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NEW TRENDS OF CLOUD KITCHEN TECHNOLOGY AND CONSUMERS' PURCHASE DECISIONS: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY

Nurul Syahirah Idris[1], Muhammad Afiq Zulkifly[2], Muhammad Safuan Abdul Latip[3*]

[1,2,3] *Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Terengganu, Kampus Dungun*

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Corresponding Author:
safuanlatip@uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper aims to explore the potential research area of Cloud Kitchens and their impact on consumer purchase decisions. With the ever-increasing demand for food delivery, Cloud Kitchens have emerged as a viable alternative to traditional restaurant models. Operating without a physical location or dining area, they present unique challenges and opportunities for stakeholders in the food industry. By identifying potential predictors of Cloud Kitchen purchase decisions through a literature review, this study can contribute to promoting and ensuring the quality of Cloud Kitchen products and services in the future. The findings of this study can benefit all stakeholders, including Cloud Kitchen operators, consumers, and policymakers, by providing insights into the key factors influencing consumer purchase decisions. This paper highlights the need for further research in this area and contributes to the existing literature on Cloud Kitchens and their impact on the food industry.

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1. Introduction

The business concept for cloud kitchens is based solely on delivery and does not have a physical store location. The expansion of cloud kitchens has been an important factor in expanding the food sector as a whole. "Cloud Kitchen" derives its name from the fact that customers can order online via food aggregator applications or restaurant apps. Hence, these kitchens are also known as ghost kitchens and virtual kitchens (Volpe, 2020). In response to the continuously growing demand for meal delivery, "cloud kitchens" have emerged as an effective alternative to traditional

restaurant operations. As COVID-19 struck the world in 2020, the F&B industry was seriously affected, leading to many restaurants and other hospitality businesses closing due to the lockdown (Latip et al., 2021). The idea of "Cloud Kitchen" started spreading very quickly, and has satisfied the need for a solution ever since. Restaurants transformed themselves into cloud kitchens to remain abreast of the changing times and adapt to new business models. This allows them to determine what factors can influence customer purchase decisions in cloud kitchen services.

The emergence of cloud kitchens and their demands seem to increase. The response given by the industry to the skyrocketing demand for off-premises orders and third-party online delivery providers has led to the emergence of cloud kitchens even before the COVID-19 pandemic (occasionally referred to as the pandemic). Cloud kitchens were created as part of the restaurant industry's reaction to the skyrocketing demand for off-premises orders (Rivera, 2019). Furthermore, Choudhary (2019) states that kitchens are fully online-based food aggregators that supply prepared meals in the delivery mood only, with no physical presence that consumers can visit. Cloud kitchens operate on a low-cost, demand-based model relying solely on online food delivery and have been an essential element in sustenance during COVID-19 lockdowns in every country, and beyond. In addition to that, many restaurants in Malaysia now provide takeaway or delivery services as a result of these new food service trends. The idea of a cloud kitchen is significant since COVID-19 has caused changes in customers' behaviour, especially "foodies" and younger people (Itani & Hollebeek, 2021). In this context, the term "cloud kitchen" refers to an idea of a commercial cooking area (Indianexpress, 2021) that allows for takeout without dining, often through calls and online platforms (Outlook, 2020). Consumer behaviour is influenced by a variety of factors, including perceived benefit and risk, consumer knowledge, E-Word-of-Mouth, halal aspect, and trust in product assurance. Thus far, a limited empirical study has been carried out to investigate this game-changing innovation to provide the food service business with insights and advice. Because of this, the purpose of this study is to fill the gap in the existing research by employing the prospect concept to help understand the underlying mechanisms that link up roots with the consumers' behavioural responses toward cloud kitchens. Thereby, the past studies related to cloud kitchens are still limited, which is the gap in this research in the food services industry.
However, some consumers do not have enough information regarding cloud kitchens. The term "cloud kitchen" is somewhat unknown among the majority of consumers. A cloud kitchen is restaurant, food place, or food hawker that offers its customers multiple benefits. These benefits include open online delivery and take away to a specified area or outside of their delivery zone, as well as assistance in generating new business and increasing brand awareness. One of the reasons why not many people are familiar with cloud kitchens is due to the fact that the term "cloud kitchen" is still relatively new. A "cloud kitchen" is a specific kind of restaurant that caters mostly to customers who want their meals to be taken away or delivered. Due to the nature of the business, which is referred to as a "cloud kitchen,". The goal of this study is to shed light on the ways in which independent variables influence consumer purchasing decisions about cloud kitchen services.

Therefore, the following research objectives are proposed for future empirical study, which is crucial to develop better and maintain the management and regulation which govern the industry.

Research objective 1

To investigate factors thatinfluence consumer purchase decisions in cloud kitchen services.

Research objective 2

To determine the strongest factor contributing to consumer purchase decision to use cloud kitchen services.

2. Literature review

Cloud kitchen

A cloud kitchen is a food service establishment that specialises in takeout and delivery; it does not offer dine-in (Restaurant Times, 2018). A cloud kitchen is similar to a food court concept; the distinction is that it solely serves meal delivery. A profitable business or venture regardless of location, atmosphere, or infrastructure. Cloud Kitchen also has a website, takes food orders online, and delivers food to customers' homes. Cloud kitchens can serve food to customers without having to hire people to talk to customers because they have a technical interface and are connected to the backend of popular delivery apps. The coronavirus pandemic has severely impacted almost all industries, including the food industry and altered the behaviour of consumers' purchase decisions, which resulted in the rising demand for cloud kitchens (Yang et al., 2020; Mehrotra, 2020). In such circumstances , a cloud kitchen might be an effective solution for business owners. On the other hand, it is essential to grasp what the customer is looking for. In order for the same information to be utilised in the context of improving business. As a result, we would like to run an experiment to study how it influences customers' purchasing decisions.

Purchase decision

The consumer buying decision process is the process of decision-making in whichthe consumer begins to acquire products or services in exchange for money in the market before, during, and after purchasing goods or services. This process can be broken down into three stages (Lumen, 2019). Furthermore, according to Kotler and Armstrong (2014), the purchase decision is the stage of the buyer's decision-making process in which an individual decides whether or not to actually purchase the product that is being considered. "Consumer behaviour" is defined as the activities and decision-making processes of people who make purchases of products and services for their own personal consumption, as Engel, Blackwell, and Mansard stated. "Consumer behaviour" is defined as "the choice process and physical action that individuals participate in when evaluating, acquiring, utilising, or disposing of goods and services," as stated by Louden and Bitta (Smirti, 2019).

In addition, Mramba (2015) insists that a wide range of factors, including personal, psychological, social, and cultural factors, impact a consumer's purchase decisions. As a result, it is challenging for marketers to forecast how consumers will purchase a specific product. In a similar vein, Djatmiko and Pradana (2015) claimed that the stage of the process that involves consumers actually purchasing the product is the stage where purchase decisions are made. Indeed, it is initiated by the intention to purchase or use the product (Latip et al., 2020). So based on past paper research, we can observe that consumer purchase decisions are significantly affected by numerous factors such as perceived benefit, benefit risk and consumer knowledge. By identifying the triggers that initiate a consumer's intention to purchase or use a product, businesses can tailor their messaging, product features, pricing, and distribution channels to better appeal to their customers and create a satisfying experience that can lead to loyalty and positive word-of-mouth.

Perceived benefit

The internet presents significant risks in cloud kitchen services but also provides numerous benefits that impact consumer purchasing decisions. The perceived benefits are consumer belief and satisfaction with cloud kitchen services, as well as consumer purchase decisions. This is because cloud kitchen services are practical and simple, offer a wider range of products, and are less risky. In the hospitality and tourist sectors, subjective and objective knowledge is associated with perceived benefits and hazards, while various knowledge types exert distinct effects (e.g., Klerck and Sweeney, 2007; Sharifpour et al., 2014). When customers perceive greater personal benefits such as convenience, a variety of high-quality food options, and societal benefits such as reduced traffic and food waste, job creation, and economic contribution, they will develop a higher level of trust and be more likely to consider cloud kitchens in the future.

Customers may consider cloud kitchens beneficial to the local economy since they provide new business options for existing and new restauranteurs by allowing them to expand or enter a market with low overhead costs. Furthermore, cloud kitchens reduce road traffic, carbon emissions, and food waste (Fabricant, 2020). Perceived benefits are based on heuristics and actual experience, while perceived risks are mostly caused by how the brain processes information (Kahneman & Tversky, 2018). Holbrook (2005) defines the significance of customer perception in understanding intentions. Consumers will complete the purchase because they believe they will receive the benefits they expect from the online transaction. Some of the consumer expectations, such as discounts and quantity of items (Lai and Zhuang, 2006). Therefore, there is a potential relationship between perceived benefits and consumers' purchase decisions in cloud kitchen services which is worth to be examined.

Perceived risk

Dowling and Staelin (1994) define perceived risk as "the consumer's sense of the uncertainty and negative consequences of purchasing a product or service." In the early 1960s, perceived risk was studied in consumer behaviour and marketing research (Bauer, 1960), and many subsequent studies on perceived risk have demonstrated that perceived risk has a negative effect on customer behaviour (Adnan, 2014). For example, Youn and Kim (2018) investigated the food quality hazards in terms of flavour and value for money, as well as food safety issues in ethnic restaurants. Other research (Liang et al. 2018; Mao and Lyu, 2017) discovered that perceived values and perceived risks were key drivers of users' repurchase intentions. Similarly, in the area of cloud kitchens, this study employs perceived risks and advantages as determinants of client behavioural intentions. The cloud kitchen is regarded as a game-changing invention in the food service business. These disruptive technologies cause two types of disruption (Schuelke-Leech, 2018). The first level has an impact on the industry and the market, while the second level has an impact on society as a whole. Similarly, this study employs two levels of perceived risks, personal and societal hazards, as advised by previous literature, as well as two levels of perceived benefits, personal and social benefits, as applicable in the current situation. Based on the earlier discussion, the following sections of this study propose and verify a new framework of perceived benefits and risks for cloud kitchens. According to Stone and Gronhaug (1993), perceived risk is the most important factor influencing purchase decisions. Therefore, there is a potential relationship between perceived benefits and consumers' purchase decisions in cloud kitchen services which is worth examining in future research.

Consumer knowledge

The customer's knowledge of a product, packaging and design, and menu indirectly influence on purchase intention, whereas consumer knowledge of a product is the most important component. Customers frequently rely on their personal memory and knowledge to make purchasing decisions. The study by Jayachandran et. al (2004) demonstrates that customer product knowledge is crucial to purchasing decisions. The correlation between customer product knowledge and purchase intent is favourable and highly significant.

According to Chi et al. (2021), knowledge is crucial in situations with high uncertainty or risk. Subjective and objective knowledge have distinct implications for the processing of customer information and subsequent decision-making (Raju et al., 1995). For instance, Raju et al. (1995) and Pieniak et al. (2010) discovered that subjective knowledge influences customers' decisions more than objective knowledge. In contrast, Lee and Lee (2009) found that customers with high objective knowledge (as opposed to subjective knowledge) are less likely to be influenced by negative product cues. Customers typically lack the understanding to comprehend a novel and unique service like a cloud kitchen. The results of this study provide empirical proof that education is important and can raise the perceived benefits and decrease the perceived risk of cloud

kitchens among customers. The results highlight additional distinctions between the effects of subjective and objective information. Specifically, subjective knowledge helps customers identify the benefits, whereas objective knowledge reduces the perceived danger, which boosts customers' faith in cloud kitchens and their propensity to order from them. Research (Klerck and Sweeney, 2007) shows that subjective and objective customer knowledge serve different purposes. Thus, consumer knowledge potentially influences consumers' purchase decisions in cloud kitchen services which is worth to be examined.

E-word of mouth

The rapid growth of the internet has altered how customers interact with one another by creating a central location for the exchange of thoughts and feedback. As a result, the potential influence of the perspectives of others has significantly expanded. According to López and Sicilia (2014), this method of communication is referred to as "electronic word of mouth" or "e-WOM." In this context, it is important for marketers to make every effort to guarantee that favourable e-WOM regarding their company and its products is maintained. Consumers are sensitive to influence by the word-of-mouth (WOM) recommendations of those in their immediate surroundings, such as friends, peers, and family.

The term "Electronic Word of Mouth" refers to an effort to spread opinions (such as those on the goods and services offered by a particular firm) from one user of the internet or social media platform to the next. EWOM is a way for customers to express themselves and is a powerful instrument that may be used to influence purchasing decisions. For instance, Moses et al. (2016) proposed that brand equity has a role in consumers' purchasing decisions for footwear products like shoes. Building brand equity is of utmost significance for branded products, as stated by Tong and Hawley (2009). This is especially true in markets that are highly competitive and brand aware. Severi & Ling (2014) strongly agree that customers are influenced toward certain products based on the feedback left by other customers that is visible online, such as on websites or online forums which also supported by May et al. (2021). Digital technology, especially social media platforms and online forums, greatly impacts how customers decide what they like. Thus, e-word-of-mouth potentially influence consumers' purchase decisions in cloud kitchen services which is worth to be examined.

Trust in product assurance

To begin, a number of researches have been conducted that have analysed the features of trust assurances and aimed to investigate the implications that these qualities have on the level of consumer's trust. Lala et al. (2002) focused their attention on the guarantees of confidence and the quality of the information. According to their findings, providing consumers with trustworthy information and information of high quality boosted the likelihood that consumers would make a purchase. When a consumer has trust in a product, they believe it will live up to their expectations (Wongkitrungrueng et al., 2020). According to a study that was carried out in the hospitality industry, consumers preferences are highly impacted by whether or not they have confidence in the organisation (Erkmen & Hancer, 2019).

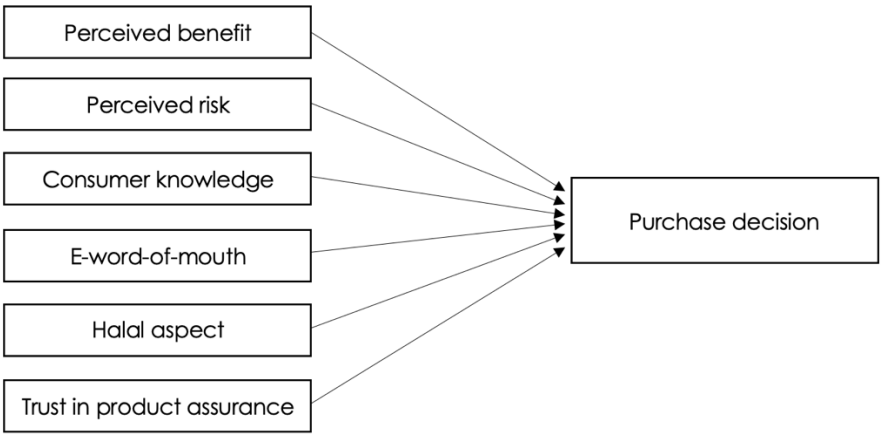
In addition, according to Shareef et al., (2019), consumers' intentions to make online purchases may be influenced by a variety of factors, including trust and operational performance. Current studies show that user behaviour is favourably associated with consumers' happiness. This is the case despite the fact that social influence, variety seeking, advertising, convenience, trust, and product aspects are all factors that are positively related to consumer behaviours (Rahman et al., 2018). It has been demonstrated by this previous research assertion that religiosity is able to influence the purchasing behaviours of consumers. All of these studies that have resulted in halal and religiosity have a significant influence on the purchase decisions made by consumers in the field of cloud kitchen services. However, do religiosity, and generate cluster differently influence consumers' purchase decisions in cloud kitchen services which is worth to be examined.

Halal Aspect

Halal is significant in Malaysia since it is essential to the country's Muslim way of life and culture. Identifying food labelling impacts on consumer behaviour (Araya et al., 2018) and Halal labels have been the subject of several research in recent years, as the topic of food labels receives an increasing amount of attention on a worldwide scale within the food industry (Iranmanesh et al., 2020). According to Wibowo and Ahmad (2016), halal products have successfully attracted a large number of consumers. After that, the Halal label is the most important piece of information for Muslim buyers to verify that the food they purchase complies with their religious obligations (Iranmanesh et al., 2020). In addition, the consumption of halal food is a necessary obligation under Islamic jurisprudence, often known as Syariah law. Muslims who disobey these regulations are seen as religiously repugnant and shameful (Bassiouni, 2012). According to one study, halal certification was linked favourably to brand perception and consumers trust in food products (Yunos et al., 2014). This emphasises how crucial halal certification is as a factor that might affect consumers' confidence and purchasing choices. Similar to this, Yener's (2022) study discovered that halal certification influences consumers perceptions and purchase intentions for such items in a favourable way.

In addition, a study was carried out by Awan et al. (2015) with the purpose of determining the factors that may impact the decision of Muslim consumers to purchase halal products. According to the conclusions of the survey, Muslim consumers are affected when it comes to making halal purchases by societal reasons, personal considerations, and the halal emblem. According to L. S. Yan et al. (2017), Muslim consumers have been the subject of several studies in the past. The results demonstrated that trust in the product influences consumers' purchasing decisions positively. This previous research has shown that a customer's level of faith in the quality of the goods they are purchasing might have an effect on their purchase behaviours. All of these studies that have led to increased customer confidence in product assurance have had a major impact on the purchasing decisions that customers make when it comes to cloud kitchen services. Thus, trust in products potentially influences consumers' purchase decisions in cloud kitchen services which is worth to be examined.

Propose Research Framework



3. Proposed methodology

There are many research designs that can be utilised in the research, but this research focused more on conclusive research design. The conclusive research design is implemented when the purpose of the research is to acquire information that can either be used to reach conclusions or to make decisions. The vast majority of the information gathered in this manner of study is quantitative, which indicates that it is capable of being represented by numerical values. Meanwhile, the type of research used in this research is the quantitative method. The quantitative method refers to the process of amassing and analysing numerical data, which can be collected from various sources.

In this research, a causal design is utilised to investigate the subject of whether or not there is a significant link between the independent variable and the dependent variable. Causal research is a research approach for determining the cause and effect relationship between two variables. This research is mostly utilised to determine the cause of a specific behaviour. Using causal research, we determine what changes occur in an independent variable due to a change in the dependent variable.

A non-probability sampling design will be utilised in this research, which is also suitable with the convenience sampling method. The method best suits the study due to the no sampling frame available for the target population. The unit of analysis for this study is individuals who have had previous experience utilising cloud kitchens in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor and either uses foodpanda or grabfood, which are the two companies that account for the majority of cloud kitchen service vendors. Furthermore, we use a self-administered questionnaire survey method with a design with a 5-value Likert scale measurement: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree.

4. Conclusion

With rising demand for the ease of services, technology has streamlined many industries and sectors to a large extent, with the food industry being one of these. Cloud kitchens may influence the consumer purchase decision based on several factors or variables. The independent variables are perceived benefit, perceived risk, consumer knowledge, E word-of-mouth, halal aspect and trust in product assurance. In addition. the dependent variable is mainly consumer purchase decisions. Changing consumer behaviour and purchase decision has increasingly made consumers seek out the latest models, such as cloud kitchens, where the essential factors are met. However, there is still a long way to go for the industry and cloud kitchens owing to the large contribution to the food services industry's future.

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Nurul Syahirah Idris and Muhammad Afiq Zulkifly led this study and wrote the paper; Muhammad Safuan Abdul Latip supervised, reviewed and improved the article.

Conflict of Interest
No conflict of interest is associated with this publication.

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