

# Spending Behaviour Toward the Financial Aid During COVID-19 in Sarawak

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## Abstract

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is highly contagious infection that has become a global public health issue. In order to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia on March 18, 2020, the government issued a Movement Control Order (MCO) restricting travel into and out of the nation including Sarawak. The MCO has slowdown the economy and many people were losing their income. The financial aid in the form of cash transfer is a fiscal policy to enhance the economy flow during the MCO. This study is focusing the behaviors of people in Sarawak on their spending behaviour after received the cash transfers from the government. This study is using the non-parametric methods to analyses the spending behaviour involving 186 respondents in Sarawak. This study also examine the regression of saving, paying debt, buying grocery and investment toward the spending behaviour to identify the successful of cash transfer policy. The findings indicate that in order for the spending behaviour towards the financial assistance programme to be successful, the citizen needs to spend their money on things like paying debt and buying groceries.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Spending, MCO, Behaviour, Cash Transfer.

## Introduction

The pandemic caused by the coronavirus also known as COVID-19 is without a doubt one of the most severe worldwide issues that we are now facing. Since the virus was initially detected late in 2019, it has rapidly spread across the world, prompting significant anxiety and panic (Hakimi et al., 2021; Anand et al., 2021; Kaye et al., 2021). Within the first five months after its discovery, the virus had already caused the deaths of more than a hundred thousand individuals all over the world and had infected millions more (Aesif et al., 2021; Nowakowska et al., 2020; Nadzir et al., 2020)

The high degree of contagiousness exhibited by the COVID-19 virus is one of the aspects that has contributed to the speed with which it has spread (Liu et al., 2021; Whitworth, 2020). The COVID-19 virus is most commonly transmitted through droplets produced in the

respiratory system, such as when an infected person coughs or sneezes (Mesgarpour et al., 2021; Chaudhuri et al., 2020; Han et al., 2020). Another method of transmission is to touch a surface that is contaminated with the virus and then touch one's own face afterwards (Guellich et al., 2021). Because the COVID-19 virus can persist on surfaces for several hours after being exposed to them, it is easy to transmit from one individual to another (Wang et al., 2020; Slifka & Gao, 2020; Singhal, 2020).

Governments around the world have instituted a variety of measures to combat the COVID-19 virus, including lockdowns, social isolation, and mask use (Wenham et al., 2023; Chow et al., 2022; Marchese et al., 2020). These measures have successfully slowed the spread of the pandemic COVID-19 in numerous nations (Chisadza et al., 2021; Kharroubi and Saleh, 2020). Nevertheless, they have had a significant impact on the global economy and supply chain, resulting in widespread employment losses and economic instability (Kumar et al., 2021; Debata et al., 2020).

The government of Malaysia was one of the earliest governments in the world to take extraordinary measures, also known as Movement Control Order (MCO), in order to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus from facing the worst conceivable circumstances (Khor et al., 2020). According to Karim et al. (2020), MCO in Malaysia has negatively impact the economy and tourism industries. Similar studies found that, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has had catastrophic effects on the global economy Abed (2022). Due to the imposition of lockdowns and social distancing measures, businesses have been forced to close, resulting in unprecedented employment losses, a decline in consumer spending, and a severe economic downturn (Katare et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2021). The pandemic has enveloped the world, and its effects have been felt across all sectors of the economy (Li et al., 2022; Brada et al., 2021).

Many Malaysians have lost their jobs, which has been one of the most severe consequences that have arisen as a direct result of the pandemic (Januri et al., 2022; Crayne, 2020). The lockdown procedures have resulted in the closure of many firms, which has resulted in the loss of employment for millions of people (Chen and Yeh, 2021). The loss of jobs has led to a reduction in consumer expenditure, which in turn has resulted in a considerable reduction in the demand for products and services (Li et al., 2022). This led the Malaysian prime minister to announce an Economic Stimulus Package know as (PRIHATIN) to save the Malaysian economy and support the people survive the lockdown (Shah et al., 2020).

The Malaysian government applied fiscal and monetary policy at the same time in this economic package and targeted financial assistance to the group that is supposed to be hit hard during the lockdown (Waiho et al., 2020). In the PRIHATIN package, the Malaysian government has allocated nearly RM 128 billion to protect the welfare of the people, RM 100 billion to support businesses including the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and RM 2 billion to strengthen the country's economy. Meanwhile, RM 20 billion was announced in the stimulus package previously (Razak et al., 2021; Shah et al., 2020).

Many of Malaysians are unemployed, which has prompted the federal government of Malaysia to channel financial aid in the form of cash transfers in order to improve the flow of money in the market (Khalid, 2020; Ahmad et al., 2020). According to Shah et al., (2020), under the National Caring Aid (Bantuan Prihatin Nasional) RM 10 billion are allocated to B40 and M40 families as one-off payment with the amount of cash within amount of RM1600, RM1000, RM800 and RM500. Government of Sarawak also give RM 250 for 6 months starting MCO for the B40 families (Anuar & Raharjo, 2022; Soe, 2022). The distribution of cash

payments to the M40 and B40 groups is primarily done with the intention of influencing the flow of money in the market.

The study also explains the flow of the introduction through the conceptual framework in figure 1 and 2. Therefore, the purpose of this study will also contribute the spending behaviour of people in Sarawak, regarding the money transfers.

### Literature Review

Money transfer also known as cash patty is a sort of cash transfer programme that was created with the intention of providing people impacted by the pandemic with financial support (Mawani et al., 2021). The majority of the time, the monetary assistance is provided to people who have been laid off from their employment or who have been seriously impacted by the restrictions imposed by the government during the lockdown (Mosser, 2020; Jomo & Chowdhury; 2020). The cash distribution is intended to assist people in meeting their fundamental requirements, which may include the requirements for food, shelter, and medical care (Mishra & Rampal, 2020).

There is evidence that cash patty has assisted individuals in dealing with the pandemic. According to Segatto et al. (2022), in Brazil, cash patty has a positive effect on alleviating poverty and food insecurity. Similarly, a study conducted in Kenya found that financial transfers helped vulnerable households mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic (Brook et al., 2022). These results indicate that cash patty can be an effective effort for recover from the pandemic's economic impact (Dubbeld, 2021). Some countries such as USA and Togo prefer to priority the cash patty for the use of health care (Kumar et al., 2021; Tossou, 2021). The success of cash patty in assisting individuals in dealing with the pandemic is determined by a variety of circumstances (Davidovic et al., 2020; Beckworth, 2020). However, the most significant things to take into account is how the person who receives the cash patty spends their money (Braun & Ikeda, 2020).

Cash transfer also gives good economic recovery and have no inflation after effect to the economy and less cost-effective. A study in Ethiopia, which suffered from food crises, whereby the program to "Save the Children" by created relief economy projects by giving several cash transfers to the people (Knox-Peebles, 2001). The results found that with effective cash transfer is more cost-effective than food aid, and there has no inflationary impact (Gebre-Selassie & Beshah, 2003).

According to Kay (2010), economic downturns do force many people to shift their usual patterns of investment and spending. There are psychological as well as economic changes. People are now more interested in their future than they are in high-end things. But during recessions, people typically purchase the required and less expensive brands. Economic conditions have a significant impact on people's spending habits, as evidenced by the fact that changes in consumer behaviours happen quickly during recessions (Latham & Braun, 2010).

Numerous studies have already uncovered on people's habits during COVID-19, particularly their spending behaviour. The most vital concern is ensuring that people to survive and make effective use of their money transfer accounts. During the duration of pandemic COVID-19, there has been a noticeable shift in the spending patterns of people all around the world (Zhao et al., 2022). Ravenska and Zulvia (2022) found that there was no difference toward buying behaviour between male and female in Indonesia during the pandemic COVID-19. While, Dang and Nguyen (2021), found that male have higher spending behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic compare to female.

- H1: There is a difference in the mean spending behaviour between male and female.
- H2: There is a difference in the mean spending behaviour between income categories.
- H3: There is a difference in the mean spending behaviour between educational level.

The effect of the closure on consumer purchasing patterns, such as the trend towards paying using online transaction, and the future of shopping complying with the COVID-19 pandemic (Chen et al., 2022). According to Rossolov et al (2022), the customers spend more time engaging in activities that take place online rather than in person, consumers' shopping behaviours have had to evolve in order to accommodate the new reality.

Due to the closure or limited capacity of physical stores, consumers have had to rely on online stores to purchase products and services (Fedushko & Ustyianovych, 2022). This shift towards e-commerce has also increased the prevalence of digital payment methods and contactless delivery services (Zvarikova et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2022). During the COVID-19 pandemic, women have a 24% higher rate of permanently losing their employment compared to males. As a consequence of this, women have a tendency to cut their current consumption and increase their savings (Dang & Nguyen, 2021).

- H4: There is a difference in the mean spending behaviour between paying method.
- H5: There is a relationship in the mean spending behaviour between saving.

Another effect of the lockdown on the purchasing spending behaviour of consumers is the prioritization of essential products (Zwanka & Buff, 2021). Due to the uncertainty caused by the pandemic, consumers have become more conscientious of their spending habits and are placing a greater emphasis on purchasing necessities and grocery (Naeem, 2021). Other studies found that an increase in demand for items such as foodstuffs, personal protective equipment, and cleaning supplies, while demand for luxury items has decreased (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020; Summers-Gabr, 2020). In addition, consumers are increasingly likely to purchase products that promote health and wellness, such as vitamins, supplements, and residential exercise equipment (Alam et al., 2022).

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a big drop in sales and cash flows, which has made it more likely that debts are unlikely to be paid back (Mirza et al., 2020). Furthermore, stock market demonstrates that bubble activity and unstable picked up during the COVID-19 period, which suggests that markets became comparatively less efficient in comparison to the time period that came before the COVID-19 period (Narayan, 2021).

- H6: There is a relationship in the mean spending behaviour between paying debt.
- H7: There is a relationship in the mean spending behaviour between investment.
- H8: There is a relationship in the mean spending behaviour between buying grocery.
- H9: There is a relationship in the mean saving behaviour between paying debt.
- H10: There is a relationship in the mean saving behaviour between buying grocery.

Therefore, this study is focusing the behaviors of people in Sarawak on their spending behaviour after received the cash transfers from the government. Thus, this studies ten hypotheses and a regression of the behaviours of respondents that affect the spending behaviour toward the financial aid to be policy successful.

### Conceptual Framework

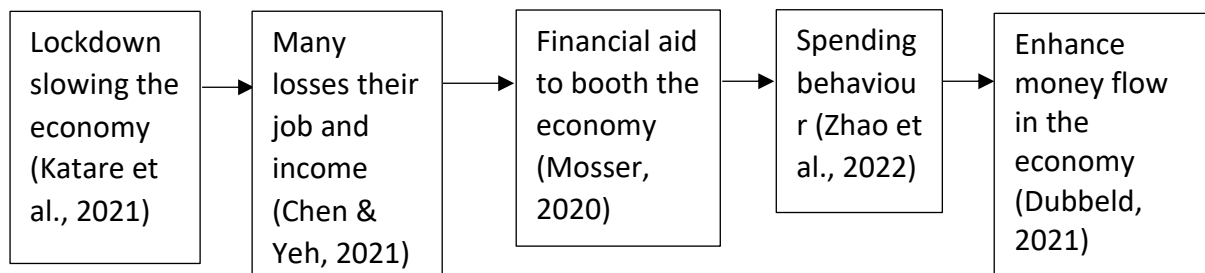


Figure 1

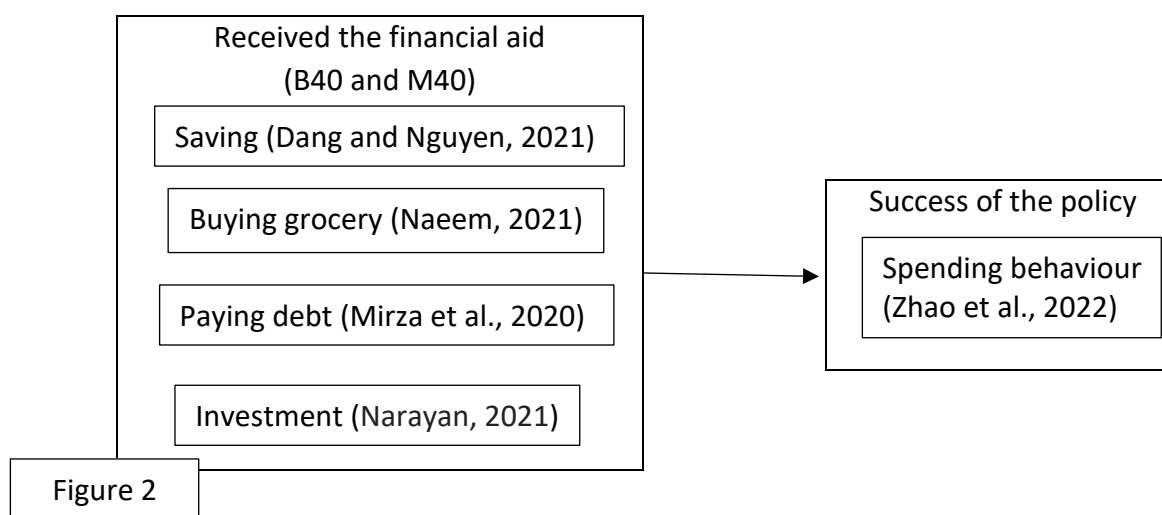


Figure 2

### Methodology

#### Population and Sample

The people who took part in this survey are representative of the adult population in the Sarawak Region and range in age from 18 to 60 years and above. A total of 186 participants in Sarawak between the ages of 20 and 60 and older were recruited for the research sample that was carried out there. The entire sample size of 186 people indicates Sarawak's population, estimated to be around 2.9 million people. As a result, it fulfils the minimum requirements for the sample size. This is based on G-power estimations; using a t-test with two tails and a probability error of 0.05%, the mean rank test requires 57 samples (Df=53.43), while the sample size required for linear multiple regression requires 89 samples (Df=86).

#### Measurement Instrument

For the purpose of this investigation, data were gathered through the use of a questionnaire as part of a convenience sampling or simple type sampling. Through the use of a google form, the questionnaire was delivered online to the responders directly. Each of the variables that were utilised in the previously published researches on the factors that determine spending behaviours such as grocery shopping, saving behaviour, debt repayment, and investing behaviour during the COVID-19 study.

In addition, a pilot study with thirty participants was carried out as part of the in-depth confirmatory research. As a result of this, a series of questionnaires quite identical to these had been distributed to the people of Sarawak. An examination of the gathered data,

reliability test was also been conducted. The reliability test revealed that the level of internal consistency was quite high. The questionnaires were divided into three distinct portions.

Section A: demographic profile of the respondents collecting the either ordinal or nominal data; for gender, age, level of education, race, occupation, monthly salaries, preferences payment method, and spending preferences during COVID-19. The income classification based on Department of Statistics Malaysia (2019) and was divide to three categories of household income (B40, M40 and T20). Section B: spending behaviour as dependent variable; and Section C: independent variables; shopping for groceries, saving behaviour, paying debt, and investment behaviour. As for Section B and Section C were using the scale measurement questions in term of Likert scale rating. There 5 choices scale values from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

For the multiple regression involving the explanatory variables,

$$Y = b_0 + b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + b_3x_3 + b_4x_4 + \varepsilon$$

Where, the Y represent the spending behaviour,  $b$  regression coefficients represent each independents variable and  $\varepsilon$  represent the error term.

## Result and Discussion

### Characteristics of Respondents

The respondents' backgrounds were determined using the sample frequency distribution. As shown in Table 1, this paper explored demographic variables such as gender, age, race or occupation and level of education.

Table 1

*Background characteristics of respondents*

Socio-demography	Variable	Total (N=186)	Percentage
Gender	Male	106	57%
	Female	80	43%
Age	below 20	3	1.6%
	21-29	39	21.0%
	30-39	81	43.5%
	40-49	49	26.3%
	50-59	12	6.5%
	60 and above	2	1.1%
Race	Malay	85	45.7%
	Iban/Bumiputra	53	28.5%
	Chinese	42	22.6%
	India	6	3.2%
Occupation	Student (part-time worker)	28	15.1%
	Self-employed	37	19.8%
	Government servant	47	25.3%
	Private sector	74	39.8%
Education level	SPM	49	26.3%
	Foundation/Diploma/STPM	65	34.9%
	Degree	65	34.9%
	Master/PhD	7	3.8%

Source: Calculated by the authors

There are 186 total respondents has answered the questionnaire survey in Sarawak. The difference between gender is less than 15%, with the males' respondents is 106 (57%), while females comprised of 43% remaining per cent. There are six categories between age; 60 and 60 above (1.1%), 50 to 59 (6.5%), 40 to 49 (26.3%), 30 to 39 (43.5%), 21 to 29 (21%) and below 20 (1.6%).

As the questionnaires survey was conducted using google form, thus the older citizen around age 60 and above is having small numbers of respondents. For the age below 20 is the lowest respondent (1.6%) respondents because within this range of age is for those that above 17-year-old. The high school student is not selected as their not eligible to the apply financial aid during Covid-19.

The majority respondents (45.7%) were Malay, followed by Bumiputra/Iban (28.5%), Chinese (22.6%), and India (3.2%). Among the respondents these thar working in private sector is the highest respondent (39.8%), followed by government servant (25.3%), self-employed (19.8%), and student (part-time worker) is (15.1%). For the level of education, there are four categories; SPM (26.3%), foundation/Diploma/STPM and Degree are similar amounts of respondents (34.9%), and postgraduate level (3.8%).

Table 2

*Percentage of preference related to financial aid during MCO*

Category	Category	Total (N=186)						Percentage	
Financial aid	Received	166						89.2%	
	Not received	20						10.8%	
Range Income	Category B40 (N = 153)	Below Rm1,200	13		7.0%				
		RM1,200 – RM2,999	64		34.4%				
		RM3,000 – RM4,849	76		40.9%				
	Category M40 (N = 29)	RM4,950 – RM6,499	25		13.4%				
		RM6,500 – RM8,579	4		2.2%				
	Category T20 (N = 4)	RM8,580 – RM10,970	4		2.2%				
		Above RM10,970	-		-				
Preference payment method during Covid	Category	B40	%	M40	%	T20	%	Total	%
	Cash	109	58.6	15	8.1	-	-	124	66.7
	Bank Online transfer	32	17.2	7	3.8	1	0.5	40	21.5
	Debit card	7	3.8	5	2.7	2	1.1	14	7.5
	Credit card	5	2.7	2	1.1	1	0.5	8	4.3
Preference spending during Covid	Category	B40	%	M40	%	T20	%	Total	%
	Grocery/food	128	68.8	22	11.8	2	1.1	152	81.7
	Emergency saving	24	12.9	6	3.2	2	1.1	32	17.2
	Buying asset Investment	1	0.5	1	0.5	-	-	2	1.1
		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Calculated by the author

The table 2 show the two group of respondents, those that received (89.2%) and did not has received (10.8%) the financial aid. The financial aid is meant to target the most sufficient economy group, such as B40 and M40. Thus, T20 was not eligible in these criteria. The other reason of not receiving the financial aid was there are citizens did not fill a complete data especially related to monthly income in the government database. Thus, their names will be dropped from being included in the list eligible to receive financial assistance during post-covid-19.

The range of income categories, shows the most respondents is B40, followed by M40 and T20. There are 153 total B40 respondents; with category range income below RM1,200 (7%), RM1,200 – RM2,999 (34.4%) and RM3000-RM4849 (40.9%). For M40 categories has 29 total respondents; which is in range income of RM4950-RM6499 (13.4%) and RM6,500-RM8,579 (2.2%). The T20 in range of income between RM8,580-RM10,970 is only 4 respondents (2.2%).

The payment method using cash is the most preference by B40 (58.6%) and M40 (8.1%). Followed by using the bank online transfer, the B40 (17.2) and M49 (3.8%). The using of debit and credit card are small numbers of respondent from B40 and M40 categories. For the T20 was more preference to pay using debit card, compare using online transfer and credit card.

The preference spending during COVID-19 shows the priority is to buying grocery and food, with B40 (68%), followed by M40 (11.8%). Preference for emergency saving is the second highest preference after grocery, with 12.9% from B40 and 3.2% from M40 category. Buying an asset only small portion for B40 and M40 will only 0.5%, and no categories has choosing to make investment. While, the T20 category has equal preference toward buying grocery and emergency saving. Thus, most of B40 and M40 are strongly needs the cash transfer to buy grocery compare to T20 categories. There also portion of B40 and M40 that prefer to saving the money as emergency and buying an asset, meaning there are percentage of people still having secure job and stable income during these periods.

For the purpose of determining whether or not the distribution was normal, Reliability test and Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) was to examine all the mean for spending, saving, buying grocery, paying debt and investment.

Table 3

*Summary of Reliability test*

Factor	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ )	Status
Spending	5	0.856	Good
Saving	4	0.935	Good
Buying Grocery	5	0.921	Good
Paying debt	4	0.904	Good
Investment	5	0.937	Good

Source: Calculated by the authors

Table 3 determine the reliability test which were statistically analysing the Cronbach's coefficient ( $\alpha$ ) for all the mean for spending, saving buying grocery, paying debt and investment. The findings of the reliability test presented in Table 3, which show the values of Cronbach's Alpha for all 5 variables are reliability is good. The retention determinants have acceptable  $\alpha$ . Spending behaviour = 0.856; saving behaviour = 0.935; buying grocery = 0.8921; paying debt = 0.904; and investment = 0.937. As value indicates that the questionnaire was reliable with the value of Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) near the value is to 1. While, a number that



reflects a Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) score lower than 0.6 is considered inadequate (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011; Vaske et al., 2017).

Table 4

*Summary of the Descriptive Analysis on variable.*

Factor	Descriptive Summary	Statistics	Standard Error	Normality ( $\pm 1.9$ )
Spending	Mean	4.677	0.031	No
	Skewness	-1.357	0.178	
	Kurtosis	1.347	0.355	
Saving	Mean	4.136	0.072	No
	Skewness	-1.366	0.178	
	Kurtosis	1.291	0.355	
Buying Grocery	Mean	4.562	0.044	No
	Skewness	-2.276	0.178	
	Kurtosis	7.978	0.355	
Paying Debt	Mean	4.325	0.059	No
	Skewness	-1.293	0.178	
	Kurtosis	1.175	0.355	
Investment	Mean	4.455	0.0496	No
	Skewness	-1.754	0.178	
	Kurtosis	4.368	0.355	

Source: Calculated by the authors

Table 5

*Summary of Normality test*

Mean	Normality test						Normality Status (Sig>.05)
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk			
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.	
Spending	0.259	186	0.000	0.771	186	0.000	No
Saving	0.214	186	0.000	0.816	186	0.000	No
Buying Grocery	0.234	186	0.000	0.734	186	0.000	No
Paying Debt	0.204	186	0.000	0.812	186	0.000	No
Investment	0.210	186	0.000	0.778	186	0.000	No

Source: Calculated by the authors

Table 4 and 5, clearly determine the data is not normally distribute at 0.05 significant level. The all mean for the variables factor are examine the statistic value using the skewness and kurtosis test find the data are not normally distributed. To be confirming these results, the researchers conduct the normality test using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk. All the mean variables indicate the significant 0.000, thus, the results are indicating the data is nor normally distributed.

According to Pallant (2020), the normality and scatter plots provide the impression that the data are in compliance with the parametric and homoscedasticity requirements for analysis of continuous variables. However, this study finds the data is not normally

distributed. Therefore, this study will perform non-parametric test of Kruskal Wallis and Spearman's rho rank-order correlation.

Table 6

Summary of Kruskal Wallis test

Mean	Kruskal Wallis test					
	Category	N	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	Sig.	Status
Spending and Gender	Male	106	91.02	0.588	0.443	Retain the null hypothesis
	Female	80	96.78			
Spending and Income	Below RM1,200	13	104.46	5.699	0.337	Retain the null hypothesis
	Rm1,200 - RM2,999	64	99.23			
	RM3,000 – RM4,849	76	93.17			
	RM4,950 – RM6,499	25	79.18			
	RM6,500 – RM8,579	4	55.75			
	RM8,580 - RM10,970	4	99.75			
Spending And Education	SPM	49	101.67	2.043	0.563	Retain the null hypothesis
	foundation/Diploma/STPM	65	88.43			
	Degree	65	91.92			
	Master/PhD	7	98.07			
Spending and Payment Method	Cash	124	100.05	8.659	0.034	Reject the null hypothesis
	Bank Online Transfer	40	87.83			
	Debit Card	14	65.54			
	Credit Card	8	69.25			

Source: Calculated by the authors

H1: there is a difference in the mean spending behaviour between male and female.

The mean rank between male (91.02) and female (96.78) shows close percent different with the Chi-square 0.588. The significant Kruskal Wallis is more than 0.05, (0.443 > 0.05), meaning for spending behaviour during COVID-19 between the gender show no difference. Therefore, retain the null hypothesis.

H2: there is a difference in the mean spending behaviour between income categories.

The Kruskal Wallis mean rank classify the income below than RM1,200 is the highest, follow by income (RM8,580-RM10,970), (Rm1,200 - RM2,999), (RM3,000 – RM4,849), (RM4,950 – RM6,499), and lastly (RM6,500 – RM8,579). In the mean ranking order, is show that the T20 category this 4 respondents have the second highest mean rank in Kruskal Wallis test. The significant value for Kruskal Wallis also determines higher than 0.05, (0.337 > 0.05), meaning for spending behaviour during COVID-19 between the income categories show no difference. Therefore, retain the null hypothesis.

H3: there is a difference in the mean spending behaviour between educational level.

The number of respondents that only have SPM level of education is 49 respondents, however the mean rank from Kruskal Wallis with the 2.043 of Chi square indicate this category is the highest rank order (101.57), follow by degree (91.92), master and PhD holder (98.07). The lowest rank order (88.43) is the foundation, diploma and STPM level. The significant for Kruskal Wallis also show it is more than 0.05 ( $0.563 < 0.05$ ). Thus, mean for spending behaviour during COVID-19 between the education categories determine no difference. Therefore, retain the null hypothesis.

H4: there is a difference in the mean spending behaviour between paying method.

By using the Kruskal Wallis mean rank classify that cash is the most dominant (100.05), follow by bank online transfer (87.83). The debit card (65.54) and credit card most 2 most unfavourable. Based on the results of the test, the Kruskal Wallis significant value is  $0.034 < 0.05$ . Therefore, it concludes that the spending behaviour during COVID-19 between the payment method show there is a difference. Therefore, reject the null hypothesis.

Table 7

*Summary of Correlations Spearman's rho*

Mean	Correlations Spearman's rho					
Spending	Mean	Spending	Saving	Buying grocery	Paying debt	Investment
	Correlation Coefficient	1.00	0.336**	0.384**	0.349**	0.275**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	186	186	186	186	186
Saving	Correlation Coefficient	0.336**	1.00	0.555**	0.671**	0.542**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	.	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	186	186	186	186	186
Buying grocery	Correlation Coefficient	0.384**	0.555**	1.00	0.539**	0.509**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	.	0.000	0.000
	N	186	186	186	186	186
Paying debt	Correlation Coefficient	0.349**	0.671**	0.539**	1.00	0.632**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	.	0.000
	N	186	186	186	186	186
Investment	Correlation Coefficient	0.275**	0.542**	0.509**	0.632**	1.00
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	.
	N	186	186	186	186	186

Source: Calculated by the authors

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 7 represents the Spearman correlation for five mean variables; spending, saving, buying grocery, paying debt and investment. The results show all mean between the variables are significance with positive value.

H5: there is a relationship in the mean spending behaviour between saving.

H6: there is a relationship in the mean spending behaviour between paying debt.

H7: there is a relationship in the mean spending behaviour between investment.

The relationship between spending behaviour toward saving show significant value, there is positive relationship correlation [ $\rho(186) = 336 P < 0.01$ ]. There is receiver of the financial aid that chose to save the money for emergency. Therefore, reject the null hypothesis for H5. The relationship between paying debt and investment is significant and also determines positive correlation with  $\rho(186) = 0.349$ , and  $\rho(186) = 0.275$ . Among the financial aid received are those that working with the government that not losing their job, and still having stable income. Therefore, this reflects to reject the null hypothesis for H6 and H7.

H8: there is a relationship in the mean spending behaviour between buying grocery.

The highest positive correlation is between spending behaviour toward buying grocery with  $\rho(186) = 0.349$ . Therefore, reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, most receiver are priorities the cash patty from the government to buy grocery during the lockdown period compare to spend on saving, paying their debt and investment. The investment is the smallest value significant in the relationship with the spending behaviour, meaning most people in Sarawak not priorities to invest as well not very confident to do investment during the lockdown.

H9: there is a relationship in the mean saving behaviour between paying debt.

H10: there is a relationship in the mean saving behaviour between buying grocery.

The table spearman correlation also indicates the highest relationship is between saving and paying debt [ $\rho(186) = 0.671$ ], and between saving buying grocery [ $\rho(186) = 0.555$ ]. Therefore, reject the null hypothesis for H9 and H10. Meaning, most people will priorities to pay their debt compare buying grocery with the saving money. This concern of that some of the financial aid received are having heavy liabilities during these periods. Even thro, the moratorium on the banking system in Malaysia have postpone to collect their loans within 6 months (Keh and Tan, 2021), however, there are still resume paying their loan with third party loan company others than the bank during the lockdown period of time.

Table 8

*Summary of Regression Model*

Model (Mean)	Regression Model				
		Unstandardised Coefficients		<i>t</i>	Significant
	Sign	<i>b</i>	Standard Error		
Constant	No sign	3.319	0.245	13.543	0.000*
Saving	-	-0.047	0.045	-1.056	0.292
Buying grocery	+	0.226	0.056	4.055	0.000*

Paying debt	+	0.138	0.054	2.550	0.012**
Investment	-	-0.016	0.054	-0.296	0.767
R	0.415				
R Square	0.173				
F	9.437				
Significant	0.000				

Source: Calculated by the authors

\* Significant at 5%, \*\* Significant at 1%

Table 8 examine the types behaviours of respondent that affect the spending behaviour toward the financial aid to be policy successful. The determination of respondent behaviour impacts the spending behaviour was analysed using a multiple regression analysis. The value of R<sup>2</sup> is 0.173 which indicates that 17.3% ( $r = 0.415$ ) of the change in the criterion variable (spending behaviour) is due to the change in the saving, buying grocery, paying debt and investment.

The R (0.415) and R square (0.173) value is considered low. However, this is because of the study conducted with the opposite money flows to toward the economy. The spending behaviour has the cycle the money in the economy, thus by buying grocery and paying debt will make money to “change hands” and generate good the money flows. While, the saving behaviour and investment is move out the money from market. Therefore, the sign for buying grocery and paying debt is a positive (+) and the saving and investment show the negative (-).

Based on Table 8, the three significant results show that multiple regression models to the situation; the constant, buying grocery and paying debt. In addition, there are six standard regression coefficients for independent variables, namely saving [ $(b = -0.047)$ ], buying grocery ( $b = 0.226$ ), paying debt ( $b = 0.138$ ), and investment ( $b = -0.016$ )]. Therefore, the results show for spending behaviour toward the financial aid to be policy successful, the citizen needs to spend their money for buying grocery and paying debt.

### Policy Implications and Recommendation

Few efforts have been made by the government to minimise the effects of the epidemic, specifically on the economy. These actions centre on two policies: first, a moratorium on financial policy and fiscal policy. For fiscal policy, the federal government has issued to injected the money flow in the economy by giving cash transfers to those income in range of B40 and M40, while the Sarawak government also injected cash to Sarawakian people in the B40 income category.

On the other hand, using the monetary policy the federal government has influence the national bank by reducing the interest rate to enhance the citizen to borrowing money. Furthermore, as many of people are losing their job during COVID-19 lockdown and some has their salary been cut down because of the economy turndown. Then, most of people having issues to paying their liability to the bank, such as house loan, car loan and personal loan. Therefore, there federal government has announced for moratorium for six months starting April 2020 to September 2020.

The moratorium offered debtors a short-term reprieve by enabling them to postpone loan repayments for a predetermined amount of time without being subject to late fees or additional interest charges. This provided the debtors with some much-needed relief

especially for those in categories income of B40 and M40 that losing their job for these periods (Thinagar et al., 2020).

However, this study finds that some of the targeted income categories are not received the financial aid. That shows the database from the federal need to be rechecked. The Sarawak has a lot of “Long House” also known as “Rumah Panjang” in rural area that having poor covered by the internet connection. Some of the people rural area not able to apply the financial aid because of this reason. During the lockdown period, many roads in Sarawak district having roadblock and cannot enter the city unless has a permit from the authority. Therefore, the government have to increase the initiative to increase the internet correction in the future to overcome this issue.

There are also T20 groups that are affected during Covid 19. However, they are categorised as not eligible to receive financial assistance. It is also conceivable that the M40 group transitioned into the B40 group during the post-covid phase throughout the time period of two years. The interpretation of information gleaned from outdated databases should not serve as a basis for providing assistance. Therefore, the government must be aware during the economic crisis, and review the salary scale at these periods to help those that lose their jobs.

### **Conclusion**

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected household spending behaviors worldwide due to various reasons such as changes in income, shifts in daily routines, and adjustments in availability of goods and services. Hence, it's vital to reiterate the primary focus of this study which was investigating the spending behaviours of individuals in Sarawak, Malaysia, post-receipt of government-issued cash transfers. This study adopted non-parametric methods to analyse data gathered from 186 Sarawak-based respondents and scrutinised the impact of variables such as saving, debt repayment, grocery buying, and investing on their spending behaviours. The aim was to assess the effectiveness of the cash transfer policy.

This study found that for a financial assistance program to yield successful outcomes, policymakers must channel their money towards pressing needs such as debt repayment and grocery purchase. This nuanced understanding of spending behaviour in times of crisis proves essential in shaping future economic stimulus policies. These findings advocate for the necessity of aligning financial aid with the critical needs of beneficiaries, thereby augmenting the overall impact and success of such policies.

### **Declaration of Competing Interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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