%
	Other	4	1.8%
Employment Status	Full-Time Hawking	104	46.8%
	Part-Time Hawking	118	53.2%
Monthly Business Revenue	Less than RM 1,000		
	RM 1,001 – RM 1,500	75	33.8%
	RM 1,501 – RM 3,000	49	22.1%
	RM 3,001 – RM 4,500	58	26.1%
	RM 4,501 – RM 6,000	23	10.4%
	RM 6,001 – RM 7,500	6	2.7%
	Above RM 7,500	11	5.0%
Level Education	SRP/PMR	6	2.7%
	SPM	72	32.4%
	STPM / Diploma	62	27.9%
	Undergraduate	78	35.1%
	Master	2	0.9%
	PHD	1	0.5%
	Others	1	0.5%

Which state is your business located in?	Selangor Kedah Others	131 32 59	59% 14.4% 26.6%
Do you have an online business platform?	Yes No	173 49	77.9% 22.1%
How would you rate your business overall online ordering system through the mobile application of food delivery?	Bad Good Excellent	19 159 44	8.6% 71.6% 19.8%
How would you rate your overall experience of the new business operation hour during Movement Control Order (MCO)?	Bad Good Excellent	116 101 5	52.3% 45.5% 2.3%
How would you rate your business performance with the new Standard Operating Hour (SOP) during this COVID-19 pandemic?	Bad Good Excellent	102 109 11	45.9% 49.1% 5.0%
Please state the type of business you are operating	Food Raya cookies Beverage Dried food Others	141 11 8 11 51	63.5% 5.0% 3.6% 5.0% 23.0%

Seventy-seven percent (77%) of the respondents had an online business platform. Thus it was not surprising that the response for business performance due to new standard operating hours is good (49.1%). While 45.9% stated that their business performance was bad, only 11% had an excellent business performance during the pandemic.

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive Statistical Test further addressed the mean and standard deviation values of variables under Section B and Section C. Section B aimed at the Independent Variables of this study, which were Internal Factors. It comprised the dimension of Movement Control Order (MCO) and Digitalization. Also, it represented the Dependent Variable of business sales performance. Respondents' responses ranged from 2.64 to 3.72, with a standard deviation between 0.99 to 1.26.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of the movement control order, digitalization and sales performance

<i>Movement Control Order</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation
My business is doing well during the MCO	2.89	1.093
I am able to pay my shop rent/mortgage during the MCO	2.64	1.159
I am able to pay my bills during MCO	2.69	1.217
I am motivated in my business during MCO	3.21	1.118
I adjusted my business hours to suit MCO SOP	3.16	1.088
I feel safe doing my business during MCO	2.85	1.134
I like my work environment during MCO	2.55	.996
I have to stop the recruitment of new staff due to MCO	3.54	1.278
My business needs incentives to maintain the SOPs during MCO	3.52	1.096
New policies need to be established for my business	3.85	1.089
<i>Digitalization</i>		
I learn valuable lessons during MCO	3.75	1.005
Learning new lessons increased my sales performance during MCO	3.22	1.060
I establish an online platform during MCO	3.66	1.188
The online application helps increase my sales	3.69	1.194
I would recommend the delivery application to anybody doing business	3.85	1.163
I am able to provide prompt and quick service using the application	3.67	1.128
I felt connected to other business owners during the MCO	3.41	1.048
MCO for the COVID-19 pandemic has changed how I do business	3.72	1.008
My sales performance is good during MCO	2.79	1.057
Financial aid from the government helps me solve my financial problems	2.73	1.247
My sales drop during MCO	3.67	1.216

My employee contracted COVID-19 during the pandemic	2.45	1.213
My sales increased for several items during MCO	3.03	1.185
Bazaar helps put my sales better	3.34	1.232
My sales grow during MCO with the online platform	3.43	1.259
Sales Performance		
My sales performance is good during MCO	2.79	1.057
Financial aid from the government help me solve my financial problems	2.73	1.247
My sales drop during MCO	3.67	1.216
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Bazaar helps put my sales better	3.34	1.232
My sales grow during MCO with the online platform	3.43	1.259

(n=222)

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

In Table 3, the correlation matrix shows that movement control order and digitalization factors are significantly and positively related to food hawkers' sales performance.

Table 3

Relationship between movement control order and digitalization with food hawkers sales performance

Variables	R square	p<0.05	Hypotheses
Movement control order	0.836	0.00	Supported
Digitalization	0.886	0.00	Supported

Discussion

Findings showed that the internal factor, the new SOP in movement control order (MCO) and digitalization, has the capability and could impact food hawkers' performances. The demographic result showed the total of respondents is 222, with 48.2 percent male and 51.8 percent female. It portrayed female respondents were higher than male respondents. With this gap difference in the quantity of gender between males and females, those female food hawkers are more open and willing to spare their time in answering the survey questionnaires, thus resulting in more female food hawkers in this study frame.

Typically, the respondent's age groups are classified into five, which are 18 to 24 years old, 25 to 31 years old, 32 to 38 years old, 39 to 45 years old, and 46 years old and above. For the 18 to 24 years old age bracket, they were 26.13 percent. The respondents aged 25-31 were

48.20 percent, whereas the least age group is 46 years old and above (5.41%). The younger age group is the largest age bracket in this study.

As referred to, the result from descriptive analysis earlier indicates that sales performance presented the highest mean score ($M= 3.67$, $SD=1.216$). The sales performance shows that food hawker is being affected by the pandemic of COVID-19. Next, the pattern of the mean score for Movement Control Order (MCO), which marked the highest mean score, was presented by the item 'New policies need to be established for my business' ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.09$). This shows that the food hawker indicates that new policies need to be established for their business. According to Krell et al (2020), SME studies lacked an explicit definition of digitalization, and thus, food business exposure to digital skills is still vague.

Dine-ins will be prohibited in states affected by the Movement Control Order (MCO). Therefore, food hawkers need to adapt to the new policies for their business according to the SOP imposed by the government, such as putting on face masks, practicing physical distancing, and frequently using hand sanitizers. Food hawkers generally recommend the use of delivery applications for all their food ($M=3.85$; $SD=1.16$). This indicates that digitalization is the best factor to increase a food hawker's sales performance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Both movement control order and digitalization showed a strong relationship to affect food hawker business performance. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected not only Malaysia but all countries in the world. Apart from economic and social effects, the pandemic has also affected the psychological status of many people, where small business owners were affected the most. This is partly because small businesses like food hawkers depend on the cash economy (Mustafa et al., 2021). When restrictions on movement were imposed, customers could not visit and dine in. This was made worse while the food business focused on the physical operation and lacked the capacity and capability to 'sell' online. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic and the after the effect have brought a blessing in disguise when businesses must immediately switch to digital platforms to remain relevant (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Support and policy responses for entrepreneurs were also made available to help these food hawker businesses, and the support crossed beyond the concept of gender discrimination (Mobin et al., 2017). Although this research showed that digitalization showed a strong effect on business performance, it should be noted that many of the respondents are doing business part-time. Some businesses liquidated during the pandemic (Mustafa et al., 2021), while some mushroomed due to a job change or being retrenched from their former career. This could be the reason for the respondents in this study. The use of social media has helped many food hawker businesses thrive during the pandemic, while food delivery also skyrocketed; thus, those hawkers who use social media and digital platforms could sustain themselves while those who did not have these platforms were facing difficulties.

Further, the findings suggested some significant business survival strategies. First, food hawkers need to keep abreast of the changing customer demand; social media marketing is important and deemed beneficial to boost sales compared to conventional marketing strategy. Second, service delivery should be an added value for any food hawker business apart from customer trust. Third, food hawkers should improve their business management and keep up with entrepreneurship skills. Malaysia's government has been quick in providing

financial aid to businesses although some people query the support given to small enterprises. In the future, the government should provide better solutions to these businesses which rely heavily on daily cash flow, while small businesses should be innovative when challenged in their operation or the effect of future crises.

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